

CONCEPT NOTE

European Urban Initiative – Innovative Actions *TOPIC 2: Sustainable Tourism*

Main challenge:

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism accounted for about 15% of Med countries GDP and 11.5% of their total employment. After the arrival of the pandemic, tourism-vocated cities found themselves in a dramatic situation due to the lockdown and the accompanying travel restrictions.

Now that the pandemic is over, tourism is rapidly recovering its social and economic relevance. The latest trends show that together with the economic recovery, tourism re-proposes those old, unsustainable patterns and business models that gave rise to undesired effects like over-tourism, extreme seasonalization, with their undesired pressures on the environment and the local communities. Post-pandemic tourism has an historic chance to thread new paths, by focusing on alternative destinations and by using emerging technologies that have been boosted by the pandemic itself.

The City of Prato is an industrial city famous worldwide mainly for its textile district, which represents about 3% of European textile production. Due to its historic and economic background, and the proximity of world famous destinations in Tuscany, the city lies outside of the main touristic routes comprising the world renown destinations like Florence, Siena or Pisa. Rather than bringing an advantage to the city in terms of tourist presences, this proximity more often causes negative effects to the city economy, environment and the local community. The majority of tourists staying in the city barely visit it, as they choose Prato for its closeness to major cities of art in Tuscany combined with more affordable prices of accommodation. Nevertheless, the City has a lot to offer to visitors that choose Prato as a part of their holiday experience. It is a modern cultural metropolis, a city that combines the ancient charm of the old town with the alternative of the modern business and contemporary art district, merged in a journey that starts from the Middle Ages and reaches the Vanguard. It is a city that has always been focused on sustainability, new technologies, innovation and creativity capable of bringing together art, history, modernity, entrepreneurship and attention to good living.

The city administration is committed for many years to implementing policies for sustainable development and strives to promote both the City's huge wealth of industrial and cultural heritage and the virtuous sustainable production practices of the companies operating in its textile district.

The objective of the project will be to develop a well known and consolidated tourism product related to **Industrial Tourism** by opening up of unconventional destinations like industrial sites and productive locations and steer significant tourism flows towards hitherto unknown areas that can be a valid alternative to mainstream destinations. It will combine the traditional ways of developing marketing and governance strategies with the use of advanced technologies - particularly immersive technologies like AR/VR/XR - that will become a powerful tool for connecting the present with history, opening up new horizons for the promotion of industrial tourism and for the enhancement of the city's identity. The attention and interest generated by industrial tourism shall stimulate the economic growth of the area, favour the creation of new job opportunities and contribute to preserving and promoting the historical and cultural heritage of Prato.

Type of actions to develop the project idea

For the purposes of candidacy for project partners, participants are invited to take particular consideration of the following topics and activities:

- Diversifying the tourism product towards varied forms of smart, sustainable and accessible Industrial tourism, digitising tourism services, catering to a wider range of types of visitors, as well as contributing to the livelihoods of local communities;
- Driving the green and digital transformation of the tourism sector within the urban setting, including the transition towards circular economy, smart tourism business models, in close cooperation with digital and green upskilling and reskilling opportunities, matching skills and qualifications sought in tourism;
- Fostering social inclusion and innovation through tourism, including by supporting accessibility and affordability measures, and social economy tourism enterprises that facilitate the creation of resilient and sustainable jobs with a special focus on the inclusion on vulnerable and marginalised groups;
- Innovative destination management models based on real-time data of tourism flows, especially in view of addressing overcrowded tourism sites and achieving a more balanced and distributed approach, including through collaborative digital platforms and innovative, sustainable and inclusive urban tourism routes;
- Strengthening the role of the city as a gate into the wider tourism regional setting, especially in lesser-known regions with high tourism potential, through fostering urban-rural linkages in the tourism context, including by capitalising on cultural assets and heritage sites in the proximity of urban centres and surrounding areas;
- New tourism governance models, including participatory and collaborative tools to enhance local and stakeholder participation, crisis management measures, innovative data collection mechanisms, systems to manage the pressure on public resources and public services, and measures addressing social and housing needs, cost and quality of living considerations;
- Communication and dissemination, including the development of a communication strategy that shall contribute to the achieving of project objectives
- Transferring of project results including the development of the transferring methodology, support in networking and cooperation between EU urban areas and facilitate replication and scaling up of project results
- Monitoring and evaluation
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Output indicators:

- Number of cultural and tourism sites supported (measurement unit: cultural and tourism sites)
- Enterprises supported (of which: micro, small, medium, large) (measurement unit: enterprises)
- Destination management organisations supported (measurement unit: organisations)
- Value of digital services, products and processes developed for enterprises (measurement unit: euro)
- Infrastructure supported (new, renovated, reconverted or modernised) (measurement unit: supported infrastructures);
- New equipment created and/or supported (measurement unit: new equipment);
- Population covered by projects in the framework of integrated actions for socio-economic inclusion of marginalised communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups (measurement unit: persons);
- Participations in joint actions promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion (measurement unit: participations);

- People supported (trained, upskilled, accompanied or assisted) (measurement unit: persons);
- Stakeholders involved in the preparation and co-implementation of the project (measurement unit: participations of stakeholders).

Result indicators:

- Visitors of cultural and tourism sites supported (measurement unit: visitors/ year)
- Percentage of visitor attractions that are accessible to people with disabilities and/or participating in recognised accessibility schemes (measurement unit: percentage of attractions accessible);
- Jobs created in supported entities (measurement unit: annual FTEs);
- SMEs introducing product, process, marketing or organizational innovation (measurement unit: enterprises);
- New enterprises surviving in the market (measurement unit: enterprises);
- Number of enterprises supported to register to EMAS (measurement unit: enterprises)
- Number of enterprises supported to apply for EU Ecolabel or other EN ISO 140024 type I ecolabels or equivalent voluntary labels, which are independent, multi-criteria based and third party verified (measurement unit: enterprises)
- SMEs participating in destination governance activities (measurement unit: participations)
- Users of new and upgraded digital services, products and processes (measurement unit: users/year)
- Level of participation achieved in the engagement with local communities (information, consultation, co-creation, co-decision) (measurement unit: percentage of the local population engaged).