



# Culture, Tourism and Well-being:

From Heritage to Healing

## BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

### Culture, Tourism and Well-being: From Heritage to Healing

*October 22–23, 2026  
Croatian Natural History Museum,  
Zagreb, Croatia*

Welcome to the conference *Culture, Tourism and Well-being: From Heritage to Healing*, to be held on October 22–23, 2026, at the Croatian Natural History Museum in Zagreb.

We are delighted to bring together a diverse community of scholars, practitioners, artists, and policymakers to explore the evolving relationship between culture, tourism, and well-being. As highlighted in our call, this conference is grounded in the growing recognition that tourism extends far beyond its economic dimensions, offering powerful opportunities to foster individual and collective well-being through meaningful cultural experiences.

In an era marked by rapid change and increasing demand for more purposeful travel, this conference invites us to rethink how cultural tourism can contribute to healing, empathy, and personal growth. The contributions presented in this Book of Abstracts reflect a rich interdisciplinary dialogue on themes such as emotional and sensory engagement, storytelling and design, the role of digital technologies, and the importance of sustainability and community well-being.

Zagreb, with its unique blend of historical heritage and contemporary cultural vitality, provides an inspiring setting for these discussions. As a city where culture plays a central role in shaping quality of life and sustainable development, it offers a living example of the very connections we seek to examine.

This Book of Abstracts showcases the breadth and depth of ideas that define this conference. It is our hope that these contributions will not only stimulate discussion but also inspire new collaborations and innovative approaches to designing cultural tourism experiences that are transformative, inclusive, and restorative.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all authors and partners who have contributed to making this conference possible. Your work is essential in advancing our shared understanding of how culture and tourism can serve as pathways toward well-being.

We wish you a stimulating and rewarding conference, and we look forward to welcoming you in Zagreb.

Marta Šveb Dragija

**Chair of the Organizing Committee**

## PANEL 1

### DESIGNING FOR WELL-BEING IN CULTURAL TOURISM EXPERIENCES

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through culture, design and technology.*

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Beyond Attendance Scores: Measuring Well-being in Cultural Participation

## SPECIAL PROGRAMME

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### EXPERIENTIAL WELL-BEING ACTIVITIES

- **Well-being Workshop**
- **Guided Well-being Tour of the Croatian Natural History Museum**  
*Exploring how the museum spaces, narratives and sensory engagement contribute to visitor well-being.*
- **Guided City Tour of Zagreb with a Focus on Well-being**  
*Discovering the cultural, historical and urban elements that shape well-being in the city.*

*\*The program is subject to change.*

# ABSTRACTS

## Emotional and Sensory Engagement Through Public Art in a Modernist Heritage Space: The Case of Quarter in Color (2024 – 2025)

Melinda Šefčić, PhD

Academy of Fine Arts, University of Zagreb, Croatia; Croatian Association of Fine Arts (HDLU), Croatia

### Abstract

This paper explores how public art can generate emotional and sensory engagement within heritage environments through the case study of *Quarter in Color*, a multi-year artistic intervention situated at Mamutica, one of Croatia's most iconic modernist residential buildings. Although conceived as a symbol of urban progress, Mamutica has long embodied anonymity, alienation, and the emotional distance characteristic of large-scale modernist architecture. The project reimagines this heritage site as a vibrant cultural landscape by integrating large-scale murals, color-based visual storytelling, and participatory workshops for children. Drawing from theories of socially engaged art (Lehikoinen, 2025) and research presented in the European Commission's report *Culture and Health: Time to Act* (2025), the project demonstrates how color, rhythm, and composition can function as emotional stimuli that support calmness, empathy, and a renewed sense of belonging. Through children's graffiti workshops and collaborative mural processes, residents and visitors were invited to see, feel, and inhabit the space differently, creating a "third space" where artistic expression mediates relationships between architecture, community, and everyday life. The intervention transforms the cold materiality of concrete into a shared emotional and sensory experience, producing a collective visual memory embedded in the urban fabric. By activating sensory perception and fostering social connection, *Quarter in Color* reframes a modernist heritage environment not as a static architectural artifact but as a living, empathetic cultural ecosystem. The paper argues that emotional and sensory engagement through public art can play a transformative role in revitalizing heritage spaces, strengthening community well-being, and reshaping urban environments into inclusive, human-centered places.

