

ŠIBENIK'S OLD TOWN REGENERATIVE TOURISM STRATEGY 2030



ŠIBENIK IS A
LIGHTHOUSE



THE ŠIBENIK TOURIST BOARD



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MANIFESTO

CHALLENGE: The global phenomenon of 'overtourism' is destroying the local quality of life and resources/attractions upon which the destinations are based.

POLITICAL MESSAGE: 'Sustainable tourism is no more an option, it is a must.'

REGENERATION RENAISSANCE: Even sustainability - a concept that is focused on using less resources and doing less damage - is no longer enough. Regeneration is the next step.

REGENERATIVE TOURISM (RT): The regenerative tourism approach acts in service of the wider systems in which it operates. It is about giving back more than we take towards replenishing the planet so that all living beings can flourish.

REGENERATIVE TRAVEL TRENDS: Post-pandemic tourists wish to travel even more sustainably and get annoyed if their travel destination stops them from doing so. They aspire to leave the places they visit better than when they arrived and to have experiences that are representative of the local culture.

OUR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: The Place DNA® framework was used to access visitor and local stakeholders perspectives. This approach helped us creatively decipher the destination's 'genetic code' or key ingredients that make a place unique. The strategy is strongly driven by a co-creative approach.





ŠIBENIK VISITOR PERSPECTIVE: The old city of Šibenik is an undiscovered jewel on the Adriatic coast, which hasn't yet been spoiled by overtourism. As captured by one visitor: 'Please keep your local identity and do not become like Split or Barcelona. We are getting away from big commercial cities. Do not become one'.

LOCAL PERSPECTIVE: Tourism can be sustainable only if it enhances the local quality of life. As one local aptly put during our co-creative workshop in 2019: *'The city shouldn't only live for tourism, but rather tourism should live in harmony with the city. When we live well, tourists will come to enjoy the city with us.'*

OUR VISION: For Šibenik's old town to become the first destination in Croatia focused on building a regenerative tourism future by 2030.

THE CONCEPT: Šibenik old town is a Lighthouse for Regenerative Tourism in Croatia. The lighthouse is a symbol of sanctuary, strength, resilience and safe arrival.

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE: 'Tourism is Localism.'

THE TWO KEY BRAND STORIES

**Šibenik is a Lighthouse for:
Nature and Regeneration**

Step 1 | From the Field to the Table

Growing and including local and organic food into Šibenik's hospitality supply chain by fostering a regional farm cluster and community supported agriculture.

Step 2 | From the Krka River to the Old City Drinking Fountains

To bring more awareness to the historical and current question of precious water, by restoring public drinking fountains and encouraging people to drink water from these fountains through a branded reusable water bottle campaign.

Šibenik is a Lighthouse for: Culture, Art and Innovation

Step 3 | from the Stage to the Streets

To extend the current concept of 'City is a Stage' to reach beyond the fortresses so that the old town can live and buzz all year long. This can be achieved through a public boost to the local art scene, international cultural projects and creative entrepreneurs.

Step 4 | Inspiring Innovation

To put the city on the world map more boldly by building up on the cultural and material heritage of the local pioneering spirit that left a great legacy in the realms of early technologies, inventions and botanical science.

THE ŠIBENIK LIGHTHOUSE LABEL

We recommend implementing a 'Šibenik is a Lighthouse' certification system for local businesses, places, tours or people that participate in regenerative practices.



FROM SUSTAINABILITY TO THE REGENERATION RENAISSANCE

The world is ripe for transformation. The alarming concerns over global climate change, public health issues, political instability and numerous socio-economic crises give us a clear impetus. While the sustainable development of tourism has been an important part of political and economic considerations for some time, it is the emergence of the global COVID pandemic that has made sustainability 'a must' at all levels of public decision-making. The issues of pre-pandemic overtourism are finally being seriously considered. The physical, visual and noise pollution of tourist crowds have reached such high levels in popular destinations (especially in urban centres) to the point that dissatisfied local populations have been driven to organise themselves in various organisations to protest against mass tourism developments. The Network of Southern European Cities against tourism (SET) (1) and various national organisations such as the Assembly of Neighbourhoods for Sustainable Tourism (ABTS) (2) are some notable examples.

#BUILDBACKBETTER

The 2020 UNWTO call for 'one planetary vision' towards a responsible recovery of the tourism sector, states that: 'sustainable tourism is no more an option, it is a must' (3).

IT'S TIME TO CHANGE

92% of consumers are aiming to live more sustainably

92% of consumers say that all businesses should be sustainable

90% of consumers say that brands and companies are responsible for taking care of people and the planet (4).

We need to go beyond sustainability across all sectors. Due to its primary focus on using less resources, sustainability is now considered to be a 'slower way to die'. The 2018 Innovation Group report - "The New Sustainability: Regeneration" (5) - echoes that 'doing less harm is no longer enough. The future of sustainability is regeneration: replenishing and restoring what we have lost and building economies and communities that thrive, while allowing the planet to thrive too'. The aspiration is to leave the planet better for future generations. Broader questions that address the quality of life and thriving communities have become key pillars for seeing the world and organising our economies and societies. A thriving community is one that feels alive, engaged, resilient, caring, and nurturing (6).

Such a worldview is considered to be inherent to the emerging regenerative renaissance.



Just as the humanist renaissance movement offered new moral, cultural, and civic values some 600 years ago, the current Regenerative renaissance is asking us to rethink systems, reimagine production and consumption, supply chains, re-evaluate how we do business and how we live. For John Elkington, an authority on sustainable development (who coined the term 'triple bottom line'), the goal of sustainability is to *'regenerate economies, societies and the biosphere'* (7).

