

An aerial photograph of a vibrant urban plaza. The ground is painted with large, overlapping geometric shapes in a rainbow of colors: red, orange, yellow, green, cyan, magenta, and pink. A network of thin black lines crisscrosses the plaza, creating a grid-like pattern. Numerous people are seen walking and standing throughout the space, providing a sense of scale and activity. The overall atmosphere is bright and modern.

**CPC**  
SERIES

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# **CULTURAL HERITAGE LEADING URBAN FUTURES**

## **Actions and Innovations from ROCK PROJECT**



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Regeneration and Optimization of Cultural heritage in creative and Knowledge cities

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Comune di Bologna

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# RÖCK



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The ROCK project sees historic city centres as laboratories to demonstrate how Cultural Heritage can be an engine of regeneration, sustainable development and economic growth. ROCK approach foresees the systemic and flexible application of a series of role-model practices in the testing sites of three Replicator cities, to turn historic city centres afflicted by physical decay, social conflicts and poor life quality into Creative and Sustainable Districts.

This book provides an overview of the project, extracting themes, material and final remarks from the Open Knowledge Week “Cultural Heritage Leading Urban Futures”, held on 27-30 October 2020. Over the past three years, ten ROCK cities – Athens, Bologna, Cluj-Napoca, Eindhoven, Lisbon, Liverpool, Lyon, Skopje, Turin, and Vilnius – together with service providers and knowledge brokers have tested and advanced numerous soft and hard tools, collaborative approaches aimed at shaping sustainable, heritage-led urban futures. This book shows their shared results, best practices and lessons learnt from interdisciplinary research, innovative action, dissemination of knowledge and creation of new synergies at European level.

**DISCLAIMER**

The sole responsibility for the content of this publication lies with the ROCK project and in no way reflects the views of the European Union.





Plazza Rossini, Bologna photo by Margherita Capilli

# Introduction

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ROCK– Regeneration and Optimisation of Cultural heritage in creative and Knowledge cities”–(grant agreement n° 730280) is a Horizon 2020 project, funded under the Work Programme 2016-2017 Climate action, environments, resource efficiency and raw materials, topic Cultural Heritage as a driver for sustainable growth (SC5-21) as part of the call Greening the Economy, third Horizon thematic pillar on Societal Challenge. Within its almost four years of activities, the ROCK project engaged 33 partners across 13 different European countries, ranging from institutions such as municipalities and universities, research centers, local associations, cities networks and technology providers. Bologna started the process, being the Municipality the project coordinator and the University the scientific guidance, thus strengthening an already proven collaboration.

Within this framework, the project’s field of investigation foresaw the release of CH from purely financial logics (e.g., support for heritage in terms of patronage on the one hand, the subordination of any action on heritage to an immediate economic advantage on the other) in order to insert it in broader economic and development processes: both social economy and increase in knowledge, creativity and overall quality of life.

ROCK project focused on historic city centres, intended as living laboratories where demonstrating how Cultural Heritage (CH) can become an engine of regeneration, sustainable development and economic growth, in line with the necessary climatic transition. ROCK project aimed at overcoming the idea of CH as an asset subject to accessory and isolated interventions and policies, only treated in its functional dimension with the objective to regain an investment with its reuse, but it can be the engine of an “adapting” reuse in which values are brought back to the entire community in its tangible and intangible dimensions. As part of

the complexity of cities, CH is dynamic and its inclusion in urban policies must consider its evolution in time and in parallel with the community producing and using it.

The ROCK project chose the city as a field of action and research, mainly because of the density of problems it poses in relation to the CH valorisation and conservation. More specifically, it has focused on historic European cities considered as a viable model and an alternative to the processes of metropolisation and gentrification of any urban reality. A model for a city of social inclusion, knowledge and creativity.

The project envisioned an innovative, collaborative and systemic approach to promote the effective regeneration and adaptive reuse in historic city centres by implementing a repertoire of successful CH-led regeneration initiatives, already tested in the Role-Model cities and inserted in the Replicator cities environment not as a mere reproduction but with a guided mentoring approach. A series of role-model practices were implemented in three testing sites in the cities of Bologna, Lisbon and Skopje, supporting the transformation of historic city centres afflicted by physical decay, social conflicts and poor life quality, into Creative and Sustainable Districts.

ROCK proposed a change of perspective in the development and reading of CH-led regeneration processes implying a new attitude in re-building community of practices and cultural ties.

The most important aspect of the transformation processes triggered by the ROCK project, is the ability to activate collective actions aimed at capturing in every act of urban modification a dynamic construction of CH for all. To be effective, the process implies that each action is based on social inclusiveness, universal accessibility and open knowledge. Indeed, the undertaken actions do not affect specific cultural realities, but they intercept and cross a large number of citizens, among specialists and non-specialists.

In this sense, the public spaces of the historical city centres represent a temporary instrument contributing to the mediation of differences, the creation of arenas of intercultural negotiation and dialogic co-creation, and the generation of a sense of belonging and care for the cities' common goods. At the same time, underused buildings became new cultural epicenters for the renewal of the local community memories. Neglected resources are renovated, and new services are developed in a collaborative effort among the local ecosystem of stakeholders, the institutions, the Universities and citizens themselves.

