Title: Official launch of Innocastle and the first study visit in Romania

Press release
Tuesday, 9 October 2018

Innocastle, a new ambitious European project dedicated to castles, manors and estates was launched last week, on the 2nd of October 2018 in Bucharest, Romania. At European level, many castles and manors have difficulties in maintaining or adapting themselves for the **future**. Innocastle aims to **improve policy instruments** governing this specific type of heritage in partner regions, through stimulating the exchange of knowhow between the five project partners.

Innocastle kicked off at Hanul lui Manuc in Bucharest, Romania, followed by a two-day study visit throughout Romania. A team of international experts and policy makers visited several manors in Ialomita, Prahova, Buzau and Dambovita counties to assess the situation in Romania and formulate advice and suggestions for improvement.

Romania has approximately **1000 castles and manors**, of which 10% are in an advanced state of deterioration, according to a study by the ARCHÉ Association in 2015. Castles and manors have an enormous potential to become drivers for innovation and tourism, but this will not happen by itself. **A shared vision, regional cooperation and political support is essential.**
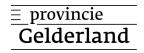
"The situation in Romania is critical, but it's not too late" - declared one of the international participants.

Kick-off conference
The lead partner, the National Institute of Heritage in Romania has organised this event. All partners presented the situation in each partner region, the policy instruments addressed in the project and their expectations from the project Innocastle.

- *"It is very important for us to stimulate cooperation between various stakeholders in Romania through this project, to create innovative policy instruments that are adapted to local opportunities."* - Raluca Barbulescu - National Institute of Heritage, Romania.
- *"We are interested in new visions on how to finance heritage and in ways to stimulate the financial autonomy of castles, manors and estates"* - Bert de Roo - University College Ghent, Belgium.
- *"We are interested in how we can better use castles, manors and estates as an asset in regional development for our region"* - Paul Thissen - Province of Gelderland, the Netherlands

- *"We wish to promote our region as a complete touristic destination. We have 332 castles in our region and wish to promote them as a whole"* - Silvia Hernandez Muriel - Regional Government of Extremadura, Spain.
- *"Being part of Innocastle is an opportunity to learn and share with European colleagues"* - Catherine Leonard - National Trust, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Study visit

The partners visited several castles, manors and estates between 3 and 4 October. A thematic seminar was organised at one of the sites, approaching the themes of **public-private partnerships** and **quality in restoration** - two themes of interest for the Romanian partner in designing the action plan to improve the addressed policy instrument, the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020, Investment Priority 5.1 - Conservation, protection, promotion and development of natural and cultural heritage.

The Royal Family in Romania

A representative of the Royal Family in Romania, lawyer Ioan-Luca Vlad, participated at the conference and the study visit. *"The Royal Family of Romania has a permanent interest to discover how these historic buildings can be put to better use, how they can be properly restored and protected. This project, which I am very happy to attend, helps me discover examples of knowhow and best practices from Romania and the rest of Europe."*

Conclusions

The study visit in Romania reinforced the premise that the historical castles, manors and estates should be viewed in relation to their local context and encouraged to act as catalysts for regional development. Some preliminary conclusions were made at the end of the study visit. An extended report will be published on the official website in the coming weeks.
- Cooperation at local and regional level, but also with the civil society, is necessary for the preservation and transformation of the rich collection of castles and manors in Romania. Cooperation should be stimulated and supported by public policies and legislative and financial instruments at national and European level.
- The involvement of local communities in conservation, transformation and exploitation of heritage is essential to ensure sustainable business models that support the local economy.
- Encouraging partnerships (private-private, public-private, etc.) may be the solution to the fragmentation that affects historical estates. Fragmentation, in many cases, hinders the process of transforming these estates into catalysts for rural or regional development.
- Approaching heritage castles, manors and estates from a landscape perspective and at network level is necessary to stimulate regional development
- Romania has a historical gap in looking at and appreciating this category of heritage, castles,, manors and estates - a consequence of the communist period. The importance of publicity campaigns to increase the awareness of these sites has been highlighted by several partners.

Innocastle - Innovating policy instruments for preservation, transformation and exploitation of heritage castles, manors and estates

European historic castles, manors and estates have the potential to become local catalysts for regional development and innovation. Innocastle prepares them for the future by stimulating resilient policies for conservation, transformation and exploitation. The consortium of partners is composed of: National Institute of Heritage in Romania (lead partner), University College Ghent in Belgium, Province of Gelderland in the Netherlands, Regional Government of Extremadura in Spain and the National Trust in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (knowledge partner). The project is financed by Interreg Europe, with a total budget of €1,120,335.00 (85% ERDF, 15% co-financing).