As a part of this broader regeneration movement, regenerative tourism aligns the whole sector towards serving life and sustaining the planet so that all beings can flourish. Regenerative tourism's purpose, then, is to act in service of the wider systems in which it operates. Unfortunately, many sustainable tourism initiatives tend to serve the tourism industry rather than its host communities and places. Tourism is regenerative when it regenerates more than just itself. Its commitment, then, needs to be guided towards regenerating the places and communities in which it operates,

and to build the capacity of support systems to evolve and produce net positive impact. While sustainability measures are a key component of regeneration, this approach goes further than sustainable tourism.

Anna Pollock speaks of regenerative tourism as the natural maturation of sustainability for which we need a whole mindset shift. For businesses to move from 'business as usual', to doing less harm, and eventually becoming a force for good and regeneration, we require a *'change in seeing, awareness and consciousness that Einstein said would be necessary if we were to generate any effective transformative change'* (8). With such a perspective shift, regenerative tourism becomes a space where many tourism and non-tourism professionals work together to deliver new kinds of opportunities, experiences, collaborations and innovations in pursuit of a regenerative future. In other words, regenerative tourism is about giving back more than we take. It's about understanding that soil, water and all living beings are a part of us and therefore our wellbeing.

The regenerative paradigm brings nature and communities at the decision-making table as equal partners to create a flourishing local economy.

At the symposium 'Travel to Tomorrow' held in Belgium in 2019, Daniel Wahl (an expert on designing regenerative cultures) draws parallels between the future of tourism and of humanity to explore how they interrelate. In doing so, he calls upon the urgent transformation of tourism to become a catalyst for regeneration. In the face of ecosystem destruction and climate change that is creating havoc on our planet, he goes as far as to claim: *'It seems that possibly the only industry with enough global reach and local trans-sectoral impact and power of influence to effect such an immense transition in a catalytic way is tourism'* (9).

Global political forces are also aligning to this end. Since the UN COP 26 summit in 2021, over 500 tourism industry entities signed the Glasgow Declaration that aims to cut global tourism emissions by at least a half over the next decade and reach Net Zero emissions as soon as possible before 2050 (10). Further endorsing the imperative for sustainable tourism, all the tourism ministers gathered at the 2021 G20 meeting in Italy developed a document called: 'Recommendations for the Transition to a Green Travel and Tourism Economy' (11). The sustainable tourism shift also makes business sense for the broader economy. According to conservative estimates, a new sustainable economy centred on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals could be worth \$12 trillion and could create 380 million jobs (12).

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL TRENDS

The world's leading travel booking website - Booking.com - conducted research in 2021 that gathered insights from more than 29,000 travellers across 32 countries. The research results suggest that the pandemic was the tipping point for travellers to finally commit to their own sustainable journey, with 72% of global travellers believing people have to act now to save the planet for future generations. To this end, 83% of global travellers think that sustainable travel is vital, with 61% saying the pandemic has motivated them to travel more sustainably in the future (13).

Almost half of global travellers (49%) still believe that there aren't enough sustainable travel options available in 2021, with 53% admitting that they get annoyed if their travel destination stops them from being sustainable (14).

In 2022, Booking.com's fresh research showed the continuous increase in travellers' demand for sustainable choices, with 71% of them saying that they want to travel more sustainably over the coming 12 months, which is a 10% increase from the 2021 data. Half of all respondents cited that recent news about climate change has influenced them to make more sustainable travel choices (15).

REGENERATION IN ACTION: BOOKING.COM RESEARCH

59% of travellers say they want to leave the places they visit better than when they arrived.

66% want to have experiences that are representative of the local culture (16).

In fact, more than a quarter say that they actively familiarise themselves with the local cultural values and traditions at their travel destination before their trips. One in four are willing to pay more for travel activities to ensure that they are giving back to local communities. Despite the appetite to give back and connect during their travels, 34% indicate that they don't know how or where to find activities or tours that ensure they are having a positive impact on the local community.

There is also good news for addressing tourism seasonality as 33% of tourists choose to travel outside of peak seasons and 27% choose to go to less popular travel destinations. Similarly, recent research by the European Commission conducted in 27 EU countries shows that 82% of EU citizens are ready to change their travel habits in a more sustainable direction (17). Furthermore, 55% of EU citizens prefer eating local produce; 48% wish to reduce their waste; 42% to travel out of season and 41% to travel to lesser known destinations. Over a third are prepared to pay more for the protection of the environment and to benefit of the local community they visit (18).



SHIFTING GLOBAL POPULATION TRENDS

In 2022, the global human population reached 7.9 billion. According to UN projections, by 2030 we are expected to grow by 10% and by 2057 to reach 10 billion people. Along with this global growth, the ageing population is also increasing rapidly. In 2020, there were around 727 million people aged over 65 and by 2050 it is expected to double to over 1.5 billion (19). In this context, 'Tourism For All' is also becoming a new industrial norm whereby the tourism industry needs to become socially-inclusive, universally-designed and catered to people with a wide range of accessibility needs (20).

TOURISM BUILT FOR ALL

The potential market of people with disabilities in the EU is more than 80 million people (130 million if we add senior citizens and accompanying persons)

70% of people with disabilities in the EU have financial and physical capabilities to travel.

The accessible tourism market is worth €150 billion in Europe alone (21).

The increasing digitisation of labour that blurs the boundaries between work and leisure gives many people flexible lifestyles. This is already significantly impacting tourism in terms of extended seasons due to flexible home office arrangements and 'workations' (working vacations). Concepts such as the sharing economy and community living are on the rise, with a growing demand for shared living, learning and working spaces. As technology enables remote working and flexible working hours, destinations that offer spaces where work and leisure can be combined (such as co-working spaces) will become increasingly attractive. Market segmentation will be more based on lifestyles, rather than demographics, as the boundaries between gender, race and ethnicity will continue to blur. In this context, the phenomenon of digital nomads is on the rise, and Croatia has been quick to recognise the trend. By offering special one-year residence permits, Croatia is becoming a popular destination for digital nomads. Being long-stayers who come in off-peak seasons, digital nomads represent an ideal market for boosting local life (22).