## Opera Festivals as Platforms for Cultural Tourism and Well-Being: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of the Arena di Verona Festival

Josip Zelić, PhD<sup>1</sup> & Damir Demonja, PhD<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*The Academy of Arts and Culture, The J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia*

<sup>2</sup>*Institute for Development and International Relations, IRMO, Zagreb, Croatia*

### **Abstract**

This paper analyses opera festivals as a specific, highly aestheticized form of cultural tourism that integrates heritage, performing arts, cultural economics, and contemporary communication practices, with particular attention to their potential contribution to individual and collective well-being. Grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework combining cultural economics, the experience and transformative economy, cultural tourism studies, and communication sciences, the study conceptualizes opera festivals as high value-added cultural tourism products. The empirical component employs a qualitative research design based on three in-depth structured interviews: with an expert in opera and ballet performing arts, an expert in instrumental concert performance within the specific conditions of festival tourism, and an artist directly involved in the Arena di Verona Festival. The interviews focus on artistic, production, and management perspectives, audience relations, communication strategies, and the perceived emotional and cultural well-being generated through festival participation. The findings suggest that opera festivals, when strategically managed and communicatively innovative, function as platforms for transformative cultural experiences that foster emotional engagement, reinforce cultural identity, and enhance the international visibility and sustainability of cultural destinations. The conclusion proposes a conceptualization of the opera festival as a hybrid space “from heritage to healing”, in which aesthetic experience, emotional engagement and cultural value are connected to the goals of contemporary cultural tourism focused on well-being.

## Exploring Visitor Experiences with Digital Enhancements at Selected Heritage Sites in Samarkand: A Pilot Study

Ulfah Nural Hidayah & Raximova Nilufar, PhD

*Silk Road International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage, Samarkand, Uzbekistan*

### Abstract

This pilot research aims at examining how the digital improvements affect the experience of the visitors to the chosen cultural heritage sites in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. This is done in view of the increasing need to have interactive and informative heritage tourism, where the study fills a significant gap in crucial research on quantitative evidence in Central Asia. The survey design used was a quantitative cross-sectional survey and involved 55 visitors (including digital users and non-users) in three major heritage sites. The structured questionnaire scaled the visitor engagement, perceived educational/heritage value, convenience/accessibility, and overall satisfaction/behavioural intention by 5-points Likert scale. Independent-samples t-tests showed that there are statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.001$ ) in all dimensions and prove that digital enhancements have a positive effect on visitor experience. Nevertheless, the Pearson correlation analysis of digital user revealed weak and non-significant linear relationships between these dimensions of experience. The results highlight the necessity to integrate digital applications using mobile apps, QR codes, and interactive displays to enhance the engagement and create a more purposeful and accessible space that facilitates the well-being of visitors. The proposed study makes a first step in offering empirical evidence on smart heritage tourism in a special context of the Silk Road and provides practical suggestions on how to design digital interventions that can positively contribute to the quality of the tourism experience.

## Making Sense of Disaster: Tourism and Heritage in Post-Disaster Japan

Annaclaudia Martini, PhD

*University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy*

### **Abstract**

This paper analyses dark and post-disaster tourism as practices that not only reshape cultural narratives and imaginaries in disaster-affected places but also generate transformative affects. Commonly framed as voyeuristic, or ethically problematic, dark tourism, if analysed through the theoretical lens of affect studies, can be interpreted as a meaningful tool for post-disaster education and placemaking. Affects, understood as more-than-conscious intensities between human and non-human actors, can be mobilised by local communities to make sense of traumatic pasts, reimagine futures, and generate a shared sense of place between locals and tourists. Drawing on qualitative accounts from tourists, residents, and tourism-related stakeholders in Rikuzentakata, a coastal town in post-2011 Tohoku, Japan, the paper analyses how tourism design and heritage practices can produce transformative affects and emotions. In this town, two main strategies are analyzed in detail: first, the celebration of Ipponmatsu, or the Miracle Pine, a symbol of resilience in the face of devastation; second, the promotion of Rikuzentakata as the 'Hiroshima of the North'. Both these discourses were based on the engineering and the apprehension of specific affective post-disaster atmospheres and perceived by residents and local authorities as key for attracting international visitors.

