Report on examples of accessibility and promotion of Adriatic natural and cultural sites

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WP5 ACCESSIBLE NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES

PP10 MOLISE REGION

EN Version

Project Acronym: TAKE IT SLOW
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cultural heritage sites
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Summary

1. TAKE IT SLOW Project

Funded under the **INTERREG - Italy-Croatia program**, the **TAKE IT SLOW project** aimed to develop new methodologies and strategies for managing the Adriatic macro-tourism destination in an inclusive and sustainable manner.

With a duration of **36 months** (extended to 42), the project's outcome was to facilitate <u>the set-up and promotion of slow and sustainable tourism linked to the natural and cultural heritage in the Adriatic area</u>, as a lever for more balanced territorial development with specific attention to inland areas.

With a total budget of just under **4 million euros**, the strategic TAKE IT SLOW project involved 5 Croatian partners and 8 Italian partners, for a total of **12 partners**:

- Dubrovnik-Neretva County (HR) - Lead Partner
- RERA SD (HR)
- Institutional Public Development Agency of Šibenik-Knin County (HR)
- University of Zadar (HR)
- Istria County (HR)
- PROMOTURISMOFVG (IT)
- Veneto Region (IT)
- Svim SRL (IT)
- Teatro Pugliese Pugliese - Regional Consortium for Arts and Culture (IT)
- Molise Region (IT)
- Emilia-Romagna Region (IT)
- Abruzzo Region (IT)

2. Il Partner REGIONE MOLISE

According to the Application Form, Molise Region was included among the partners entrusted with the concrete implementation of the project values, carrying out **a pilot action** in its own regional territory.

The experimental action attributed to the Molise partner focused on the slow tourism itinerary called the **"Cammino delle 7 Chiese" (Path of the 7 Churches)**: a strategy for local regeneration aimed at increasing the attractiveness of the places (for tourists and new generations) and facilitating socio-economic resilience mechanisms for certain inland areas of Basso Molise, characterized by the presence of Serbian-Croatian linguistic minorities recognized and protected at a national level. This local experimentation aimed to create a **new supra-municipal territorial**

brand, with the medium/long-term goal of establishing a **new micro-tourism destination** based on the tradition of the Serbian-Croatian linguistic minorities present in Molise.

With a budget of approximately **165 thousand euros** and the production of **34 project deliverables**, as of June 30, 2023, the Molise Region partner successfully concluded the project activities, utilizing around 95% of the allocated budget and achieving the 34 deliverables specified in the Application Form.

Through a qualitative analysis based on outcome indicators, it was found that the implemented activities reached a rate of approximately 110% compared to the actions initially planned. The surplus of activities mainly concerns the proactive involvement of the Local Contact Points (LCPs) and the Local Community, as well as the online and offline promotion of the pilot action "Cammino delle 7 Chiese." These results highlight the success of the undertaken initiatives and the willingness to exceed initial expectations, focusing on the interest and enthusiasm of the local community and the effective promotion of the new tourist destination.

3. The Pilot Action: C7C

CAMMINO DELLE 7 CHIESE

The "slow" trail aimed at discovering the tangible and intangible heritage of the Croatian-Molisan community lands .


During the approximately 36 months of the project, the partner Molise Region (PP10) has planned and implemented the slow trail "Cammino delle 7 Chiese" as an historical and cultural route that unfolds in the area of Basso Molise, involving the five Croatian origin territories (Acquaviva Collecroce, Montemitro, Palata, San Felice del Molise, Tavenna), to which two aggregating tourist areas have been added: the towns of Larino and Termoli. The underlying idea of the itinerary is to promote the cultural heritage (both material and immaterial) of the involved territories, starting from the pivotal physical location of the local community: **the Main Church of the village**.