The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting global stay-at-home policies has also made people more aware of the precious freedom to travel. In 2021, when more and more countries reopened their borders to eager tourists, a trendy new phrase emerged on social media dubbed as 'revenge travel'. The term has been used to describe trips as varied as family reunions, big splurge holidays and re-visits to favourite places. While the term 'revenge' has more of a negative connotation, the idea of 'revenge travel' seems to be more about expressing the love for travel (24). Yet, this love for travel has the power to continue the pre-pandemic trend of overtourism, which forces many destinations to seriously rethink how to manage tourist flows. This strategic vision represents such an important pivot so that Šibenik can also move towards a more conscious and sustainable direction.

There will be a billion digital nomads by 2035. (23)

CROATIAN TOURISM IN NUMBERS

Being on the continuous rise, tourism is the most important economic sector in Croatia as it holds the overall economic foundation of the country. In 2009, the tourism sector represented 14% of the GDP and by 2019 it had grown to 19.5% (25). According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), international data shows that this ratio is even greater. Using a consistent methodology to assess 28 European countries, in 2019 the WTTC revealed that Croatia was on the top of the list with 25% of its GDP deriving from tourism, followed by Greece (20,3%); Portugal (17,1 %); Malta (15,8%); Spain (14,1%), Cyprus (13,8%), Italy (13,1%) and Austria (11,8%) (26).

Being a small country with less than four million people, Croatia receives an enormous annual influx of international tourists (27).

In 2019, the last pre-pandemic year, there were almost 20 million tourist arrivals with over 91 million nights, whereby international tourists made 89% of the overall arrivals and 92% of tourism nights. These numbers have continued to rise since 2009, at an average annual growth rate of 5,9% (domestic tourists by 3,3% and internationals by 6,4%). In 2009, the total national income from tourism was over 7 million euros and it grew to over 10 million in 2019. Also in 2019, Germany, Slovenia, Austria, Italy and Poland represented the most dominant international tourist markets respectively. Geographically, most of the arrivals and nights still predominate on the Adriatic coast, which hosted 96% of all tourism nights in 2009, and almost 95% in 2019 (28).

CROATIAN TOURISM IS STILL BOOMING

In 2021 (still a pandemic year), international arrivals reached 67% of 2019 numbers and 77% of tourism nights. In 2022, they are expected to go back to 90% of the peak 2019 numbers (29).

ŠIBENIK'S TOURISM IN NUMBERS

In 2021, Šibenik also reflected the broader Croatian trend towards a fast, post-pandemic tourism recovery. Its huge tourism growth for the last 10 years is clearly illustrated in the fact that the number of private tourism accommodation units available in the city of Šibenik grew from 51 in 2011 to 778 in 2018, counting 2748 beds, plus the beds from the recently opened city hotels that included: Life Palace, King Krešimir, Bellevue, D-resort and Armerun Heritage Hotel (around 350 bed capacity).

Furthermore, domestic tourists made up 20% of this figure with 56.650 arrivals and 224.523 nights in 2019, which was quickly picked up in 2021 with 44.912 arrivals and 186.259 nights despite the pandemic (30). In 2019, there were 324.699 registered tourists along with 1.397.760 nights, and in 2021 there were 189.682 tourists with 945.562 nights. The pandemic has influenced the increase of the average stay from 4.3 days in 2019 to 5.4 days in 2021. The average stay extension is good news as it shows that Šibenik has more to offer (31).





RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE: 'TOURISM IS LOCALISM'

The Šibenik Old Town Tourism Strategy 2030 is a co-created vision combining local, tourist and expert perspectives. In the regenerative tourism paradigm, we know that tourism is not a one-way street. Our guiding principle is 'Tourism is Localism' because authentic destinations only thrive when locals do and destination strategies tend to work long-term if the locals can resonate with them. Successful destinations must be equally desirable places to live for the locals that inhabit them.

"The city doesn't only live for tourism, but rather tourism lives in harmony with the city. We live well and tourists come to enjoy the city with us."

This strategic vision was fully informed by the perspectives of key stakeholders: the locals and travellers. That is why our research methodology took both the tourist and local perspectives into equal account. Unsurprisingly, their visions were aligned because everybody wants to visit a lively city where the locals enjoy a high quality of life.

To harvest these insights, we followed the Place DNA® methodological framework invented by Destination Think, which is a creative agency specialising in tourism strategy and marketing. One of their former associates - Marthe Nordahl - was engaged in the development of our research process. Destination Think stands on the forefront of progressive tourism strategies around the world and they received the 'Global Destination Sustainability Index Innovation' award for the Copenhagen tourism strategy ('Wonderful Copenhagen: Tourism for Good') in 2018. This Place DNA® framework helped us to answer the 'why?' questions. Why would someone live in city X or visit region Y?

This reveals a place's identity and purpose; the attributes that define it, the things that make it tick (or not) and the way it operates from the inside. Place DNA® consists of a set of variables that include biography, history, geography, a particular attitude of the people, unique inventions or traditions, an aesthetic or visual quality, and more. A place's core identity is at the centre of all the experiences and stories it generates (32).

The advantage of this DNA® framework is that it significantly reduces the marketing gap between projected and perceived tourism images, expectations and experiences. Sourced from a deep sense of place held by locals, it gives an authentic 'vibration and feeling' that resonates coherently in all aspects of the place. As locals identify with the 'genetic code' of their place DNA® that is consistently communicated across all channels, an authentic brand comes to life rather than an artificially imposed one created solely for tourists. In other words, this DNA®-based branding reflects positive emotional and material elements with which locals identify and tourists can feel. As a result, the destination develops a genuinely positive reputation.

