

Sustainable Destination Award Good Practice Story

Berguedà

Biennial of Romanesque Art Under The Eyes Of Picasso, in the Roman Churches of Berguedà.

Category: Culture & Communities

Preamble:

The Berguedà county, located in the north of Barcelona province in Catalonia, has one of the largest concentrations of Romanesque churches, hermitages and monasteries in south Europe. This density is due to its history in early middle ages, during the IXth, Xth and XIth centuries, when (as part of the Kingdom of the Franks and afterwards being part of the Catalan Counties) a large number of religious buildings were spread along the territory to set the Cristian population in a land won to the Muslim kingdoms.

Nowadays these buildings are far from the towns and cities, they do not have a daily life and so they have fallen into the oblivion of the population with the consequent physical decline. Over the last few decades these churches are visited only by some hikers, some fans of the history of art or architecture and some local communities that celebrate religious festivities annually.

The local governments (Bergueda Development Agency and Diputació de Barcelona) have been doing big efforts during the last 20 years to maintain, preserve and energize the dynamism of those Romanesque churches in Berguedà County. During the last 20 years, these churches are open to the public and so visitors have the chance to know about their history and architecture. However, nowadays visiting with a guide seems not enough and visitors are few.

The next step is to bring life back to the buildings and, as it's seen all over Europe, the best way to make it is helping the local community and their associations to use these buildings for different cultural activities such as concerts, art exhibitions, workshops, family activities...

Civitas Cultura is one of those local cultural assotiations which are developing activities in the area and, with the support and help of Bergueda Development Agency, has been working for the last 2 years to put those churches in the cultural agenda of Catalonia.

In 2019, as it's the year of Cultural Tourism in Catalonia, they have created a Festival called "Biennal de romànic" with the aim of attracting people all over the country to discover these jewels of Romanesque art.

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The Festival offers more than 100 activities for different kind of publics in 5 churches spread in the territory of Berguedà. Those activities are quite different and there is a range from concerts to painting and photography exhibitions, performances, workshops...

1. Issues faced

The main issue faced in the Berguedà churches is that, although we have a great and numerous jewels of the human civilization, these buildings have moved aside from the local population. Locals pass daily close to those churches but a lot of them never pay any attention or visit the buildings.

These medieval buildings are not used regularly to celebrate religious ceremonies either, because the towns have their own churches in the centre. Those Romanesque churches are spread in the countryside and so it is just once a year or twice that a mass or religious celebration takes place in them.

The strong determination of the local administrations and associations is to make the buildings stop being obsolete and promote activities that attract people (locals and visitors), taking in mind the importance of cultural development, responsible mobility, energy saving and access for people with reduced mobility.

In resume, we want to bring people to the heritage that we have the luck to have.

2. Methods / steps / tools used

The local communities, Civitas Cultura association and the Bergueda Development Agency are working to create a Sustainable cultural destination in a nature background. To do so there are several aspects to take into account:

- Community empowerment. The cultural associations, the citizens and the stakeholders, have to participate in the decisions-making process.
- The cultural heritage is open to various interpretations with multiple new means of communication in which individuals can add meaning and context to these interpretations. It's not just the local authorities competing for investment, human resources and number of visitors; as well it is providing high living standards, full employment and the catering for the needs of the communities.
- The common heritage is not domain of experts only, although their initial role in its restoration and interpretation is crucial. It is not just a given from generation to generation but a multifaceted process in which different actors play active parts.

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- Study the past, act today and influence tomorrow. "We want to differentiate ourselves from other magnificent Catalan Romanesque churches as the ones in Boi Valley. We want to make an interpretation of the Romanesque from the contemporary" says Toni Puig, Civitas Cultura.
- A challenge shared with passion because Berguedà has a top-class Romanesque heritage as Pablo Picasso discovered in 1906 when visiting the area and part of Romanesque painting style was incorporated to his art. The Biennial has been organized with an artisanal tone that overtakes memory commitment to reinvent the common future. A bi-annual event with the people of the region and throughout Catalonia: one of the great events of this summer and autumn.
- Better connection and green mobility. We are arranging the paths that connects the churches with the towns, the roads and the greenways that will link the county with Barcelona city. That gives hikers and bikers a way to follow the 200km from Barcelona to the Pyrenees using a long distance path (GR271). We are working to be a main destination for hikers and bikers.
- Promoting better knowledge and deeper understanding. We organize seminars to talk about the Romanesque art, their influences, our artists and our masters like Picasso.
- Managing some buildings (cultural heritage) trying to obtain more visitors to enjoy more memorable trips, allowing people to learn and enrich as the axis of the trip. Cultural Tourism within the canons of sustainability allows us to obtain multiple benefits for the community and the preservation of the intangible traditions and material heritage, thus we can group these benefits in three profiles: the economic, social benefits and environmental.
- Adopting an action plan to develop the county (taking into account the cultural heritage, the local community and the enterprises). We have created a Commission with ADB technicians, Town Hall members, the regional administrations and several advisors to decide the actions to develop and to find the resources to do it.

HERITAGE IS OURS. CULTURE IS COMMON !!!

3. Specific/measurable results, benefits and recognitions

The efforts have recently taken Berguedà to be recognized in different European awards:

- The work done in all the destination in 2017 by the **EDEN-European Destinations of Excellence Awards**, (https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/eden_en).

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- The effort to transmit this past and the revaluation of the cultural heritage was recognized by the **DSCT Destination Sustainable Cultural Tourism Awards** (https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/award-sustainable-cultural-tourism-destination-2018_es) in 2018.
- Berguedà County was added in 2018 in the 100 best destinations chosen by **Green Destinations**.
- Thus, together with the efforts of the administration to implement in the maximum number of companies to the recognition of **Biosphere Certification** (<https://www.biospheretourism.com/en>) brings Berguedà to be more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable in terms of tourism.

4. Lessons learned

Sustainable tourism helps to preserve the heritage as well as the history and traditions, which are vital to the society and its economy, and bring plenty of new opportunities for the local population.

Bring live culture to buildings that before were used as traditional visiting spaces. Bring the community to new stages to perform their cultural curiosity. Bring to the countryside exhibitions, groups and artists which, before, were just enjoyable in the big cities.

And the most important is achieving that local communities feel this heritage as part of themselves, of their community and their territory.

5. Specific/additional (web) references

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c62h5I9OvwA>

<https://www.civitascultura.org/>