

Visiting the Margins. INnovative CULtural ToUrisM in European peripheries

This Project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement no. 101004552



Deliverable number: D6.2 Title: Guidelines on the use of European Structural and Investment Funds Due date: 31.01.2024 (M33) Actual date of delivery to EC: 25.01.2024

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Context

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Deliverable version number	2.0
Document reviewed by:	Maria Teresa Bonet Garcia

History

Change log

	8			
Version	Date	Author(s)	Reason for change	
1.0	11.01.2024	Karol J. Borowiecki and Maja U. Pedersen	First draft	
2.0	25/01/2024	Karol J. Borowiecki and Maja U. Pedersen	Second draft	

Release approval			
Version	Date	Name & Organisation	Role
2.0	31.01.2024	Maria Teresa Bonet Garcia (UGR)	Project Manager

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Executive Summary

The INCULTUM project focuses on promoting cultural tourism in Europe's peripheral regions, leveraging European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). This report analyzes the experiences of INCULTUM pilots with ESIF, providing insights into their application, management, and impact on cultural heritage projects.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

Administrative Complexity: Pilots frequently encountered bureaucratic challenges in accessing and managing ESIF.

Local Engagement: Successful projects were those that aligned closely with local contexts and actively involved community stakeholders.

Innovation and Sustainability: Innovative approaches in project design and a focus on sustainability were key factors in the success of several pilots.

Recommendations for Policy and Fund Design

Streamlining Application Processes: Simplify procedures and provide supportive systems for applicants to enhance the accessibility of ESIF.

Community-Centric Approaches: Design projects that are rooted in local needs and involve communities in planning and implementation.

Balancing Innovation with Tradition: Encourage the integration of modern technologies with traditional practices in cultural heritage projects.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The experiences of the INCULTUM pilots provide valuable lessons for future utilization of ESIF in cultural heritage projects. A shift towards more streamlined, flexible, and community-focused approaches in ESIF policy and practice is recommended for enhancing the impact of these funds.

1 Introduction

The INCULTUM project, an initiative under the Horizon 2020 framework, embarks on a journey to explore and harness the capabilities of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) in revitalizing and enriching cultural tourism in Europe's peripheral regions. This exploration is not merely about financial mobilization but encompasses a broader aim of integrating strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and innovative approaches to cultural heritage preservation and promotion. INCULTUM's undertaking, therefore, positions ESIF as instrumental tools in nurturing the socio-economic growth and cohesion that stem from the rich tapestry of local traditions, history, and identity. The main focus of the INCULTUM project, is the implementation of innovative participatory approaches across ten diverse pilot cases. This deliverable presents a description of the Pilot's experience with the use of ESIF hence providing valuable lessons for future utilization of ESIF in cultural heritage projects.

1.1 Role of the deliverable in the working package and in the project

Deliverable D6.2 Guidelines on the use of European Structural and Investment Funds focuses on the use of ESIF in the context of sustainable and respectful cultural tourism development, particularly in depopulated, rural, and small community-based contexts. The deliverable provides a critical review of various European Commission initiatives and resources. These include the novelties in the proposed Common Provisions Regulation and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Smart Specialisation Strategies as a policy framework for ERDF Research and Innovation investments, guidance documents for policy-makers, and insights from the "Stairway to Excellence" project. To complete this deliverable, we have completed Task 6.2, which involved an analysis of the utilization of ESIF in culturally significant, often rural or depopulated, areas. The core achievement of Task 6.2, is the development of comprehensive guidelines, informed by a review of European Commission initiatives. Furthermore, an important part of the work done to achieve this deliverable has been to send out questionnaires to our Pilot part-



ners to gain insights in their experience with the ESIF. By collating inputs from partners throughout the project's duration, this task forms an integral link between theoretical frameworks and practical applications, guiding the overall strategy and implementation of the INCULTUM project. It is hoped that the guidelines developed under this task will be accessible and relevant to policy makers and cultural institution managers. The work done for this deliverable is part of the WP6 Deliverable D6.1 *INCULTUM training portal*, as it will be linked with the INCULTUM training portal and be available Open Access for consultation.