In the design phase of the pilot action, the partner Molise Region has conceived a concept called **"Smart & Slow"**, referring to and applying the concepts of Slow Tourism and Accessibility promoted by the Take It Slow project, emphasizing the following characteristics:

- **Authenticity** – the itinerary focuses on unique, original, and non-reproducible elements that preserve the local identity connected to the Serbo-Croatian linguistic minorities.

- **Experientiality** – the itinerary offers engaging and memorable moments, also thanks to the use of innovative technologies.

- **Sustainability** – the itinerary includes and enhances the territory, involving the local community, companies (artisans, gastronomic workshops, etc.), and the local third sector.

At the base of the slow trail, as the main project output, is an **interactive map** (see the figure below) constructed through the implementation of **participatory processes** in the Croatian territories.
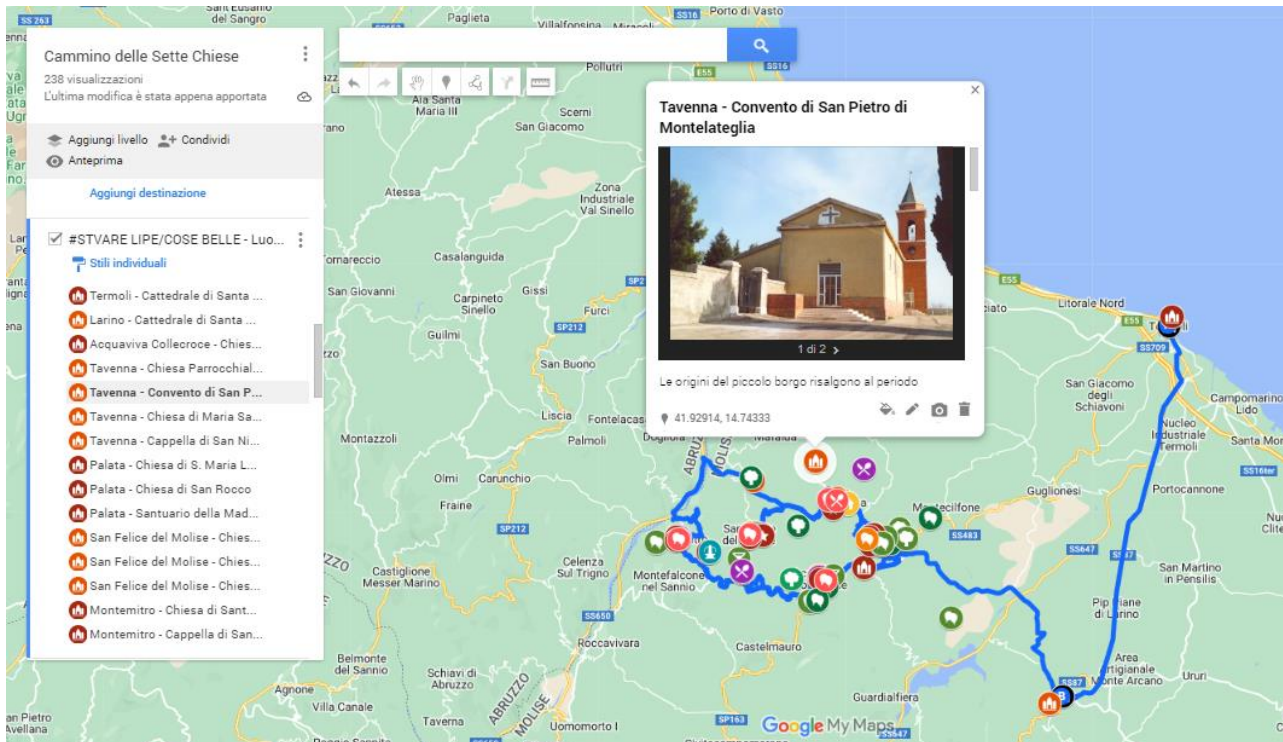
The hotspots were identified through research activities carried out by the BIOCULT Center (University of Molise), in synergy with the LCPs and the local community, through the implementation of a participatory process lasting approximately four months, structured as follows:


To date, the map contains about <u>90 points of interest</u> that span across the seven municipalities included in the itinerary.

