



Umbria

Development of an intangible cultural history asset to drive rural tourism

The St. Francis Way links cultural treasures and sites from the life of Francis of Assisi into a 550 km route. It runs from **LaVerna** (Tuscany) and from **Rome** (Lazio) to **Assisi** (Umbria).

We promote it as a **slow tourism** experience of **nature and culture**, connected to St. Francis' message of **respect for others**, including nature and animals.

St Francis Way – Via di Francesco



Innovative features:

- Community involvement – passion, engagement, creativity, ingenuity
- Bottom-up approach
- No expenditure of public funds
- Promotion of overlooked villages and cultural heritage sites
- Attracting visitors off the beaten path, fostering **sustainable slow tourism**
- Source of revenue and employment for **rural** and **mountain** communities

Main strategic actions:

- Define, map and signpost a single route
- Ensure visibility of the ownership / key role played by civil society
- Marketing Communications: multilingual maps, guidebooks and brochures; press tours; comarketing activities/events with publishers
- Monitor and analyse traffic
- Fundraising



Stakeholder involvement

On behalf of the Region, Sviluppumbria coordinated the interdisciplinary working group of stakeholders to develop the Way.

- Provide technical support to associations and accept field cooperation
- Arrange meetings with a high participation of tourism professionals and hoteliers, municipal administrators, civil and religious associations as well as interested citizens
- Focus on the experience and needs of the walker (listening, surveys, questionnaires, facebook)
- Foster the development of a form of sustainable tourism, able to benefit the communities
- Establish participatory governance of the route



Results

- From 2015 to 2017, increase of **35%** in number of hikers on the Way; **3x** increase in visitors from the USA, Netherlands, Germany and Austria
- **Community-building:** local associations and communities have received support and technical assistance, contributing to the personal and professional development of the people involved.
- Increased pride of communities for their cultural heritage.
- Via di Francesco won best European 'Destination of Sustainable Cultural Tourism' by the European Cultural Tourism Network and Europa Nostra (2018) and is listed as one of the "25 life-changing adventures for 2019" (*The Telegraph*, London)



Transfer - Learning

- Not based on a geographic feature, but on **identifying the intangible heritage asset** and then creating an itinerary to valorise it.
- Many steps and considerations are needed to build a tourism itinerary and it is a long process which must involve many contributors.
- The coordinator must have the **vision, will** and **resilience** to work with stakeholders and keep driving the project forward.
- The stakeholders and partners bring not only opinions and guidance but also **specific skills** (planning, infrastructure, marketing) needed to **implement** the project and to **manage, maintain and promote** it after it is “open for business”.

For more information:

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THANK YOU!

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2018 
**EUROPEAN YEAR
OF CULTURAL
HERITAGE**
#EuropeForCulture

