Final publication of the project: ISTER

ConnectIng hiSTorical Danube rEgions Roman routes

/Summary/

ISTER aims to revive a 2000-year-old heritage by putting the "Roman roads" back on the map and developing a pedestrian-friendly route by following the traces of Romans. The route aims to revive the local rural economy, connect communities with the heritage and transform neglected areas into focal, vivid points on an eco-cultural corridor along the Danube Region.

I. About the project

ISTER project addresses the challenge of Roman heritage discontinuity, which reflects both in a territorial dimension related to a low level of investment and connection between heritage resources and local/ regional productive sectors, as well as in visualisation and attractiveness dimensions regarding the promotion and awareness raising on the importance of heritage resources.

ISTER's main objective focuses on rediscovering and revitalising the ancient Roman Roads Network along the DR as a key driver in promoting territorial development based on sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage (precisely, Roman routes).

ISTER tackles the Roman Routes territorial dimensions as a continuous transnational element that passes DR states' borders and provides a relevant scale for exchange and joint development.

II. Outputs

1. Multi-Layered Stakeholders' Group setup

The constellation of partners in the ISTER project is very diverse. Their geographical scope, knowledge, experiences and skill set in stakeholder analysis and engagement differ from case to case. Therefore, a Methodological framework for Stakeholders Mapping was developed based on empirical and analytical methods proposed by stakeholder theorists and scholars using a selected practical method. Overall, this methodology aimed to provide a simplified stakeholder analysis method with tailor-made practices by considering 1) accessibility and approachability for all the partners and 2) project scope.

Stakeholder identification and analysis were used for prioritization reasons based on an importance/ impact matrix to select the best approach for each stakeholder group following transnational guidelines. Based on the transnational methodological guidelines and tools, each territorial partner provided a local stakeholder map, which became the basis for creating the Multilayered Stakeholder Group (MLSG).

2. Catalogue on Roman routes & settlements along the DR

The data collected in the Catalogue extended the current knowledge framework by providing a comprehensive picture of the existing database, laying the foundation for developing a GIS-based territorial Atlas of the heritage of Roman routes in the Danube Region helped deepen the understanding of this heritage.

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It provides information as:

• Starting & Ending points of the Routes
• Category
• Type of Roman heritage
• Dating (century/period/date range)
• Protection status
• Boundaries (of immovable cultural assets)
• Type of ownership & owners
• Location
• Physical state/condition
• Type of restoration
• Plans of the site/sites

3. **Common Branding Strategy**

Cultural Routes are a driver of economic development, social cohesion and transnational cooperation. The Common Branding Strategy of VIA ISTER in the Danube Region is developed to create impact and open new opportunities for regional development in the countries crossed by the Roman Roads.

It consists of recommendations, suggestions, opportunities and best practices that help build brand awareness and visibility at the Danube Region level. The activities, thematic campaigns, tools and tactics recommended for the launch and promotion of the brand are subject to adaptation to the local context and the availability of resources for implementation and validation.

4. **GIS-based territorial Atlas of Roman Routes legacy in DR**

The GIS Atlas of Roman routes in DR represents an innovative cartographic web application of the Roman routes in the entire DR. It provides a spatial representation of the available open inventory of Roman routes legacy in DR and relevant information regarding protection limits applicable to both Roman Settlements and Roads Network, retracing the history of the Roman Empire through Roman Roads Network in Danube Region (DR) and its relation with the natural environment.

The Atlas provides:
- Query tool over database items;
- Possibility to share the predefined queries;
- API interface for sharing the data (machine access and download of the data);
- Ability to add multimedia material for individual features (e.g. photos, articles, descriptions);
- Overview of the database and associated media material.

5. **Transnational Interactive tool (ISTER App)**

VIA ISTER transnational interactive tool is designed to promote the geo-referenced information on Roman sites and routes collected and stored in Territorial Atlas based on interactive maps.

ISTER app provides:

- Interactive geo-referenced maps of Roman Cultural Heritage (sites and monuments, roads and routes);
- Descriptions, pictures, illustrations and multimedia elements of Roman Cultural Heritage;

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- Up-to-date information about the surroundings, especially touristic information (places to eat, places to stay, potable water sources, toilets, public transport, events and other attractions);
- Walking and cycling routes related to Roman Cultural Heritage.

6. **Pilot Actions**

Pilot actions are the results of the testing phase of the Interactive digital tool - ISTER App for the Roman eco-cultural route. They aim to connect the digital app with the physical investments in the pilot sites. The Roman Milliars will exist in both digital and physical environments and help the users customize their trip and monitor the physical progress in the digital environment.

7. **Policy Handbook**

Based on the experience of the ISTER project, the handbook shares findings and recommendations with the communities in the Danube Region and at the EU level. It contributes to building the capacity of multi-level stakeholders and formulating the conditions of the regulatory framework through policy integration measures.

It contains good transnational practices regarding practical, technical and organisational/management aspects of (Roman) cultural heritage asset management, aiming to create homogeneous tools and strategies for protecting, valorising and sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources.

8. **Memorandum of Maintenance**

The project outputs, platforms, handbooks and tools were developed in close collaboration with target users. However, priorities, needs, and requirements can change over time. The further sustainability of ISTER's digital tools depends on the continuation of the collaboration and updating after the end of the project.

One of the instruments to ensure the project sustainability is the Memorandum of maintenance of the ISTER GIS-based Atlas & Interactive App. By signing the Memorandum of maintenance for the two ISTER tools, relevant stakeholders (museums, cultural organisations, public bodies, etc.) intend to integrate these tools into their local, regional and national-level policies.