The **geolocation** of these points allows tourists to move easily and safely

throughout the entire local territory, following personalized routes created with the help of dedicated IT tools.

Focus: Accessibility

<u>Personalization of the experience and ICT tools</u> have been the pillars of the **multi-channel strategy** implemented by the partner Molise Region, to mitigate the issues related to **limited accessibility** to the tourist destination. This includes both physical accessibility to the locations and access to online and on-site tourist information. In terms of online accessibility, the partner has developed a **dedicated and branded website** called "Cammino delle 7 Chiese" (Path of the 7 Churches): https://www.7chiese.it. Through this website, tourists can access the local heritage from the very beginning of their vacation planning.
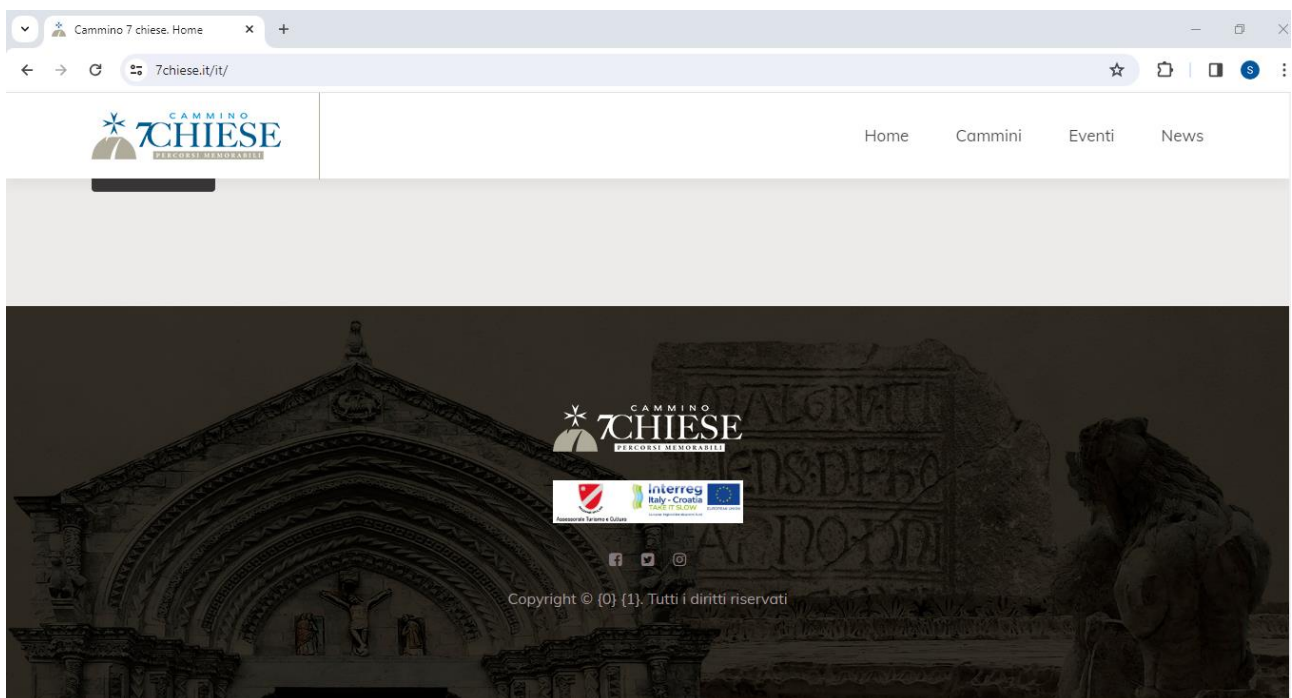
By downloading the associated app (currently being uploaded to the Android and IOS stores), tourists can stay connected to the territory and access interactive content that enhances their independent exploration of the area and fosters engagement in the tourist experience.