1.2 Objective of the document

The primary aim of this document is to offer a detailed exploration of how ESIF can be effectively utilized for cultural heritage projects. By drawing on the real-world experiences of those directly involved in the INCULTUM project, the report seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the practical aspects of ESIF application, management, and impact. It aims to serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, practitioners, and stake-holders, guiding them through the complexities of ESIF and demonstrating how these funds can be leveraged to foster the growth and development of cultural tourism in Europe's peripheral regions.

1.3 Structure of the document

Following this introduction, Section 2 provides the background of this deliverable, Section 3 delves into an overview of ESIF, exploring its relevance and impact. Section 4 presents detailed experiences of INCULTUM pilots with ESIF, followed by Section 5, which synthesizes these experiences into recommendations for policy and fund design. The report concludes with Section 6, summarizing key findings and future directions.



1.4 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Shahedul Alam Khan for his research assistance during the initial preparations of this deliverable. We would also like to thank our INCULTUM Pilot partners for their valuable inputs through questionnaires we prepared for this deliverable.



2 Background

At the heart of the INCULTUM project lies the understanding that cultural heritage is a pivotal element in regional development. It embodies the traditions, history, and identity of local communities, offering a unique platform for socio-economic growth and cohesion. However, realizing this potential requires not only financial investment but also strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and innovative approaches to cultural heritage preservation and promotion. This is where ESIF come into play, serving as crucial instruments in the pursuit of these objectives. Within the INCULTUM project, it has been explored what is the potential of ESIF in revitalizing and promoting cultural tourism in Europe's peripheral regions.

This report delves into the experiences of various INCULTUM project pilots with ESIF, aiming to shed light on the practical aspects of fund utilization, the challenges encountered, and the successes achieved. The insights gathered from these diverse pilots, each with their unique cultural and historical significance and set within varied geographical and socio-economic landscapes, provide a rich tapestry of lessons learned. These experiences are invaluable in guiding future policy and practice, not just within the scope of the INCULTUM project but also in the broader context of cultural heritage projects across Europe.

Through this report, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of how ESIF can be effectively utilized for cultural heritage projects, drawing from the real-world experiences of those directly involved in the field. The findings and recommendations outlined here are intended to serve as a resource for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders, offering guidance on navigating the complexities of ESIF and harnessing their potential for the enhancement of cultural tourism and regional development.

3 Overview of European Structural and Investment Funds

The ESIF stand as the cornerstone of the European Union's commitment to promoting economic, social, and territorial cohesion across its member states. These funds, no-tably including the ERDF, the European Social Fund (ESF), and the Cohesion Fund, are instrumental in driving the Europe 2020 strategy's objectives of smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth.

3.1 INCULTUM and the Common Provisions Regulation

The Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) governs according to five distinctive policies, identical with the funding priorities of ERDF. The INCULTUM project seeks to develop tourism in the peripheral area, with the aim of developing a self-sustaining economy for the regions through the creation of jobs and income for the locals. The project also seeks to utilize the available resources and develop further resources to support the tourism in a sustainable manner. The actions undertaken within the INCULTUM project will lead to an innovative and smart economic transformation in the participating regions (CPR PO(Policy Objective)-1).

The project is also facilitating knowledge sharing and connectivity across the marginal regions through INCULTUM websites, publications, events and community building and networking, which will ensure regional ICT connectivity (CPR PO-1).

Out of the ten participating pilot sites, five can be considered cross boarder cases where the action will promote cross country integrated efforts and connectivity (CPR PO-1 and 3).

Finally, the project is incorporating an inclusive effort where different stakeholders of the community are studied and play roles in attaining the outcome of the project, ensuring an inclusive initiative to a more social Europe (CPR PO-4) and an integrated and sustainable development (CPR PO-5).

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3.2 The Smart Specialisation Strategies

Research and Innovation (R&I) is an effort to create an ecosystem to support innovation, R&D, and entrepreneurship to promote innovation and attain a sustainable growth across Europe. Along with ERDF, the R&I initiative is supported by Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) . It is a location focused approach that develops a collaborate solution with local stakeholders to identify the location specific potential advantages to develop the economy and entrepreneurship. The pilot areas of the INCULTUM project are below their respective national and European averages considering different economic aspects such as income and employment. However, each pilot area has a diversified set of resources with a potential to develop the tourism sector, with positive spillover effects on the local economy. The pilots aim to use their unique cultural resources to develop tourism which can help them to generate jobs and income and to develop the local economy. It is a place-based approach for growth and development as prescribed by S3 (S3 Key Principle (KP)-1).