The main result of ROCK consisted in the development both of a methodology and of an operational framework (cultural, technological, managerial), valuable and effective in different urban realities. The

application of these two shared elements has started and will continue to facilitate the comparison and collaboration between the 10 ROCK cities without inhibiting the site-specificity of places and communities, and without imposing a unique and standardized interpretative and operational model. A balance has been sought on the one hand between the sharing of methods and values in a European perspective and, on the other, between the respect and enhancement of the specificities of places, attributing to the term “place” a broad interpretation that includes its physical, social, political, cultural and memorial structure.

This result was achieved thanks to the implementation of pilot actions, supported by specialized and innovative skills, which are not only able to intercept all the cultures of the city but also to redefine themselves by supporting processes of empowerment in a circular process. This generates a constant, mutual transfer of knowledge between specialized knowledge and ordinary “skills” of the “citizens”, i.e. every actor operating in the city, whether his presence is stable or temporary.

The implementation followed an action-research approach, tackling the daily and ordinary life of the city, strongly neglected by the design cultures in the recent decades in favor of more striking themes and of greater communicative effect.

12 The project activities started in January 2017 and ended in December 2020. The present book comes at the end of the project and intends to provide final reflections and an overview of the activities carried out over the years, without representing a detailed scientific or documentary account.

The first section of the book is aimed at the general presentation of the project. In the first part, the organizational and management efforts that allowed the development of a fruitful cooperation among all the involved partners and the opportunity to share knowledge, competences, skills and experiences are highlighted. The second part introduces the main theoretical and scientific premises of the research as well as the developed scientific and disciplinary results, described further in the volume, but mainly focuses on the innovative research-action-research methodology, that subverts the consequential logic typical of the modern design process. The research-action-research in ROCK, represents a dynamic way to create new paths of knowledge to rethink the evolution of historical centers and prepare them for future challenges. In this perspective, the upgrade achieved by the ROCK project involves bringing the theme of CH back to the heart of primary political choices, placing the issue of memories and cultural identities of communities at the foundation of every economic and social program. Therefore, ROCK is putting on the spot the cascading role of identifying key piloting actions having impacts on the entire society.

The second section is dedicated to the storytelling of the implementation of cities actions: a repertoire of successful heritage-led regeneration initiatives related to the 7 Role-Model cities (Lyon, Turin, Liverpool, Vilnius, Cluj, Athens, Eindhoven) that tested the replicability of their strategies in 3 Replicators cities (Lisbon, Skopje, Bologna). After the description of the methodological framework and the project strategy, a catalogue of ROCK Cities Actions resumes the most significant interventions to identify the enabling conditions, technologies and communication measures able to maximize the impacts. The project has involved more than a thousand people across knowledge creation, co-designing, co-construction and co-developing the future of CH in the cities. The impacts of this process include socio-economic outcomes in the rediscovering and reactivation of urban areas and their urban cultural heritage in previously neglected spaces, setting an important precedent in the new practices of citizen involvement and heritage valorization. In this perspective, the demonstration areas of the Replicator cities are transformed into experimental labs where a systemic transformation process is implemented and monitored to be eventually synthesized into three site-specific Integrated Management Plans (IMPs), aggregating shared principles, local strategies with site-specific CH-led regeneration tactics.

The third section deals with the outputs related to the three main domains of innovation: organizational innovation, technological innovation, social innovation. Thanks to ROCK, cities had the opportunity to adopt technological tools and to develop unique capabilities to harness their distinctive potential through an innovative mix of technology, citizens and community engagement, physical transformations, new uses and activities. The flexible implementation methodology, the variety of solutions and the multiple scenarios co-developed and tested within the project offer other cities in Europe replication possibilities to capitalize on local cultural potential through innovation, communities, entrepreneurship and digital technologies, all brought together in the open innovation ecosystem.

The third section includes an Innovation Portfolio displayed in tables, aimed at presenting ROCK tools and their added value for stakeholders and potential users.

During the ROCK Open Knowledge Week “Cultural Heritage Leading Urban Futures”, the final ROCK conference, a special room for displaying innovations was available: it was possible to visit the virtual booths of ROCK partners presenting technological solutions and discover relevant EU projects focusing on cultural heritage.

The conference, to whom the last contribution of section 3 is addressed, marked the closure of the ROCK project. It was held online on 27-30 October 2020, due to the pandemic Covid emergency that prevented

the possibility to organize events in presence. The conference was transformed into a virtual journey in which participants delved into innovative solutions that demonstrate how cultural heritage can be the driving force behind urban sustainability.

The book conclusions point out the role of CH in urban sustainability and the related topics, considered essential by ROCK to its fulfillment, such as Access, Sustainability and Innovative Partnerships. The contribution closes addressing climate change issues that are impacting on communities and their environment and impose future challenges on CH: another example on how societal and urban transformations require a global and interdisciplinary approach for facing future threats and CH may play a leading role in urban futures.