## From Repertory Stage to a Cultural Destination: Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb as an Emerging Driver of *Cultural* Tourism

Iva Hraste-Sočo, PhD & Mario Gigović, MBA

*Croatian National Theater in Zagreb, Croatia*

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to present the case studies of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb that as an institution that has undergone a profound institutional, organisational, and programme-based transformation in recent years (2022-2025), significantly contributing to its international recognition and visibility. This transformation is reflected in international co-productions, active membership in key international networks, as well as increased inbound and outbound mobility of artists and productions. Particular emphasis is placed on the Theatre's sustained presence within the international professional and media landscape, positioning it not only as a national flagship cultural institution, but also as a relevant and competitive actor within the broader European cultural field. In parallel with internationalization, the paper analyses a set of strategically designed audience development programmes that have played a crucial role in expanding and diversifying both local and international audiences. These programmes include curated formats aimed at younger audiences, first-time visitors, and culturally motivated tourists, as well as membership-based and thematic initiatives that foster long-term engagement, repeat attendance, and loyalty. One of the case studies focuses in particular on the Zagreb Opera Festival, an international opera festival that brings major international opera productions to Zagreb, with a repertoire-oriented focus on works not regularly presented. Special attention is given to programmes that intersect with cultural tourism, including festival formats, premium events, and exclusive experiences designed for international visitors. These initiatives contribute not only to audience growth but also to wider urban and tourism outcomes, such as increased overnight stays, extended visitor itineraries, and enhanced destination branding.

## Archeological and Non-Institutional Heritage Sites in Narratives of Well-being

Anja Mlakar, PhD

*University of Maribor, Maribor, Slovenia; Institute IRRIS, Slovenia*

### **Abstract**

In recent decades, archaeological and archaeologically imagined sites have increasingly started being seen as places of healing, energy, and enhanced well-being. This presentation will explore narratives of healing and well-being associated with megaliths, so-called energy points, and other archaeologically or pseudo-archaeologically perceived locations in Slovenia. Rather than addressing the therapeutic efficacy of these sites, the presentation will focus on how well-being is experienced and narrated in the context of these specific places. I use an exploratory approach, as the meanings attributed to these sites are diverse, fluid, and not yet fully mapped. I will focus on how certain locations come to be understood as meaningful for well-being and how such understandings are connected to material aspects of the landscape, spatial configurations, and interpretations of the past. Both archaeologically confirmed sites and locations perceived as ancient or significant through local interpretation are included. Particular attention will be given to the relationship between materiality and experience, as well as to the ways different forms of legitimacy, archaeological, historical, experiential, are used in the process of meaning-making. The focus of the presentation will thus be on bottom-up (re)interpretations of archaeological and presumably archaeological sites, analysing how new heritage meanings are created outside institutional frameworks and how these sites become linked to postmodern discourses, new religious movements, and ideas of well-being.

## Determinants of Cultural Traveler's Destination Choice and Word-of-Mouth Behavioral Intentions: Evidence from Longji Terraces

Chen Zhao, Junjun Wang & Xiangyun Wei

*Tourism University, Guangxi, China*

### Abstract

With the global surge in wellness-focused travel and growing attention to mental health, agricultural heritage destinations have become key attractions for cultural travelers seeking psychological restoration and authentic cultural engagement. This study explores the determinants of cultural travelers' destination choice and word-of-mouth (WOM) behavioral intentions, using China's Longji Terraces as the national intangible agricultural heritage site. Grounded in the integrated Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) framework, the study examines how external stimuli (authenticity, theatricality, and legitimacy) shape internal organismic states (perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, presence and flow experience) and ultimately affect behavioral responses (revisit intention and WOM intention). A quantitative design was adopted, with a self-administered questionnaire distributed to travelers at Longji Terraces. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test hypotheses via AMOS 26.0. Key findings reveal that agricultural heritage attributes and cultural authenticity significantly enhance perceived usefulness and mental health benefits, which positively predict destination choice. Perceived usefulness and ease of use moderate the relationship between agricultural heritage experiences and WOM. This study contributes theoretically by integrating SOR-TAM to unpack cultural travelers' decision-making in agricultural heritage contexts, highlighting mental health as a core organismic variable. Practically, it will guide heritage site managers in leveraging authenticity, aesthetics, and well-being benefits to attract and retain culturally-motivated tourists, thereby promoting sustainable tourism and conservation through enhanced visitor loyalty and positive advocacy.