The pilot areas are deprived, remote, peripheral, and partly deindustrialized, but, have cultural or natural features that can be turned into tourist attractions. The INCULTUM project will help the local stakeholders to collectively develop innovative strategies to capitalize their local advantages to attain sustainable economic growth. It will help the local governments by sharing the knowledge generated during the implementation of the INCULTUM project to focus on their core advantage and make effective investment decisions (S3 KP-2). To be aligned with the key principle 3 of S3, the project has incorporated the views and participation of stakeholders, including the visitors, and related businesses, residents, institutions, and government, to develop a collective solution for the local economic and social challenges. It is a bottom-up approach to develop an inclusive solution to reduce the negative effect of tourism on the locals and increase the benefits to both locals and tourists.

The project is exploring a range of changes based on economic, demographic, online presence and engagements of the spots, and perception of locals and tourists; subse-

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quently, developing a multi-dimensional perspective of innovation in tourism in the pilot areas (S3 KP-4). Data was gathered before and during the implementation of the INCULTUM project to analyze the impact the the pilot action. As a part of the collection of data the pilots have conducted surveys of visitors and locals, identify the capacity of the pilots and opportunities of developing capabilities. These initiatives are helpful in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the projects and modifying the approaches according to the reality existing in the pilots (S3 KP-5).

To enable the synergies among European Union Funds, the project must not use national or regional funds as a substitute or private funds as a source of joint funding along with EU funds. In addition, same project expenses must not be financed by multiple funding sources. Synergies can be realized by the project if the combined efforts of the different fundings can be used to achieve greater impact and efficiency. In this regard, INCULTUM has ten different pilots with potential and unique cultural heritage, however, with the same peripheral socio-economic nature. The project has initiated parallel projects in these pilots to develop and implement innovative ideas for cultural tourism based on their local resources. The aim is to develop a sustainable solution for these marginal European regions to grow and a balanced development across Europe.

Apart from developing synergies among EU funds discussed earlier, the "Stairway to excellence (S2E)" project of the JRC and DG-REGIO worked to reduce the innovation gap among the EU member states. In support of this, the INCULTUM project is working in the marginal areas of the EU and developing and implementing innovative solutions from the collaborative effort of the local community. The project also enhances experience and knowledge of the stakeholders in conducting research and identifying area specific competencies for developing as desired by the S2E.

4 Experiences of INCULTUM Pilots with ESIF

The INCULTUM project, encompassing a diverse array of pilot sites across Europe, offers a rich tapestry of experiences with the ESIF. These experiences, drawn from various cultural and geographical contexts, provide valuable insights into the practicalities, challenges, and successes of utilizing ESIF in the realm of cultural tourism and regional development.

The pilots covered, each with their unique cultural and historical significance, range from rural communities rich in heritage to areas with hidden cultural gems. They encompass a variety of geographical landscapes, from the rolling hills of Mediterranean regions to the rugged terrains of Northern Europe, each presenting distinct challenges and opportunities in cultural tourism development. These sites were carefully selected not only for their cultural and historical value but also for their potential to demonstrate the versatile application of European Structural and Investment Funds. Through their varied experiences, these pilots offer invaluable insights into the practical implementation, challenges, and successes of utilizing ESIF, providing a comprehensive perspective that is both contextually rich and uniquely instructive for future endeavors in similar settings.

4.1 Overview of INCULTUM Pilots

Figure 4.1 shows with a red diamond marker the approximate location of each of the INCULTUM pilot sites.¹ The blue dots indicate the location of all attractions in the participating INCULTUM countries, with larger dots indicating a higher concentration of visitors. From Figure 4.1 it clearly appears that the pilot sites are in the periphery, in locations with smaller volumes of tourists. In Table 1.1 in the Appendix it is possible to see a description of the pilot locations, together with their respective NUTS3 and NUTS2 regions.

Apart from being located in the periphery, economic development of the areas is also

¹The locations are based on the Pilots own description of the location. The Irish pilot action takes place all across the country and has no specific location.

