

PRESS RELEASE

10 European Pilot Villages selected to create a transnational CHARMING rural route across Europe

Ten villages across **six** European countries (Finland, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Belgium) have been selected to become **CHARM Pilot Villages**. These pilots are set to become the first villages being part of the CHARM European transnational route, aimed at enhancing their inherent cultural and rural identity while developing sustainable and innovative tourism experiences.

Pilot selection began on the second semester of 2019. Afterwards, the tourism situation of each pilot was thoroughly analysed, as well as their offer in tourism activities and experiences, which was a great starting point to begin with the execution and development of the project.

A rigorous selection was applied to select **the villages** to participate in the creation of a transnational route focused on the promotion and preservation of these **rural areas with common identity features**. These features include the idea of a **Charming Village**, a destination (and its surroundings) that is perceived as charming by visitors because of the strength, coherence and consistency of its identity or personality linked to history, traditions, cuisine, architectural elements and other cultural and natural assets. In addition, another element that distinguishes a charming village is the community and citizens who are proud of their heritage as well as their current lifestyle.

Each pilot village will benefit from i) The expertise of the CHARM project partners in tourism product development and governance, ii) Participating to the workshops and trainings to apply the common CHARM methodology, iii) Developing new products for national and international markets, iv) Receiving new visual content creation, storytelling and supporting services v) Applying new technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) in their tourism products, and vi) being part of a cross-selling platform to market Europe as an integral destination for rural and cultural tourism.

Country/Region	Pilot Villages
Finland	Mathildedal
Finland	Oravi
Germany	Friedrichstadt
Germany	Seiffen
Italy	Borgo della Cunziria

Portugal	Monsaraz
Portugal	Sortelha
Spain/Catalonia	Taüll
Spain/Catalonia	Rupit
Belgium	Burg - Reuland

Each pilot village will participate in a **capacity building - training session**, which are a crucial phase of the pilot villages participating process in order to define and build a common vision and identity for the European Charming villages. Thus, the aim of these Training Sessions is to mobilize to action and generate a compromise between the local public authorities and the local relevant stakeholders (involved directly or indirectly in tourism) in order to build an innovative value chain (private-public partnership) being able to deliver new tourism experiences in the Charming Villages.

As of yet, **six of the ten training sessions have been held**, including those for the pilot villages from Finland, Germany and Spain. These sessions, being delivered by professionals on experiential tourism product development, aim at supporting and inspiring the diverse public and private entities of each pilot, and how they can carry out the conceptualization and the creation of a product that represents its essence as a charming village. Out from these training sessions, the pilots aim to create a total of 70 new tourism products and engage more than 110 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) across the 6 CHARM countries, thus contributing to local development and job creation.

More information on the CHARM project is available at www.charmingvillages.eu

THE CHARM PROJECT

“**CHARM: Immersive experiences in European Charming Villages**” is a project co-financed by the COSME Programme of the European Commission, led by the Agència Catalana de Turisme (Catalan Tourist Board) in cooperation with 6 partners coming from 6 different European countries representing Destination Marketing Organisations (DMO), Destination Management Companies (DMCs), Research Centres, Software developers and a European network. The project started on March 15th, 2019 and will last until March 2021.

CHARM aims at boosting tourism flows towards rural areas having low tourism density, through the creation of innovative, responsible and sustainable tourism products, while preserving and promoting their historical and traditional heritage, their architecture and landscapes through innovative experiences. The incorporation of technologies from the cultural and creative industries, such as augmented reality, will add value to the tourism product by creating immersive experiences for visitors.