"Reputation is about sharing your identity instead of pretending you're something else. In other words, it's your brand...a brand as an organic, living thing: the sum of all stories told. Stories come from the experiences that residents, visitors, and businesses have about your place. Everyone has a role to play." (33)

There were a range of different methods used to identify the Place DNA® of Šibenik's old town. The research process began in the late summer of 2019 by approaching visitors and locals on the street that were passing by at random and then interviewing them through the 'HarvesThink' method. To collect these insights, Dr. Irena Ateljevic set up a flipchart research station next to the frequently visited St. Jacob's Cathedral and Azimut cafe. The location is generally used to enter the city and was therefore perfect to capture the main tourist flows as well as locals that love to sit in the Azimut cafe. Interviewees were asked to stop by the flipchart to discuss and write down their experiences around Šibenik's key challenges and highlights as a place to live and visit. The flipchart was also used to draw attention and inspire reflections upon statements previously collected. In doing so, a 'rich harvest' of research data was obtained. In addition to harvesting first-hand material, social media and online platforms (travel blogs, Trip Advisor, the Šibenik tourism website) were also analysed to get fuller insights and statements from visitors.

The research continued after the summer months in autumn and winter of 2019 through individual in-depth interviews with many residents who live and work in the old city. We also conducted an open survey through the popular ŠibenikIn media platform by anonymously asking local residents the following three questions:

1. *'If Šibenik was a person, how would you describe them?'*
2. *'What would Croatia be missing if there was no Šibenik?'*
3. *'What do you see as the biggest opportunity for Šibenik?'*

These carefully designed questions had the power of identifying emotional and material characteristics with which locals take pride and express their attachment to the place. By posing these questions, we could access that 'deep genetic code' of the city's Place DNA®. The first 'personification' question was particularly effective as it tapped into their poetic and subliminal affections. We focused on the positive aspects of Šibenik rather than its problems, in order to avoid the facilitation of complaining culture. The readers sent their comments and answers in response to these intriguing questions, which will be explored in the next section. Finally, a co-creative workshop was organised in the winter of 2019/2020, to gather all key stakeholders from public, private and civic sectors with a high attendance of 38 people. The workshop was very successful as most participants were fully engaged in visioning the future of the old city of Šibenik.

The workshop began with an overview of all research conducted up until that point, followed by the same set of questions asked through the SibenikIn website.

Co-creators firstly wrote their own answers on individual sticky notes and then in small groups they discussed their answers and grouped them into coherent messages, which then each group presented to the rest. This kind of engaging interaction is known as the 'World Cafe method'. After that, the following key question was posed:

How do you imagine the old city of Šibenik to look in 2030 if it were a place where you fully enjoy living and working in and where visitors would enjoy and contribute to the life of the city?



The participants were asked to 'time travel' into the future and tap into their emotions to unearth deeper motivations, personal dreams, affections and visions. The participants were asked to close their eyes and imagine their ideal old city in 2030 through all their five senses. This 'dreaming method' was well received and participants responded enthusiastically with a plethora of imaginative ideas and visions. The co-creators wrote down their individual visions, which they then discussed in their group, integrated into a coherent story, and presented to the rest of the participants. To concretise the visions, the following question was set:

'What do we need to do for the city to become as you imagined?'

For this part, participants provided certain measures and steps necessary to jointly create a sustainable future of the old city.

The overall response to the workshop was so positive that all participants agreed to be part of an email group, which would continue facilitating this high energy of co-creation. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic hit a month later and everything was put on hold. Initially, the pandemic appeared to be a total disaster for the tourism sector. But on the bright side it provided an even greater impetus for creating a strategic direction for the city's sustainable (tourism) future.



The summer of 2021 showed a fast recovery of the tourism sector (despite pandemic measures) and therefore interest in the sustainable tourism strategy for the old city of Šibenik was renewed. The first draft of the strategy was presented to local stakeholders in April 2022 and the official strategy was launched in June 2022.

KEY FINDINGS: VISITOR & LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

VISITOR FEEDBACK

All tourists interviewed shared a strong sentiment that the old city of Šibenik felt like an undiscovered jewel on the Adriatic coast which hasn't been spoiled by overtourism like other coastal cities such as Split or Zadar. As summed up by an international visitor: *'Please keep your local identity and do not become like Split or Barcelona. We are getting away from big commercial cities. Do not become one.'* Another visitor echoed this fear of overtourism: *'Do not come to the point where locals hate tourists.'*

The qualities that tourists largely praised were related to the intimacy and authenticity of the old town as there were still a lot of traditional restaurants; cute historic streets and admirably well preserved architecture; the buzz of local people who seemed to be living in the old city and socialising in charming cafés, and very few tourist shops selling cheap souvenirs. On a more critical note, they did complain about the disproportionately large number of ATM machines around the old town and how this aspect significantly reduced the charm of the streets and spoiled the overall visual aesthetics of the city's historical architecture. They also noticed many abandoned spaces in the old town that they felt could be revived through more cultural content and artwork. Tourists noticed this to be a source of untapped potential as these empty spaces hadn't been turned into unattractive tourist shops.

Overall, the recurring theme voiced by visitors was the desire to maintain the local identity intact in order to avoid becoming a *'faceless, impersonal tourism business.'* As another tourist declared:

'This is such a small old city with such huge cultural heritage. Please do not spoil it! We want to see local people happy and proud of their place.'

Some also suggested how a contemporary art gallery with permanent exhibitions as well as various interactive events would lift the town's cultural tourism appeal to another level. Also, as the city is known for its international children's festival, domestic tourists in particular would like to see more activities and content curated for children beyond the festival season.