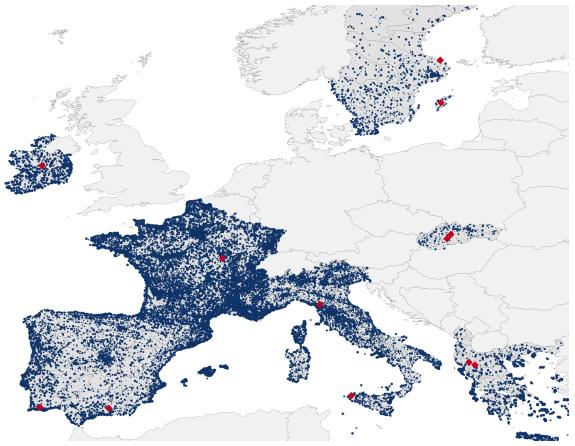


Figure 4.1: Map with INCULTUM pilot locations

Notes: This map shows the approximate location of the INCULTUM pilots (red squares) together with the locations of all attractions in INCULTUM countries (blue dots). *Source:* Tripadvisor reviews collected in Borowiecki et al. (2023a,b) and INCULTUM Pilots.

below the national averages, as can be seen in Figure 4.2. As a measure of urbanization we show population density at the NUTS3 regional level. As an indicator of the local labor markets we use the unemployment rates at the NUTS2 level and to show economic activity we show the level of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the NUTS3 regions in which a pilot is located. In all cases we show the yearly average for the years before the INCULTUM project started (2018-2019) and the years after implementation (2021-2022).

In Panel A of Figure 4.2, compared to the EU27 average, it is evident that the majority of the regions are less densely populated. The only INCULTUM pilot regions that lie above the EU27 average are Italian regions, which is not surprising due to the high population density of the country. When comparing with national averages, a majority of the INCULTUM pilot regions tend to be less densely populated. The relatively low level



of population density suggests that the pilot regions are more rural regions rather than metropolitan regions.

The unemployment rates of INCULTUM NUTS2 regions are illustrated in Panel B of Figure 4.2. The INCULTUM pilot regions in Northern Europe follow more or less their respective national unemployment average. However, when considering Southern European countries, there seems to be substantial variability in unemployment across regions. Overall, the unemployment rates show that there is great variability across the pilot regions, but in most cases the levels are similar to the national average.

Finally, in Panel C of Figure 4.2 shows the income levels for the NUTS3 regions. There once again seems to be a divide between Northern- and Southern European regions. Almost all Northern European regions have income levels that lie above the EU27 average level of GDP per capita, while the majority of Southern European INCULTUM pilot regions have income levels that lie below the EU27 average. When comparing with national averages, a majority of INCULTUM NUTS3 regions have lower income levels than their respective national income levels. Therefore, also the levels of income indicates the peripheral nature of the regions of interest.

Given that tourism is at the core of the INCULTUM pilot action, it is useful also to have a look at tourism flows over time in the INCULTUM pilot regions. We use the number of reviews posted on Tripadvisor to shed some light on tourism activity and trends (see Borowiecki et al. (2023a,b) for a detailed explanation of the data). In Figure 4.3 we illustrate how the number of Tripadvisor reviews changes over time, together with the share of visitors in the four categories 1) local, 2) domestic, 3) Europe, and 4) world for each pilot region. The solid line indicates the total number of reviews while the different shades of gray, show the share of reviews for each of the four travel categories, out of the total number of reviews in the pilot area. There are some interesting differences between the INCULTUM pilots in terms of the composition of visitors and how this change over time. It appears that international travel dominates in most pilot areas except from France and Italy (Sicily). Furthermore, areas where international travel reaches the highest levels are