With regard to on-site accessibility, the use of **signage and paper maps** supports tourists in accessing the local historical heritage. These resources are available in three languages: Italian, English, and Croatian-Molisian (to safeguard and preserve the minority language).

For individual communication materials, the signage is created in the form of 100x70 display panels. This is of the removable type, fixed in the city center of each of the seven municipalities involved - see some images below.

Larino	Palata
Tavenna	San Felice (and Mayor)

The same poster template (appropriately reworked) is used to develop **the tourist map** (see image below), prepared in the form of an e-map: with the help of the "Qr-Code" tool, the tourist can connect to the site internet and/or apps and access additional content or locate yourself in the area by defining personalized itineraries.
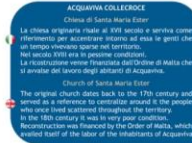
Points of interest are marked and integrated with **information panels** (see images bellowed) that, through the use of QR codes, provide direct and simplified access to targeted digital content for the user.
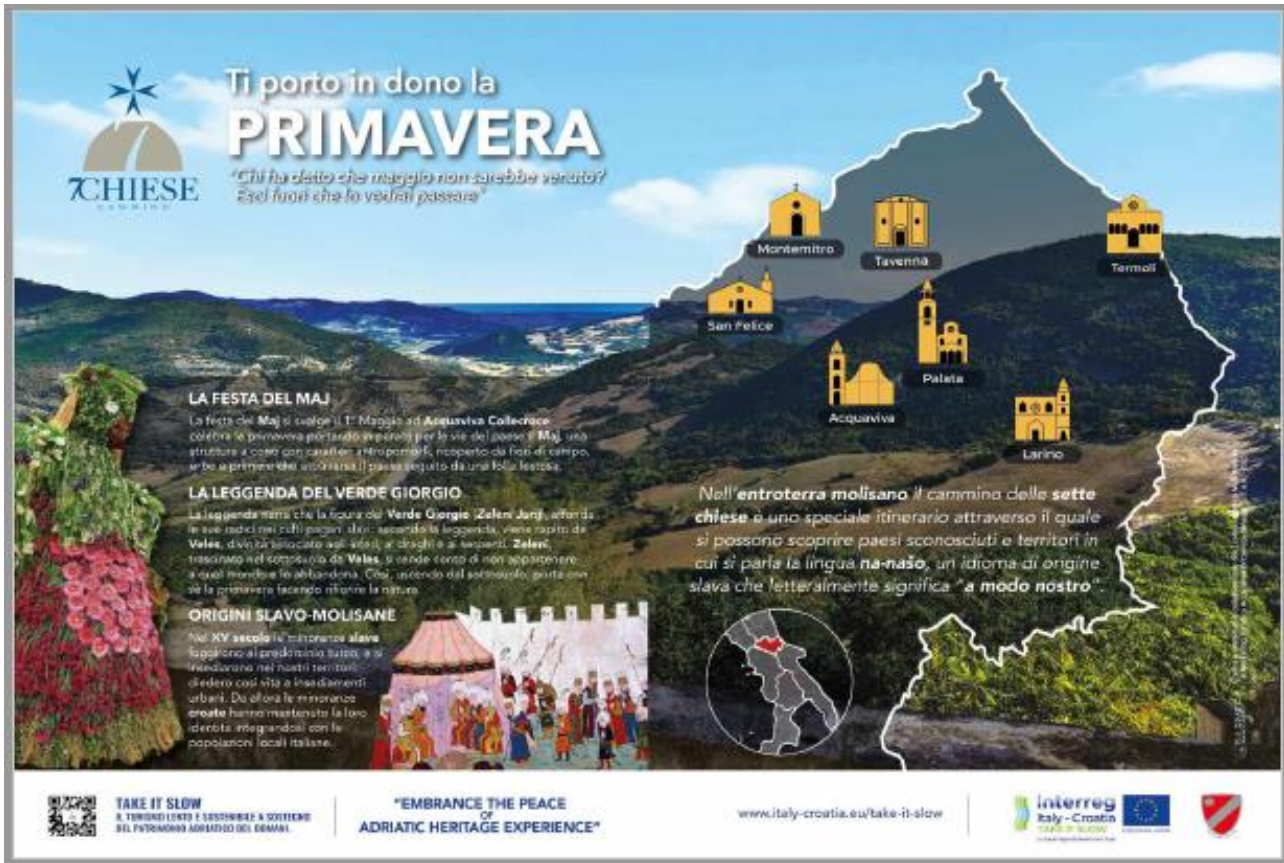
Focus: Promotion