Some tourists also praised the boutique festivals and artistic cultural events at St. Michael's fortress, but would like to see more of them happening on the streets and outside the main season. In general, they agreed that street life could be enriched through more live music in the green areas and in Šibenik's main park. They also wished for better street food options and small delicatessens with local finger food such as sardines, cheese, good bread, wine and so on. Generally, many wanted to experience more locally authentic food and complained that the average food in local restaurants was quite generic. In fact, this was one of the biggest pain points expressed by visitors, which confirmed the earlier described global market trends.

Another recurring complaint was the difficulty of parking near old city accommodation but that problem has been partially resolved by the recently built garage underneath the main 'Poljana' square. Additionally, tourists did notice physical accessibility problems to the old town (especially for those with suitcases, baby trolleys, or wheelchairs) and highlighted that this aspect needs improvement. They also suggested that it would be great to have a small 'hop-on-hop-off' boat, which would cover all the main points around the Šibenik bay - from the Banj beach area (where people can also park their cars) to the old town (by the cathedral), Mandalina, Minerska Bay, the St. Ante channel walking route, St. Nicholas' Fortress and Martinska Bay. Overall, they wished to see greater mobility around the city in terms of public transport via buses and boats. They suggested implementing a small and regular electric bus that circulated around the key points of the old city.

The demand for more sustainable tourism practices based on responsible waste management, locally-sourced food, the reduction of plastic, alternative sources of energy and public transport was strongly expressed.

Some people also suggested that Šibenik could follow the example of Venice's commitment to be plastic-free by 2030. On the whole, Šibenik's visitors expressed the desire to see greener travel awareness, practices, and behaviours. Online commentary also echoed our findings that Šibenik was still a charming and unspoiled destination:

'Strolling through the narrow streets, surrounded by old stone houses, I had the impression of travelling back in time. Šibenik is a place that is full of atmosphere, authenticity and magic. Still a bit unexplored and not destroyed by mass tourism' (34).



LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

This section integrates all local insights collected from our HarvestThink street method, the ŠibenikIN survey, as well as the local stakeholder workshops and individual interviews. Most significantly, many of the insights noticed by visitors were reinforced by locals. They also found Šibenik to be relatively unspoiled by tourism, which puts it at an important crossroad particularly as this industry represents the city's key economic sector. They showed great concern about the threat of overtourism that can seriously degrade the local city life. They complained that there are already too many restaurant and café terraces taking over the public squares and streets, especially expressing distaste for the unattractive chairs, tables and signage. Locals asked for clear regulation or guidelines of all promotional signage and their design aesthetics. Similarly, like tourists cited earlier, locals saw great potential in abandoned city spaces, which beg to be revived with art, hosting workshops, boutiques selling local products and so on.

The issue of imported produce and goods (such as souvenirs) was also clearly noticed as one local person stated: 'Everything is imported, we don't produce anything and we only sell tourists back their own things'. They also highlighted the problems of physical accessibility for people in wheelchairs, with baby trolleys and suitcases.

When asked to personify the city, local residents gave some powerful answers as illustrated here:

'Like Arsen Dedić, like a rock with a soul'

'A dignified and talented artist who creates eternal beauty but unable to manage his own talents. He needs to remember his own power and use it with full sovereignty.'

'Forgotten for a while but it is better that way because now it will be different and better than others.'

'Simultaneously likes to hide and show itself.'

'A hero born from stone from which he built fortresses and islands.'

'A rough man who misses a woman and her tenderness.'

These statements provided critical input for identifying Šibenik's DNA and its cultural character. This subsequently informed our lighthouse metaphor to be expanded upon later, which is a fitting symbol of fortitude, protection, solitude, and resilience.

Participants seemed to agree that the city had both positive and negative traits of a middle-aged man such as being:



*'Stubborn, rude, and heavy; prone to gossip and irony; arrogant, rude, envious and cynical; confident and proud; frowning and wrinkly; somewhat lonely; raw, firm and slightly rough; traditional and averse to change; in conflict with oneself; lazy **and simultaneously:** unique and beautiful; creative; full of integrity; a handsome intelligent individual with rich knowledge and culture; seductive and beautiful; mysterious and charismatic; calm and shy; positive and energetic; pleasant company; romantic, poetic, intimate and warm; elegant and charming; full of love and sincerity; open and worldly; sovereign and ready for challenges.'*

The dynamic answers continued in response to the subsequent question: **'What would Croatia lack if there was no Šibenik?'** The selected answers follow:

'What would the queen lose if they took away her crown?'

'It's heart and soul.'

'A significant part of history and cultural heritage under UNESCO protection, the Mediterranean as it once was (smartly preserved and not crowded); a second chance for true tourism, an alternative to overly commercialised cities, an original micro destination, a rest between Split and Zadar, the only boutique destination from Rijeka to Dubrovnik'

'An urban stage for local tales told through the creative arts'

'A part of its identity, the unique character of the local people and their dialect, song and music, the joint spirit of the fishermen and peasants, beautiful women, sport, gastronomy, and festivals.'

Finally, many interesting suggestions and visions emerged to answer the question about what represents the biggest opportunities for Šibenik including:

‘Local awareness of Šibenik’s potential and the danger if it goes in the wrong direction.’

‘The city still has time and developing it in a sustainable direction in terms of culture, entrepreneurship and planning is still possible - it is unspoiled’.

‘A small town with a lot of stories’.

‘Slow city, slow tourism.’

‘Authentic, undiscovered, not commercialised; an organised private sector; changing consciousness of the local population; not materialistic, intangible capital; young people who want something different; networking, partnership, collaboration, innovation, creative products and services; still big areas of preserved nature; boutique hotels with local supplies and offers; a return to traditional and local cuisine; greater interaction with visitors.’