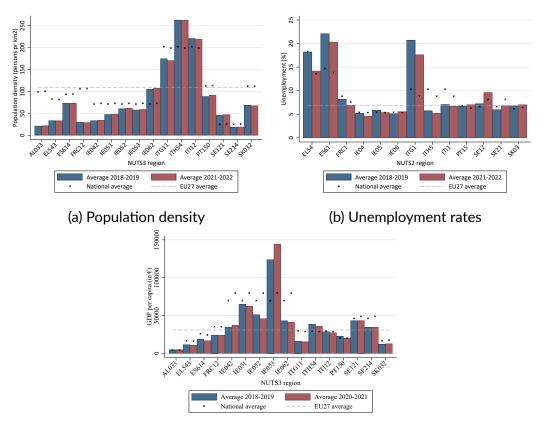


Figure 4.2: Urban and regional development in INCULTUM pilot regions

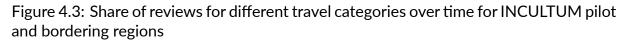
(c) GDP per capita

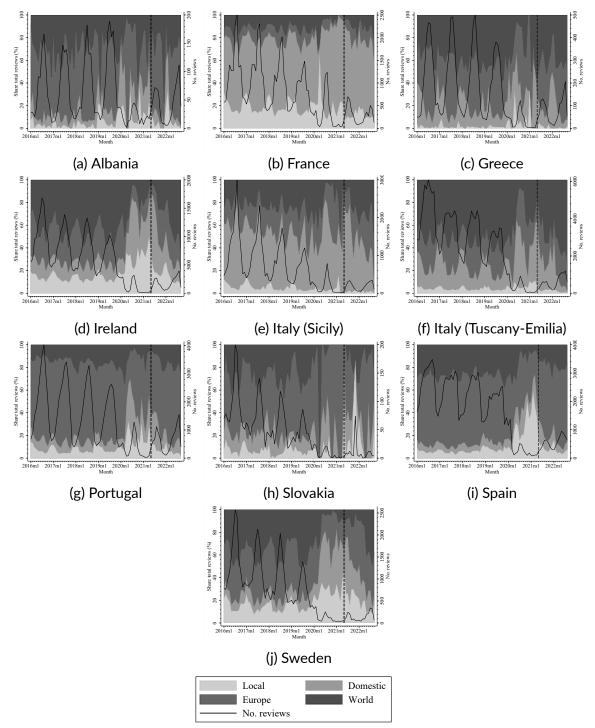
Notes: This Figure shows urban and regional development in the INCULTUM pilot regions. Panel A shows the average population density for the two periods 2018-2019 and 2021-2022 for NUTS3 regions in which an INCULTUM pilot area is located. Panel B shows the unemployment rates for the two periods 2018-2019 and 2021-2022 for NUTS2 regions in which an INCULTUM pilot area is located. Panel C This figures shows GDP per capita for the two periods 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 for NUTS3 regions in which an INCULTUM pilot area is located. The figures also show the national averages for the same two time periods and the EU27 averages. *Source*: Reproduced from Borowiecki et al. (2023b) using data from Eurostat. Panel A, Eurostat (2022b) online data file DEMO_R_D3DENS. Panel B, Eurostat (2022c) online data file LFST_R_LFU3RT. Panel C, Eurostat (2022a) online data file NAMA_10R_3GDP.

also the places mostly affected by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The higher the levels of international travel before the pandemic the larger shifts towards domestic travel after.

Another way to look at tourism flows, is to loo at the travel distance of visitors. In Figure 4.4 we show the average travel distance for each INCULTUM pilot area over time. In almost all areas, excluded the Albanian pilot area, there is a decrease around the beginning of 2020, followed by an increase during 2021 around the start of the INCULTUM project.





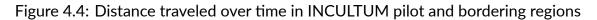


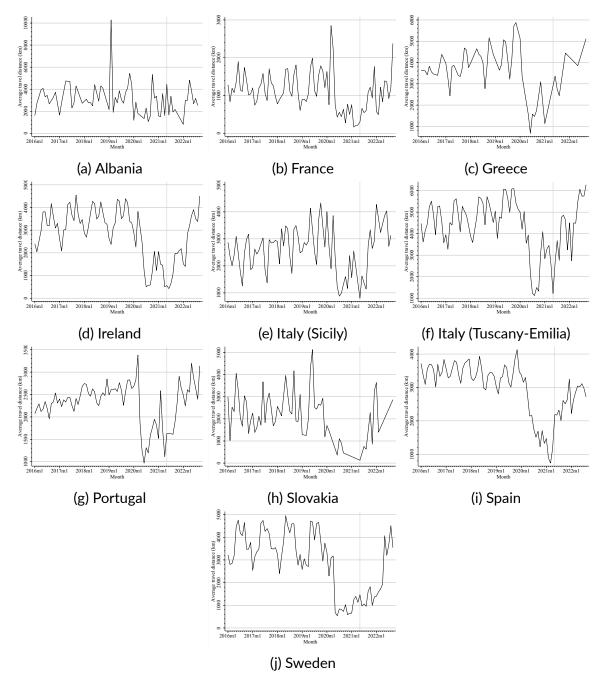
Notes: This Figure shows the share of reviews out of the total in the following four travel categories: local, domestic, Europe and world. The vertical line indicates when the INCULTUM action started. Regions refer to NUTS3 regions where an INCULTUM pilot is located and bordering NUTS3 regions. *Source*: Tripadvisor reviews collected in Borowiecki et al. (2023a,b).