## Immersive Environments and the Future of Health Tourism: The Case of QC Terme Milano

Aleksandra Błotnicka & Wojciech Maciejowski, PhD

*University of Physical Culture in Krakow, Krakow, Poland*

### Abstract

An immersive spa represents a new generation of wellness facilities in which a multisensory, technologically supported experience of immersion plays a central role. An immersive spa is understood as a carefully curated sensory environment in which architecture, light, sound, water, temperature, scent, and digital media form a coherent setting for embodied experience. The aim of this article is to analyse the concept of the immersive spa as an innovative product of wellness and health tourism, with particular emphasis on its therapeutic and sensory potential, as well as its significance for enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of spa and health resort facilities. The theoretical section discusses issues related to multisensory integration, Snoezelen environments, and immersive digital technologies. The empirical and applied section presents a case study of QC Termemilano - one of the most recognisable immersive spa facilities in Europe. Located within a historic railway complex in Milan, QC Termemilano illustrates how cultural space, architectural heritage, and multisensory design can be integrated into a holistic healing experience. The article also highlights the potential for adapting similar solutions in other spa resorts as a means of diversifying the offer and responding to the evolving needs of contemporary spa visitors and wellness tourists. Immersive spa environments may contribute to the development of meaningful, regenerative, and well-being-oriented tourism experiences, aligning with contemporary trends in slow travel, mindfulness, and regenerative tourism.

## From Cultural Consumption to Embodied Healing: A Phenomenological Study of Chinese Women's Experiences in Bali

Fang Jie

*Udayana University, Denpasar, Indonesia; Nanchang Normal University, Nanchang, China*

### Abstract

This paper explores healing tourism as a growing global phenomenon, focusing on the experiences of urban Chinese women in Bali. Caught between rapid urbanization and enduring cultural expectations, many women face significant physical and emotional exhaustion, prompting a search for restoration through cultural tourism. While Bali is widely perceived as a destination of spiritual healing, a gap often exists between idealized representations and commercialized realities. This study therefore asks whether participation in cultural practices such as yoga or purification rituals leads to genuine healing. Using an interpretive phenomenological approach, the research examines how cultural tourism facilitates a shift from consuming heritage to reclaiming the self. Drawing on concepts of “soft” and “hard” wellness, as well as “empowered-ness,” the study emphasizes the importance of subjective experience over questions of authenticity. Methodologically, it combines auto-ethnography, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with Chinese women who have spent extended time in Bali. Findings suggest that healing is a complex and often contradictory process. It begins with bodily reawakening through sensory engagement and interaction with nature. Cultural environments function as “buffer zones,” enabling temporary detachment from social roles and creating space for self-focus. However, healing is typically experienced as momentary rather than permanent, manifesting in brief but meaningful episodes of emotional relief and empowerment. These experiences, though transient, contribute to longer-term psychological resilience. The study highlights healing tourism as a dynamic interaction between individual needs and cultural contexts, positioning Bali as a transformative space for self-discovery.

## Support of Drama and Dance Exercises in Achieving Educational and Rehabilitation Goals

Mario Kovač, PhD<sup>1</sup>, Branko Banković, PhD<sup>2</sup>, Svjetlana Kopčinović<sup>3</sup> & Damir Demonja, PhD<sup>4</sup>

*<sup>1</sup>Independent artist, theater director and drama pedagogue, Zagreb, Croatia*

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*<sup>3</sup>Zagreb City Red Cross Society, Zagreb, Croatia*

*<sup>4</sup>Institute for Development and International Relations, IRMO, Zagreb, Croatia*

### Abstract

This presentation summarizes several years of continuous practice using drama and dance exercises to support educational and rehabilitation goals aimed at improving the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities. It presents practical experiences of transdisciplinary collaboration in conducting workshops with people with intellectual disabilities, with approaches that are also applicable to other groups, with or without disabilities. The primary goal of these exercises was to foster the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities—one of the most marginalized groups in society—into community life through public performances that highlight their artistic expression and creative potential. Importantly, participants were not only involved as performers but also as co-creators of the workshops and the final public presentations. The collaborative process resulted in successful public performances in major cultural institutions in Zagreb, as well as in the empowerment of participants in terms of self-esteem, self-advocacy, and social relationships. Particular emphasis was placed on self-advocacy, understood as a shift from others speaking on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities to enabling them to speak, decide, and act for themselves. The findings indicate significant improvements in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interaction, self-image, self-confidence, and the ability to express personal needs and interests. The development of self-advocacy skills represents a particularly important outcome for future educational and rehabilitation work. This presentation offers a unique example of adapting classical drama and dance methods for use with people with intellectual and other disabilities.