For the final part of the co-creative workshop, we employed the 'dreaming process' to learn about how local stakeholders imagined their ideal description of Šibenik in 2030. They pictured a city that is full of life all year round filled with happenings for kids and adults, artistic and cultural engagement, life-long learning, festivals, and galleries. As one participant described: *'full of exciting life in winter and summer.'* They imagined lots of charming shops with beautifully arranged windows selling locally-made artisanal products, gifts and souvenirs, bookshops, special crafts and traditional trade shops; abandoned city spaces given artists and cultural creatives; well-designed restaurants and cafes built with natural materials used in interiors and exteriors that match the old town aesthetic; small restaurants with local and traditional gastronomy; bakeries with healthy snacks; street seafood that is available at different corners of the old town; caper plants growing through the stones of the city, and finally a regular organic produce market. There would also be an efficient composting facility for the collection of food waste from personal households and restaurants.

The old town would be like a big living room for local residents where gardens and balconies would be full of plants; everyone would keep their outdoor areas tidy; there would be benches where older people could sit, play cards and tell their stories; children would play outside and run around freely; the 'tiramole' tradition would be protected (hanging laundry publicly);

all the streets would be clean and fully illuminated with traditional street light; the building facades would be restored; here would be edible and beautifully scented herbal gardens around which storytelling points and tours would be organised; there would be specifically designed 'communication zones' where locals and visitors could meet and talk; and there would be many street performances and music. Young people would be incentivised to return to the city and there would be many international students and artists coming to study and visit.

There would be a lot of community capacity-building and educational opportunities for adults and children about the culture of living, local history, cultural heritage conservation, ecology and permaculture, social entrepreneurship; dance workshops; more children's workshops and programmes (like during the children's festival); intentional meetings between older people and children would be organised to facilitate intergenerational interactions and there would be physical accessibility modifications to enable greater mobility for disabled and aged people.

Such busy community life would be organised in the fortress facilities, on the streets, and in city spaces. Tourists would then become a nice addition to the good life of the city, rather than a stressful source of income concentrated in the peak months of summer.

Visitors would come throughout the whole year because the city would be full of life and cultural happenings. They would participate in educational and creative workshops together with local people (such as artisanal work or traditional cooking) and in doing so become 'temporary locals'. As expressed by one of the local stakeholders in the workshop:

'The city shouldn't only live for tourism, but rather tourism should live in harmony with the city. When we live well, tourists come to enjoy the city with us.'

Regarding the tourism business sector, participants imagined that all tourism stakeholders would recognise the importance of mutual dependency rather than competition so they would work in a more collaborative spirit. The public sector would be fully in tune with the community's needs and would facilitate civic-public-private networks and initiatives. The start-ups of young entrepreneurs and cultural creatives would receive support through the free provision of city spaces or relief of city taxes. There would be a specifically defined action group that would manage the old town in terms of implementing all those requirements, recommendations, propositions and strategic directions. They would apply for EU funding that would support many of the proposed public activities and also synchronise the annual event calendar so that there would be no significant overlap of key events.

To summarise, the dreaming method sparked visions of Šibenik being:

'A city in which each visitor feels like they have returned to a happy childhood.'

The Place DNA® methodological framework to discover Šibenik's authentic destination reputation defined earlier was aptly captured by another group in the co-creative workshop:

'If we feel good in our own city then we will present ourselves authentically and only then can we make other people happy.'

Our research of Šibenik's local and tourist stakeholders clearly echoes the global trend towards our guiding principle; 'Tourism is Localism'. In the section that follows, we will present Šibenik's old town strategy and branding direction informed by our research and integrated by our expert perspective.



THE PRINCIPLE STRATEGY CONCEPT:

ŠIBENIK IS A LIGHTHOUSE FOR REGENERATIVE TOURISM IN CROATIA

Why do we believe that Šibenik is a lighthouse for regenerative tourism? At first glance, our metaphor is actually quite literal. Šibenik's highly protected geography means that, when entering the old town by boat in the dark hours, the help of its eight lighthouses is essential. Metaphorically, the city's pioneering spirit has been played out in the past with some particularly enlightened inventors and leaders. Most notably, Šibenik was amongst the first places on the planet to have alternate current electricity light up its streets and power up its various industries including the production of ice, pasta, textiles and furniture. The symbol of a lighthouse is also very powerful from a psychological and storytelling perspective.

Below we will explore all these points deeper before diving into our two core brand stories and strategies that synthesise Šibenik's soul and direction. Based on our research, we trust that the time is ripe for the town to draw from its own innovative character and take advantage of its 'unspoiled potential' to become a lighthouse for tourism that promotes regenerative living in Croatia and beyond. To this end, Šibenik will become the first destination in Croatia specifically focused on building a regenerative tourism future.

Let us dive into our lighthouse symbolism. From a branding point of view, capturing people's imagination through strong collective symbols is a powerful tool for destination marketing. The lighthouse has several symbolic meanings attached to it that really resonate with Šibenik's destination DNA. More generally, lighthouses evoke a romantic image of simultaneous strength and sanctuary. This is particularly attractive in the context of a global crisis where people are craving more meaning through travel.

SPREADING THE LIGHT: THE ŠIBENIK LIGHTHOUSE LABEL

As an overarching brand recognition tool, we recommend implementing a 'Šibenik is a Lighthouse' certification system for regenerative entities. This certification scheme can be awarded to local businesses, places, tours or people that participate in regeneratively enriching practices. In order for tourists to learn about the lighthouse ethos and system, we recommend creating an app or website that explains it with a map and descriptions of the businesses. An example of a successful Croatian certification system is the 'Croatian Island Product' quality label established in 2007 (37).

We recognise that there is an existing system in place called the 'Šibenik Card' that allows visitors to buy a virtual card in order to receive discounts on local attractions and businesses (38). Our certification system could merge with the Šibenik Card scheme as a sub-category for sustainable entities or could exist on its own. We will expand on how this 'Lighthouse Label' could function for the brand stories outlined in the next sections.