In conclusion, this subsection has shown evidence of the peripheral and nature of the INCULTUM pilot sites according to economic measures such as population density and



regional income level. We have also shown how the pilot area differs in terms of unemployment. Finally, we have provided evidence for tourism activity in the INCULTUM pilot regions.





Notes: This figures shows the average travel distance of visitors to attractions in NUTS3 regions where an INCULTUM pilot is located and attractions in bordering NUTS3 regions by month. The vertical line indicates when the INCULTUM action started. *Source*: Tripadvisor reviews collected in Borowiecki et al. (2023a,b).



4.2 Experiences of INCULTUM Pilots

The pilots within the INCULTUM project have interacted with ESIF in various capacities, reflecting a wide spectrum of familiarity and engagement with these funds. From initiating applications to managing and implementing funded projects, their experiences cover a broad range of activities and outcomes.

Administrative Complexity: A common challenge across many pilot sites was the administrative complexity associated with ESIF applications and management. Pilots often faced rigorous documentation requirements, demanding application processes, and a need for meticulous financial planning and tracking.

Bureaucratic Hurdles: Several pilots noted the bureaucratic hurdles in accessing funds, with some highlighting specific national or regional peculiarities that added to these challenges. The need for extreme precision in application preparation and project execution was frequently mentioned.

Successes in Project Implementation: Despite these challenges, many pilots reported successful experiences in securing and utilizing ESIF for impactful projects. These ranged from digital innovation in cultural heritage to enhancing heritage site accessibility and engagement.

Variability in Fund Experiences: Different ESIF programs, such as ERDF, EAFRD, and others, were utilized by the pilots, each presenting its unique set of opportunities and challenges. The experiences varied significantly based on the specific fund and the nature of the project.

The survey conducted among the INCULTUM pilots revealed also insights into their experiences with ESIF, including on strategies for overcoming challenges. Pilots shared strategies they employed to navigate the complexities of ESIF, including building robust administrative support systems, engaging in proactive planning, and developing strong collaborations with local stakeholders.



The pilots also reflected on the impact of ESIF-funded projects on local development. Many reported positive outcomes, including job creation, enhanced tourist engagement, and improved preservation and promotion of cultural heritage.



5 Recommendations and Guidelines

The experiences of the INCULTUM project pilots with ESIF offer valuable insights that can inform improvements in both policymaking and fund design, particularly in the realm of cultural heritage. These insights lead to a set of integrated recommendations and guidelines aimed at enhancing the effectiveness, accessibility, and impact of ESIF.

Streamlining and Simplifying Procedures: A key recommendation emerging from the pilot experiences is the need to streamline and simplify the application and management processes for ESIF. This involves reducing bureaucratic hurdles through clearer and more straightforward guidelines and documentation requirements. Establishing dedicated support systems to assist applicants throughout the application process can significantly ease the administrative burden. These systems would provide guidance, clarification, and assistance in navigating the complexities of fund management, ensuring that cultural heritage projects can be implemented more efficiently and effectively.

Adaptive and Responsive Funding Approaches: The variability in cultural heritage projects necessitates adaptive funding models. Funds need to be flexible enough to accommodate unique project needs and responsive to regional specificities. Tailoring ESIF policies to regional contexts ensures that they address the specific cultural, historical, and socio-economic characteristics of different areas. This includes allowing for adjustments in project scopes and timelines to cater to unforeseen challenges and changes in local conditions.

Collaborative Networks and Community-Centric Approaches: Collaboration among various stakeholders, including local authorities, cultural heritage experts, and community groups, enhances the impact and sustainability of ESIF-funded projects. Projects should be designed with a community-centric approach, ensuring that they are grounded in local needs and perspectives. This not only fosters a sense of ownership among local communities but also ensures that the benefits of these projects are widely shared and contribute to social cohesion.