## The Use of AI in Museums for Designing Content for Children: Case Studies of Serbia and Croatia

Tatjana Pivac, PhD<sup>1</sup>, Damir Demonja, PhD<sup>2</sup> & Sanja Kovačić, PhD<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, Serbia*

<sup>2</sup>*Institute for Development and International Relations, IRMO, Zagreb, Croatia*

<sup>3</sup>*University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, Serbia*

### Abstract

Museums in modern society, marked by accelerated technological development, face the challenge of simultaneously preserving cultural heritage, tradition and basic values, but also responding to changes in the needs and expectations of the audience. The challenge of establishing a connection with the younger generations, whose ways of thinking, learning patterns and experience of the world are shaped by the digital and virtual environment, is particularly pronounced. In this context, artificial intelligence opens new opportunities for the development of innovative, interactive and educational museum contents, with a special focus on children as one of the key target groups. This paper aims to examine how museums in Serbia and Croatia use, or plan to use, artificial intelligence in creating content for children, as well as to review the views of museum professionals on the potential, limitations and ethical challenges of applying AI in a museum context. The research is based on qualitative methodology and includes semi-structured interviews with representatives of museums in Serbia and Croatia, whereby a total of ten interviews will be conducted (five in each country). The expected results of the research indicate that artificial intelligence is recognized as an important tool for improving museum interpretations, personalizing content and increasing children's engagement, but also that there are differences in the degree of application and understanding of AI between museums in the observed countries. In addition, the results could indicate key obstacles in the application of AI, such as the lack of technical resources, knowledge and clearly defined strategies, but also the need for additional education of museum staff. The work contributes to the understanding of contemporary practices and the future of the use of artificial intelligence in museums, with a special focus on the development of content for children and young people.

## Cultural Tourism and University: What Can they Do for Each Other?

Jasenka Kranjčević, PhD<sup>1</sup> & Amir Muzur, PhD<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Institute for Tourism, Zagreb, Croatia*

<sup>2</sup>*University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia*

### Abstract

Institutions of higher education often remain closed to broader segments of the population, and even more often are perceived as such. On the other hand, community support for a university can be of crucial importance for its functioning. To encourage the constituent units of the University of Rijeka to explore the rich heritage of their respective disciplines, we initiated the “University Tourism” project, which is intended to result in a series of specialized guides - covering the history of medicine, law, economics, industrial heritage, maritime heritage, and others. The realization of such a series of publications, which to our knowledge is unique, would achieve an ideal promotion of walking as an element of a healthy lifestyle and leisure (stimulated by curiosity, independent exploration, the acquisition of knowledge, and the lyrical stylization of the text), as well as the identification of a tourism market niche that combines cultural, tourism and well-being in an original way. This approach is aimed at all generations of residents and visitors, and especially at students. In addition, it is expected that the University itself, through this popularization of science, would benefit in multiple ways by strengthening its own identity and reinforcing its ties with the community.

## How Emotional and Sensory Engagement Shapes Museum Experiences for Older Visitors

Jasenka Rici

*Museum of Slavonia; University of Osijek, Osijek, Croatia*

### Abstract

Older adults increasingly engage with museums as spaces for learning, reflection, and well-being, yet the mechanisms through which emotional and sensory experiences shape their museum encounters remain underexplored. This paper investigates how emotional resonance, sensory stimulation, and participatory meaning-making influence the way older visitors perceive, internalize, and remember museum experiences. The study draws on empirical findings from MUSEORIUM, an innovative programme at the Museum of Slavonia designed to support well-being through interpretative dialogue, tactile exploration, and creative expression. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews (N≈20), and short pre/post self-assessment measures capturing mood, perceived competence, and meaningfulness of engagement. Qualitative analysis employed thematic coding, while quantitative indicators provided descriptive insights into emotional and sensory shifts during the sessions. The findings indicate that emotional resonance played a central role, as storytelling and guided interpretation heightened personal relevance, encouraged calmness, and deepened reflective engagement among participants. Sensory activation further contributed to the experience: tactile interaction with objects and hands-on material activities enhanced concentration, reduced anxiety, and often triggered vivid autobiographical memories. At the same time, relational engagement emerged as a significant dimension, with collaborative tasks fostering social cohesion, increasing openness within the group, and positioning the museum as a supportive and meaningful community space. The paper proposes a conceptual model linking sensory-rich museum learning with emotional regulation, identity work, and well-being outcomes in later life. Findings offer practical guidance for museums seeking to design inclusive, evidence-based programmes for ageing populations and contribute to broader discussions on how cultural spaces can foster healing, empathy, and connection.