All tourists interviewed shared a strong sentiment that the old city of Šibenik felt like an undiscovered jewel on the Adriatic coast which hasn't been spoiled by overtourism like other coastal cities such as Split or Zadar. Amidst the darkness, a lighthouse serves as a beacon of hope, as Dr. Alex Pattakos affirms: *'It is this lighthouse effect that helps us see ourselves and our situation more clearly, as well as guides us along the path to meaning so that we may achieve our full potential as human beings'* (35).

When we first presented this idea to Šibenik's locals, many of them resonated with the idea as lighthouses are also symbols of resilience. This is a core identity trait of the city and its people, which has a history of foreign attacks through war but also the plague that almost diminished the town's population in 1649. After the most recent war accompanied by the economic downturn in the 1990s, a lot of the city's industry was also ruined. Yet, a decade later the city has emerged as a blooming Mediterranean destination. No matter how many waves crash onto its shores, Šibenik remains strong and resilient, just like a lighthouse.

Ultimately, for the symbolic purposes of destination branding, lighthouses also portray a welcoming and positive image to travellers as they signal and trigger a feeling of safe arrival. As French thought-leader Jacques Atalli says, the future of tourism is about:

'Less tourism, more hospitality' (36).

TWO KEY BRAND STORIES

SIBENIK IS A LIGHTHOUSE FOR:

✦ NATURE & REGENERATION

✦ CULTURE, ART & INNOVATION

These brand stories represent the two key pillars and unique selling points that underpin the city's narrative in terms of local identity and reputation. We will start by exploring how these brand elements have played out in the past and how they are relevant for the present day. This will be followed by strategic steps and recommendations to help the city to continue to grow into a regenerative and prosperous destination, while staying true to its roots.

BRAND STORY ONE:

SIBENIK IS A LIGHTHOUSE FOR NATURE & REGENERATION

Since our strategy is emphasising a regenerative approach, the first brand stories will be accentuating the city in relation to its natural and geographical environment. We will first set the environmental stage of the city and region followed by two best regenerative destination examples from around the world.

This will be followed by a strategic focus on the brand narratives of local food as well as water that flows from the Krka National Park.

Šibenik sits between Zadar and Split; the two other major historical towns on the central Dalmatian coast. A prime asset of the city (as the Šibenik 2015 regional tourism strategy also emphasised) is the natural beauty that surrounds it, as it occupies a special position between two world-renowned national parks. Namely, in the hinterland lies the Krka National Park, which is famous for its lush greenery, waterfalls, canyons, and wildlife. If we turn towards the sea, Šibenik is also close to the Kornati Islands National Park; a stunning archipelago of 156 islands, islets and cliffs (89 are under NP territory), which is popular amongst sailors for its moon-like, wild allure. Moreover, three regional Nature Parks of Vransko Jezero, Velebit and Dinara further enhance its surrounding impressive beauty.

The old town of Šibenik itself was built in the naturally-protected bay on the left, mainland bank of the Krka estuary and the port is separated from the open sea by two semi-peninsulas. For seafarers, it can only be entered via a narrow channel marked by the impressive St. Nicolas fortress that welcomes travellers before sailing into the harbour where Šibenik's picturesque old town proudly emerges. If you were to pass and follow the channel going north, you would sail under an imposing bridge before encountering an even older historical town of Skradin (dating from the first century) and eventually find yourself going through a bountiful canyon all the way to the mighty waterfalls of the river Krka.

Before heading into specific sustainability strategy goals for Šibenik, let us look at two case studies from other destinations that are leading the way to flourishing tourism futures. These destinations show that regenerative tourism is about balancing out the needs of all stakeholders involved so that everybody can thrive including the local community, the environment, and the tourism industry.

BEST GLOBAL REGENERATIVE PRACTICES IN TOURISM

Bay of Plenty, New Zealand. Due to its uniquely beautiful and sensitive natural environment, New Zealand is known for creating innovative and sustainable tourism strategies and policies. Most recently, a pristine region in NZ called the Bay of Plenty worked with the avant-garde tourism marketing agency 'Destination Think' to develop their destination strategy. As a response to combat overtourism, the concept they came up with - 'For the Love of Tourism' - reflects their aspiration to shape a culture that goes beyond pure economic growth towards a more balanced and responsible treatment of the environment. Kirsten Dunne (Tourism Bay of Plenty CEO) acknowledged that this way of thinking is actually not new as the indigenous Māori people had already lived by the life-affirming approach long before colonisation and industrialisation. This guiding regenerative principle can be summed up with one question:

'How can we fundamentally leave our place better than we found it?' (39).

Costa Rica. With its highly-protected, biodiverse and lush rainforests, wildlife and beaches, Costa Rica is a prime destination for nature lovers. Most recently, the country has taken its sustainability approach to a new level by promoting themselves as a regenerative travel destination, as their official tourism website reads:

'Rather than focusing on doing less harm around the world, regenerative travellers also aim to repair the harm that has already been done, choosing hotels and tour operators that are working to leave the surrounding area even better than it was when they arrived. If this idea speaks to you, there is no better place to experience regenerative travel yourself than Costa Rica' (40).

STRATEGY STEPS | FOOD & WATER

We suggest that the old town of Šibenik would do well to harness its huge ecological potential by emphasising its connection with the land that feeds (or should be feeding) the locals and visitors, as well as the Krka National Park. The strategies below will pave the way for this brand story to bloom.