III. Aerial photography, field trips and excavation work

The ISTER project identified sectors of Roman roads from selected areas in partner countries that are too faint, too large or too discontinuous to be assessed at ground level using non-invasive research methods in modern archaeology.

Aerial photography provided valuable visual information and contributed to a better understanding of Roman roads' territorial layout and the landscape's features. It was carried out by a light plane and a drone equipped with a camera and thermovision to get lovely bird's-eye views.

Alongside the aerial photography activities, the ISTER project carried out a series of field trips and excavations to identify the preserved Roman road sectors that meet the conditions for valorisation.

IV.   ISTER International Best Practices Awards

The contest aimed to recognise and support the best practices of innovative projects and initiatives for the protection, conservation, management, valorisation and sustainable use of the cultural heritage associated with Roman heritage in the Danube region.

It inspired participants from 7 countries in Danube Region to apply. The International Jury evaluated 12 applications and announced winners in each category.

- Category 1 – Protection and Preservation of Roman Heritage
  1st Prize Winner: National Museum of Uzice, (Serbia)
  Project: Protection and Preservation of ancient monuments in the Lapidarium

- Category 2 – Promotion and Valorisation of Roman Heritage
  1st Prize Winner: National Museum of Unification in Alba Iulia (Romania)
  Project: PANTHEON 3D

- Category 3 –Sustainable Use and Development of Roman Heritage
  1st Prize Winner: Regional Administration Vidin (Bulgaria)
  Project: Network for Sustainable Mobility along the Danube/ Transdanube.Pearls

The ISTER Awards Ceremony took place on 23 February 2022 in Aalen (Germany).

V.   Workshops

30 Local capacity-building workshops (CBW) were organized to enhance the capabilities of local multi-layered stakeholders to create a capable, strong horizontal governance chain.

• **Module 1:** Roman Route heritage as a driver for tourist, local/regional development

• **Module 2:** Roman Route heritage as an enabler for policy and regulatory framework

• **Module 3:** Roman Route heritage as a means for exchange and collaboration

> 3 module training
> in 8 DR countries
> organised by 10 project partners

VI.   Development and tools

- **Practical guide for stakeholders mapping**

  The guide reveals different methodological guidelines and tools for identifying stakeholders in the field of Roman Routes and settlements' heritage at the local level of the consortium territories. The framework provides a deeper understanding of stakeholders' interests, influences, and information exchange relationship linkages based on an importance/influence matrix and interest analysis.

- **Policy and regulatory report** analyses the trends and conditions for the protection and valorisation of cultural heritage (Danube region and EU level), the current policy framework in partner cities/regions/countries regarding the protection and valorisation of heritage values, with an emphasis on the physical heritage of the Roman network of routes and settlements.

The report provides a set of best practices/successful examples regarding current policies, plans and regulatory instruments for the protection, development and valorisation of Roman routes and the network of settlements as a cultural route.

- **Common Benchmarking Toolkit** encloses a series of practical methods, policy guidelines, mechanisms and recommendations with high potential for testing, replication and creative pictures for increasing competencies in identifications and evaluation of cultural routes, as well as establishing new common approaches toward Roman eco-cultural routes development, use and valorisation in Danube Region.

- **Cross-learning Modules Toolkit** includes a set of materials to provide supporting material for conducting the local CBW addressed to the MLSG. The tutoring guidelines successfully address the gaps and challenges related to the accessibility, use and valorisation of Roman routes and settlements network in DR and align sectoral visions and documents related to spatial planning, land use and environmental protection.

- **ISTER Video Documentary**

    The video-documentary ISTER was developed as a transnational marketing tool for broader use and distribution, including a collection of footage from different moments during the project, and promotes the connection between the individual and collective identity of the Roman Eco-Cultural Route, emphasising the local products and experiences in ISTER partner cities and countries.

VII.   Small-scale investment

Small-scale investment within the ISTER project involves areas from all partner countries and responds to transnational and local/regional challenges related to the network of Roman Routes and settlements valorisation. As part of the ISTER project, 8 partners from 6 countries installed 40 milestones or metal plates along ancient Roman roads. A QR code for the ISTER app is engraved on the bevelled side of the metal plate.

Placing a Roman-inspired milestone along the Ancient Roman Road (called miliarium) aims to increase the visibility of the remaining heritage, especially in the unexcavated areas and contribute to the global branding for the entire Danube Region, as the Roman milestones will be recurrent elements along the route.

VIII.   Communication, dissemination and capitalization

All consortium partners implemented communication, dissemination and awareness-raising activities during the project's life cycle. The promotion of project results, initiatives and events was carried out by providing consistent and targeted messages in English and the national languages of the consortium countries through the existing DTP website, project and partner communication channels and active interaction with appropriate traditional and social media.

Impact:
- networking and stakeholders' involvement;
- intensive cooperation with other synergistic projects and initiatives;
- interaction with the press and media;
- involvement in the local communities' development;
- contribution to active social inclusion.

Results:

- ✓ **1** final publication
- ✓ **2** scientific publications
- ✓ **2** non-scientific publications
- ✓ **5** e-newsletters
- ✓ **17** awareness-raising events
- ✓ **40** promotions of the ISTER project on external events
- ✓ **1000** publications in traditional and social media in **8** languages
- ✓ over **300 000** views and impressions

Transnational Capitalisation Workshops

The consortium partners participated in the three transnational capitalisation workshops held in Alba Iulia (Romania), Aalen (Germany) and Carnuntum (Austria) during the project duration. The events facilitated better understanding and internal collaboration. They expanded the ISTER network on a broader scale by establishing links outside it with synergistic projects/initiatives and designing a joint roadmap for follow-up opportunities.

IX.   Partnership

Special thanks to the project consortium!

26 project partners
15 financing project partners
11 associated strategic partners