## Memory as Community Care: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Well-being and Ageing in a Low-Density Rural Territory

José Maria Carvalho, PhD<sup>1</sup>, Rui Carvalho, PhD<sup>2</sup>, Mário Santos<sup>3</sup>, António Calha, PhD<sup>4</sup> & Maria Rosália Guerra<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>*Centre for Research in Health and Social Sciences, Polytechnic University of Portalegre, Portalegre, Portugal*

<sup>4</sup>*Polytechnic University of Portalegre; Centre for Research in Health and Social Sciences, Polytechnic University of Portalegre, Portalegre, Portugal*

<sup>5</sup>*Research Centre for the Valorization of Endogenous Resources, Polytechnic University of Portalegre, Portalegre, Portugal*

### Abstract

Population ageing and social fragmentation pose significant challenges to community well-being, particularly in low-density rural territories where opportunities for social participation are increasingly limited. In these contexts, intangible cultural heritage can operate as a relational resource, sustaining emotional well-being, social cohesion and continuity of identity among older adults. Focusing on the municipality of Portalegre, a Portuguese region marked by advanced demographic ageing and fragile social networks, this paper examines the role of memory-based cultural practices in everyday experiences of care, belonging and resilience. Drawing on sociological perspectives on ageing, health and culture, well-being is approached not as an individual or clinical outcome but as a collective and relational process, produced through shared memories, cultural participation and community ties. The analysis centres on forms of engagement in local cultural associations with a strong presence of people aged 65 and over, including choirs, traditional singing groups and long-standing musical collectives. These spaces function simultaneously as sites of sociability, intergenerational memory transmission and mutual recognition, where cultural practice becomes intertwined with informal forms of care and emotional support. By exploring how participation in intangible cultural heritage practices shapes experiences of ageing in a rural context, this paper highlights the potential of memory as a community-based infrastructure of well-being. The discussion contributes to interdisciplinary debates on culture, ageing and territorial cohesion, suggesting that heritage practices play a significant role in sustaining social resilience and collective care in ageing rural territories.

## Enhancing Local Community Well-being Through Sustainable Heritage Tourism

Nataša Urošević, PhD<sup>1</sup>, Kristina Afrić Rakitovac, PhD<sup>2</sup> & Matteo Legović<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Pula, Croatia*

<sup>2</sup>*Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Pula, Croatia*

<sup>3</sup>*University of Primorska, Slovenia*

### Abstract

Economic theory traditionally emphasizes growth and development as key mechanisms for improving the quality of life of individuals and communities. However, excessive globalization, rapid urbanization, and unsustainable exploitation of resources have generated significant negative consequences for many local communities, often threatening their wellbeing. In tourism destinations, irresponsible tourism development has further intensified these challenges, negatively affecting residents' everyday lives and social environments. This paper focuses on the concept of local community wellbeing as a multidimensional model which includes social, economic, environmental, and cultural conditions that influence the quality of life of local communities. Special emphasis is placed on sustainable heritage tourism, analysing how the responsible use of cultural heritage contributes to local communities' quality of life through enhanced community involvement and social cohesion. The paper follows a theoretical framework that connects community wellbeing, local communities, and heritage tourism within the context of sustainable development. This framework is empirically examined through a case study of Pula (Croatia). Characterised by a unique and multilayered heritage, from ancient Roman sites to military and industrial heritage, Pula represents a relevant context in which questions of quality of life have become increasingly important, especially in times of social, economic, and environmental uncertainty. For the purposes of the research, the authors conducted a survey among the local community to analyse perceptions of the impact of tourism on quality of life and perspectives towards the role of sustainable use of heritage to improving their quality of life. The preliminary findings indicate the potential role of heritage to enhance community wellbeing, particularly when integrated within sustainable tourism strategies. The paper highlights the importance of aligning heritage and tourism policies with the needs and expectations of residents, placing participatory democracy in the heart of current city development strategies.