The promotion of tourist destinations during the exploration phase is of fundamental importance in attracting the interest of potential visitors and encouraging them to consider that particular destination as a choice for their trip. For this reason, the partner Molise Region has devised and implemented a multi-channel communication strategy based on five key concepts:

- **Brand creation**: The brand "Cammino delle 7 Chiese - Memorable Routes" identifies the itinerary and, more broadly, the tourist destination. It is closely connected to the communication channels activated within the project, such as the website, app, and printed materials (signage, posters, and interactive map).

- **Emotional involvement**: Well-executed promotion can evoke positive emotions and stimulate the imagination of potential visitors. Molise Region has developed an extensive multimedia gallery that includes images, videos, captivating descriptions, and engaging stories - all freely accessible from the project website.

- **Useful information**: During the exploration phase, potential visitors seek detailed information about the destination, such as tourist attractions, accommodations, restaurants, transportation, and available activities. Aware of the difficulties in accessing the destination, Molise Region has implemented a strategy that combines online and offline channels. Geolocated and multilingual signage and an interactive map enable tourists to navigate independently and easily access interactive content using their smartphones.

- **Awareness and visibility**: To facilitate widespread promotion, the partner Molise Region has developed a dedicated advertisement in the "Lonely Planet Magazine Italia" (see detail

bellowed) special edition - a trade magazine targeting tourist travelers located in Italy and neighboring European regions (France, Switzerland, and Germany). The campaign was designed based on the unique aspect of undertaking the Cammino delle 7 Chiese during the month of May (a pivotal month for Serbo-Croatian origin festivities) with the aim of creating awareness about the destination, increasing its visibility, and highlighting its attractions, activities, and unique strengths.

- **Differentiation from the competition**: Molise Region's objective was to establish a promotion that highlights the unique and distinctive aspects of the destination, setting it apart from the competition. Through the Study Visit (open to partners and the press), Molise Region created the destination's storyboard: a three-day journey that emphasizes unique attractions, local traditions, culture, gastronomy, and authentic experiences. As a summary of the trip, an emotional video and a brochure were created to provide a virtual experience that allows people to envision themselves in the destination and desire to explore it in person.

Lessons learned: Criticalities and Best Practices

The cross-border activity, carried out in close synergy with diverse actors in terms of geographical location, typology, and background expertise, has allowed the partner Molise Region to experiment and, above all, transfer new knowledge and skills in the field of destination management applied to sustainable and slow tourism to the territories involved in the project. However, the application and experimentation of new models in underdeveloped tourist areas often involved defining new relationships and balances between the partner organization, tourism operators, and the local community.

In this context, the **main criticality** that the Molise Region partner had to face during the planning and implementation of project activities was the proactive involvement of Local Community Partners (LCPs) and the local community in a broader sense. Specifically, regarding LCPs, in the initial phase of the project, the team observed limited involvement based on a "top-down" decision-making approach, despite holding regular meetings for updates and sharing operational choices. However, during the final phase of the project, the organization of a proposed travel itinerary to be implemented within the Molise "Study Visit" reversed this trend, and LCPs became active participants in the process of enhancing and promoting their own territory. As for the local community, the initial limited participation can be attributed to a lack of familiarity with participatory processes used as a methodology for involvement in project activities. However, the team noticed a constant increase in participation and enthusiasm as the meetings progressed.