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Sustainable Development and Environmental Considerations: Sustainability should be a cornerstone of ESIF initiatives, with projects designed to contribute to the long-term economic and social development of the region. Incorporating environmental sustainability principles is essential, promoting practices that preserve and protect cultural heritage sites. This approach ensures that cultural heritage projects contribute positively to both the community and the environment.

Innovation, Inclusivity, and Accessibility in Cultural Heritage Projects: Innovative approaches to cultural heritage preservation and promotion, such as the use of digital technologies and novel conservation techniques, should be encouraged. Projects should be designed to be inclusive and accessible, catering to diverse audiences and contributing to greater social cohesion and cultural understanding. By integrating these principles, ESIF can play a pivotal role in not only preserving cultural heritage but also in fostering cultural understanding and appreciation across diverse communities.

6 Conclusions

The exploration of the experiences of INCULTUM project pilots with the ESIF has yielded insights into the multifaceted nature of these funds when applied to the realm of cultural heritage and regional development. This report, drawing from a diverse range of European contexts, offers a panoramic view of the challenges, opportunities, and successes associated with ESIF, providing a rich foundation for future policy and practice in this sector.

The key challenge consistently highlighted across the pilot experiences is the administrative complexity and bureaucracy involved in accessing and managing ESIF. This issue, while not insurmountable, has proven to be a significant hurdle, often requiring extensive preparation, meticulous documentation, and a robust understanding of the fund's mechanisms. The need for streamlined procedures and enhanced support systems for applicants is evident, pointing towards a policy shift that could make these funds more accessible and user-friendly.

Another critical finding is the importance of aligning projects with the local context and engaging stakeholders at every stage. Projects that resonated with local communities, leveraged local expertise, and actively involved stakeholders not only achieved their objectives more effectively but also fostered a sense of ownership and pride in the outcomes. This community-centric approach underscores the need for ESIF-funded initiatives to be deeply rooted in local needs and aspirations.

Innovation and sustainability emerged as key themes in successful projects. Balancing modern, innovative approaches with traditional practices has shown to enhance the value and appeal of cultural heritage sites, making them relevant to contemporary audiences while preserving their historical integrity. The sustainability of these projects, both in environmental and economic terms, is essential for their long-term viability and impact.

As we look towards the future, the lessons learned from the INCULTUM pilots are in-



structive. They call for policy improvements that simplify ESIF procedures, enhance fund flexibility, and acknowledge the unique challenges and strengths of different regions. There's a clear directive for future projects to emphasize collaborative networks, community involvement, and innovative yet respectful approaches to cultural heritage.

This report serves as a guide and a blueprint for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders involved in cultural heritage projects, offering a pathway to more effective, inclusive, and impactful use of ESIF.

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A Appendix

Table 1.1: Regional classifications of INCULTUM pilot areas

#	Country	Location as described by pilot	NUTS3 region name	NUTS3 region code	NUTS 2 region name	NUTS 2 region code
1	Spain	The Altiplano	Granada	ES614	Andalusia	ES61
2	Portugal	Campina de Faro	Algarve	PT150	Algarve	PT15
3	Slovakia	Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica	Banskobystrický kraj	SK032	Central Slovakia	SK03
4	Italy	Monti di Trapani, Calatafimi-Segesta, Custonaci, Buseto Palizzolo	Trapani	ITG11	Sicilia	ITG1
5	Italy	San Pellegrino, Alpe, Tuscan-Emilian Appennines	Modena Lucca	ITH54 ITI12	Emilia-Romagna Toscana	ITH5 ITI1
6	France	Regional Natural Park	Nièvre	FRC12	Bourgogne	FRC1
7	Greece	Aaos Valley, Konitsa	Ionnina	EL543	Epirus	EL54
8	Albania	Upper Vjosa Valley, Përmet	Gjirokastër	AL033	Southern Albania	AL03
9	Ireland	County Mayo County Galway County Limerick County Cork County Waterford County Wicklow	West Region West Region Mid-West Region South-West Region South-East Region Mid-East Region	IE042 IE042 IE051 IE053 IE052 IE062	Northern and Western Region Northern and Western Region Southern Region Southern Region Southern Region Eastern and Midland Region	IE04 IE04 IE05 IE05 IE05 IE06
10	Sweden	Gotland Öregrund	Gotlands län Uppsala län	SE214 SE121	Småland and the Islands East Middle Sweden	SE21 SE12