## Unlocking the Potential of Cultural and Creative Tourism for Sustainable Local Development in Croatia's Rural Region of Lika

Ema Bašić & Anita Bušljeta Tonković, PhD

*Institute for the Social Sciences Ivo Pilar, Regional Centre Gospić, Croatia*

### Abstract

Cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are increasingly recognized as potential drivers of sustainable development (SD) in non-urban areas. This paper examines how CCIs in Croatia's rural region of Lika contribute to sustainability by generating place-based tourism experiences rooted in local culture and heritage. The study is grounded in the theoretical framework of reflexive modernization, and the four-pillar model of SD. Empirical findings are based on qualitative research conducted between 2024 and 2025, including 21 semi-structured interviews with cultural and creative practitioners and six expert interviews with professionals in culture, development and entrepreneurship, complemented by policy and strategy documents analysis. The results show that CCIs (in Lika) are widely recognized by local actors and experts as contributors to the SD through cultural and creative tourism, including the production of authentic souvenirs, small-scale cultural events, heritage-based activities and creative services linked to tourism. These practices support local (self-)employment, income diversification, particularly within cultural associations and small creative enterprises. At the same time, they foster demand for locally produced, environmentally sensitive and culturally meaningful goods and experiences, aligning economic sustainability with broader well-being outcomes. However, the findings also reveal a tension between the recognized economic potential of CCIs and their limited institutional support, precarious working conditions and largely declarative presence in regional development strategies. The paper argues that strengthening cultural and creative tourism as a component of SD requires territorially sensitive policies that move beyond symbolic recognition and provide concrete financial and infrastructural support for CCIs in rural regions.

## Enhancing Well-being While Preserving Cultural Tourism Sites (Volunteering)

Patricia Janes, PhD

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### **Abstract**

Across Michigan (USA), 250 historic and cultural tourism attractions were slowly falling into disrepair under a combined maintenance deficit exceeding \$400 million. Without intervention, this lack of care would have resulted in reduced access to history, heritage, and place-based experiences. While underfunded cultural assets are a common challenge globally, Michigan's response was distinctive. Efforts to not only restore attractions but build community and enhance well-being through volunteerism was conducted. Recent research supports the effectiveness of this model. Longitudinal evidence from the COVID-19 period shows that sustained volunteering helped buffer declines in well-being, with volunteers reporting fewer depressive symptoms and higher life satisfaction than non-volunteers (Kelle, 2025). Further, the Social Connection Guidelines (2024) evidence brief concluded that volunteering meaningfully strengthens social health by reducing loneliness and increasing social connectedness. Over the past decade, nearly 6,000 tourism industry professionals volunteered to restore cultural attractions at 68 locations. These efforts generated nearly \$2 million in labor/supply cost savings for attractions while also producing benefiting volunteers' social, physical, and emotional well-being. Participants most frequently cited personal gratification, enhanced socialization, and valued teamwork as key benefits. Impacts extended beyond individual projects: 99% of volunteers reported feeling more connected to Michigan's tourism industry, 84% positively influenced their own travel behavior, 83% increased their personal volunteerism, and 66% reported increased volunteer engagement within their organizations. Designing volunteer initiatives that address tourism asset degradation while fostering well-being offers a scalable solution for destinations worldwide.

## Heritage, Creativity and Tourism Development: Exploring the Potential of Cork and Tapestry Experiences for Community Well-being in Portalegre

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### Abstract

Intangible Heritage and the activation of cultural-tourism resources have proven to be an effective way of promoting territorial development in low-density areas. Creative tourism provides an appropriate framework for such development, allowing the strengthening of local community well-being based on local arts and heritage. In this context, third sector cultural and art-led organisations have been gaining importance in tourism development. This paper focuses on the Cork and the Tapestry of Portalegre for the tourism development of the city, through the consumption of creative tourism experiences and their potential to promote the entrepreneurship of creative communities while consolidating the well-being of the local communities. As the aforementioned cultural resources remain fully unexplored, this research has the goal of providing a framework for the development of a local entrepreneurship network of creative communities. The authors used a qualitative stance based on the literature review on the variables of study (creative tourism, heritage and the well-being of local communities) and content analysis focusing on the case study of the Cork and Tapestries of the region of Portalegre, Portugal. This approach not only allows for the development of a creative tourism network for local entrepreneurship and community well-being, but also enables a critical examination of the tensions between cultural heritage valorisation and the commodification of creativity, the pressures exerted by tourism on artisanal practices or more elitist art forms, community rhythms, and the ambivalences surrounding local empowerment and the uneven distribution of development effects on the territory.