Despite the initial challenges, the partnership experimentation allowed the involved actors (i.e., Molise Region and LCPs) to devise shared models and solutions to address the challenges of the Adriatic macro-destination, such as economic development, community involvement, and the enhancement and preservation of cultural and natural heritage. The project activities conclude with a precise list of collected **best practices** to be capitalized on at the local and regional levels:

a. **Encouraging destination accessibility** - Inland and underdeveloped areas are often characterized by limited tourism infrastructure and services (e.g., limited accommodations, lack of tourist information, limited tourist activities and attractions, etc.). This issue can represent a barrier to the attractiveness and accessibility of the destination, limiting its potential for tourism development. Molise Region is addressing the challenge of accessibility by experimenting with a **multichannel strategy** aimed at facilitating access to online and on-site tourism resources, as well as encouraging independent exploration by tourists.

b. **Promoting Awareness and Skills** – Local communities may not be aware of the benefits and opportunities offered by sustainable tourism. It is essential to carry out awareness-raising activities on sustainable practices, involve them in the decision-making process, and provide training to transfer the necessary skills to responsibly manage tourism activities. Recognizing

the achieved results throughout the project and the importance of communities in preserving and enhancing the territory for future perspectives, Molise Region deemed it useful to conclude the project activities with the organization of a results-sharing activity structured as a "**capacity building**" initiative. By organizing a workshop (online and in-person), Molise Region aimed <u>to facilitate the involvement, empowerment, and training of the Local Community Partners (LCPs)</u> involved in the TIS project. The activity was based on a process of sharing and examining the Study Visit event in Molise, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the entire experience lived by the guests.

c. **Protection and Preservation of Resources** – Inland areas often host fragile ecosystems and culturally/naturally valuable resources. The implementation of new models of sustainable tourism must take into account the protection and preservation of the environment, minimizing the negative impact of tourism activities on the local ecosystem. This requires adequate planning and management of the heritage, coupled with medium-to-long-term protection and preservation procedures. Molise Region participated in project actions by developing and sharing an **Action Plan** that opens a local debate on the shared management of the new tourist destination. At the local level, <u>discussions on governance and agreements</u> are initiated, as specified in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) co-signed by Molise Region within the framework of the TIS project.

d. **Promotion and Tourist Attractiveness**: Inland and underdeveloped areas may be less known and have lower tourist visibility compared to more famous destinations. Effective promotion and increased tourist attractiveness may require additional efforts to reach and attract potential visitors, communicating the value of authentic and unique experiences offered by these destinations. By utilizing tools and methodologies developed within the Take It Slow project, Molise Region is experimenting with a **participatory methodology** that involves the local territory for the first time. The achieved result is an <u>interactive map that identifies and defines the (material and immaterial) heritage that the Local Community intends to convey to tourists</u>. This "best practice" is actively capitalized on by the Molise Region within a new Interreg project, with the goal of enhancing tourism in the inland areas for the entire regional territory.

e. **Funding and resources**: The implementation of new models of sustainable tourism requires long-term financial investments and resources. However, inland and underdeveloped areas may have limited financial resources and access to external funding. The lack of funds can make it difficult to start and maintain sustainable tourism initiatives. In this context, the **cross-border component and cross-border activities** assume an extremely important role: within the Interreg Italy-Croatia program, <u>Molise Region is experimenting with a pilot action involving the Croatian-Molisan community, aiming for concrete, sustainable, and inclusive</u>

future growth of the local areas involved in the TIS project. The involvement of stakeholders in partnership actions and the development of dedicated promotional materials have been designed and prepared to facilitate the tangible connection between the Croatian-Molisan community and "modern" Croatia.

Communication Materials

Below are the links to the emotional video that the Partner Molise Region has developed as a summary of the entire project activity:

Link **QUI!**