## Tourism Carrying Capacity Assessment and Tourist Social Psychological Comfort at Amir Temur Mausoleum

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### Abstract

The current study assesses tourism carrying capacity psycho comfort and social of tourist at the Amir Temur Mausoleum, which is one of the most important cultural and spiritual heritage sites in Uzbekistan. In a study, the primary data were gained using online questionnaire given to visitors, which allowed evaluating the effects of social density, psychological comfort, visitor behavior, spiritual ambience, and site management as a group on the visitor experience as a whole. Determinants of perceived crowding and psychological comfort were analyzed using a multiple linear regression. The results show that despite the pleasant spiritual and emotional experiences of visitors, the experiences of being overcrowded are growing steadily and starting the correct their effect on the visitor of the facility to enjoy the historical and spiritual beauty of the site fully. Important predictors of psychological comfort were found to be stress/anxiety tolerance, spiritual atmosphere, perception of overcrowding, and the ability to relax in large crowds. Conversely, perceived density tolerance is significantly affected by visitor behavior and the level of noise. These findings prove that the site is not in the state if exceeding its social carrying capacity, but it is also close to the critical point that requires active visitor management intervention. The study gives such recommendations as visitor flow control, increased reinforcement of behavioral guidelines and increased participatory management through participation in collaboration with local communities. These are the strategies that are seen to help in alleviating the negative impact of overcrowding and to maintain the integrity of visitor experience. This study fuses social and psychological levels to the evaluation of carrying capacity, and it add value to the body of literature in heritage tourism management in Central Asians and provides an example to be followed in the similar heritage sites.

## From Isolation to Socialization: Measuring the Restorative Impact of Digital Cultural Interventions on Youth Well-being in European Healthcare Settings

Edita Bilaver

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### Abstract

The European Film in Hospital project, co-financed by Creative Europe, provides digital access to quality cinema for children and adolescents in hospital and home care across an expanded network of twelve European countries (operating via national VOD platforms). The project aims to reduce cultural isolation, contribute to the humanization of care, and increase psychophysical well-being by fostering moments of socialization. To strategically optimize the platform's catalogue and methods of intervention, the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore collaboratively designed and conducted a research activity, collecting quantitative data across four European partner countries (Italy, Belgium, Croatia, and Slovenia), during 2022 and 2023, utilizing indirect observation surveys administered to in-field operators. Key findings presented in 2024 revealed that overall enjoyment correlated strongly with emotional involvement and attention. Crucially, the shared viewing experience (in class groups or small occasional groups) proved significantly more engaging and rewarding than individual viewing. These measurable outcomes informed the consortium's decision to strategically reshape project activities, moving beyond passive consumption to prioritize increasing offline, mediated engagement and encouraging joint viewing in common hospital rooms. This shift maximizes the therapeutic impact of film as an active tool for expression and socialization, providing a blueprint for measuring restorative cultural participation in healing environments.

## Beyond Attendance Scores: Measuring Well-being in Cultural Participation

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### Abstract

In cultural institutions and tourism contexts, impact is still predominantly measured through attendance-based indicators such as visitor numbers and participation rates. While these metrics capture reach and access, they provide limited insight into how cultural participation affects individual and collective well-being. This paper responds to growing critiques of such approaches by examining how well-being in cultural participation is currently measured and how it can be more meaningfully assessed. Cultural participation has been linked to a wide range of outcomes, including emotional regulation, psychological flourishing, social connectedness, and meaning-making, as well as community-level benefits such as social cohesion and resilience. However, despite increasing recognition of these multidimensional effects, empirical research remains methodologically fragmented, reflecting diverse and often implicit conceptualizations of well-being. This study adopts an integrative literature review to systematically analyze the methods used to assess well-being in cultural participation across cultural, heritage, arts, and tourism contexts. Drawing on interdisciplinary sources, it identifies and classifies key measurement approaches, including self-report and psychometric tools, qualitative and ethnographic methods, behavioral indicators, physiological measures, and neuroscientific techniques. Each approach is critically evaluated in terms of its underlying assumptions, strengths, limitations, and applicability. By synthesizing existing approaches, the paper contributes to more robust and policy-relevant evaluations of cultural participation, supporting a shift from counting attendance to understanding its psychological and well-being impact.

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