STEP 1 | FROM THE FIELD TO THE PLATE

If we are to stay true to our guiding principle 'Tourism is Localism' then growing and including local food into Šibenik's hospitality supply chain is our primary strategic goal for our first pillar. As global pressures such as the pandemic and climate change highlight, localised and organic food production has become an ever-increasing imperative for a sustainable tourism and economic strategy. This is especially important for Croatia, a country of almost four million people, which welcomed and fed 20 million visitors in 2019 alone. However, around 70% of those food needs are imported, which represents a huge economic leakage for the country. To borrow a metaphor from the Croatian biologist and environmentalist Roman Ozimec, tourism in Croatia is like a train going through the country full of travellers where we receive money from one window and throw it out through the other window, instead of taking advantage of the market that has arrived at our doorstep (41).

Boosting the supply chain for local and high quality organic food is also an important cultural asset that significantly heightens the quality of local gastronomic culture.

While Šibenik is surrounded by many OPGs (family-owned farms), there are some fundamental obstacles that currently lie in the way of sourcing food from the farms to the restaurants in the city (and beyond). Namely, a robust and reliable local food supply chain is non-existent. The only way to find high-quality local produce is to go directly to the farms themselves or to visit the local market, both of which are often impractical, unreliable and more expensive options for hospitality business-owners. Furthermore, local OPGs also need to be strengthened. To demonstrate this issue, when the Barone Fortress had opened in 2016 they aspired to primarily offer local produce but found that they required stronger and more reliable supplies from local farms in order to do so.

Fortunately, there are concrete steps that local stakeholders can take to remedy this situation.

To show that our localising strategy is realistic, we have taken inspiration from the Vukovar-Srijem county in Slavonia, Croatia. This innovative county has created a cluster model, where produce is collected and centralised from local farms by a company and then distributed further to the local market (including the hospitality industry). This 'Agro Klaster' initiative has been made possible through a partnership between the local municipality, the agricultural university of Osijek, the regional county, local farmers, and a fruit and vegetable cooperative (42). Furthermore, the local municipality of Vinkovci has also created a gastronomy centre for the purpose of promoting and serving local food and authentic products (43).

We recognise that Šibenik can benefit from adopting a similar strategy and structures that strengthen the local food supply chain in the region so that farmers are guaranteed to sell their produce at a fair price and the hospitality industry are able to source high-quality local and even organic food more reliably. However, if this initiative is to be successful it also needs to be stimulated from the regional policy level in order for OPG production to be strengthened.

Once a strong Šibenik food produce cluster is set up and in order to incentivise local businesses to buy locally, we recommend awarding them with the 'Lighthouse Label' system. The branding should be visible at the establishments and on the lighthouse website so that visitors can recognise locally-sourced places. Minimum standards should be required for the businesses to be able to receive a 'Lighthouse Label'. For example, at least 50% of their products should have to be sourced from the local cluster or from domestic Croatian products. However, while sourcing local produce should be prioritised to boost the local economy, it does need to be recognised that many small farmers are not necessarily organic. This challenge requires much more attention and action at the policy level by encouraging and supporting more organic farming.

This aspect is very important for two reasons. Firstly, the demand for organic produce is one of the fastest growing global markets with an annual growth of 14% (44). Secondly from an environmental perspective, conventional agriculture degrades land, water and biodiversity and significantly contributes to climate change.

On the other hand, regenerative agriculture has the power to nourish the environment and even reverse climate change.





However, the perception of local small farmers is that this form of agriculture is more expensive and demanding as it requires more resources (time, labour and capital), while lacking guaranteed access to the market because they cannot easily compete with supermarket prices. This challenge could be overcome by ensuring sales through community-supported agriculture schemes (CSA). This subscription-based model identifies specific consumer needs which then inform farmer's production and guarantees produce sales in advance (45).

Emphasising the importance of local and organic food is aligned with the European Green Deal (2020), which aims to make the EU the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. 'The Farm to Fork' Strategy is at the heart of this vision that is aiming to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly. Consequently, it can be expected that financial support and public funding will be on the rise.

STEP TWO | FROM THE KRKA RIVER TO THE OLD CITY DRINKING FOUNTAINS

The generous waters that gush from the Krka River provide prosperity to the city of Šibenik and the surrounding region. This increasingly precious natural resource gives energy through hydropower, is the main source of clean water for locals and animals, and brings life to the land for food production.

The significance of water has always been connected to the economic prosperity of the old city of Šibenik. The city had a history of difficult water access, which began to be resolved in the 15th century by building a public cistern right next to St. James' Cathedral that was accessed through four 'water well crowns.' In addition to these public wells, the Šibenik council also subsidised citizens that wanted to build their own wells in their old town houses. Yet, that was still not enough to satisfy the city's needs and the water continued to be shipped over from the nearby town of Vodice as well as brought from Skradinski Buk by using donkeys as a form of transport. The current Azimut cafe and cultural centre is situated inside this former cistern space while the terrace of the Michelin-star Pelegrini Restaurant occupies the plateau above with these 'four well crowns.' The issue of water scarcity was finally resolved in 1879 when the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy built a water supply system from Skradinski Buk to Šibenik (for the supply of steam locomotives). Thanks to the mayor Ante Šupuk, Šibenik received one branch of that water supply system that included six public drinking fountains (46, 47).

In the light of this interesting history and global water scarcity, we propose to bring more awareness to the historical and present question of precious water, which is also clearly specific to the old city of Šibenik. This could be achieved by reviving those remaining five iconic drinking fountains (enhanced by water filtration systems if necessary) and by making visitors and residents aware of their presence and interesting historical stories.



Easing single-use plastic is also an important way of taking care of the environment and can be addressed by encouraging people to drink from these fountains through a branded reusable water bottle campaign. These bottles could be created, for example, by the local cluster and then sold by local businesses as well as the tourist info centre as souvenirs that carry the 'Šibenik is a Lighthouse' branding. The bottles themselves could have QR codes that lead people to the 'Šibenik is a Lighthouse' website and social media channels. This initiative could also partner with the innovative plastic-free campaign undertaken by Šibenik's neighbouring Zlarin Island, which banned all single-use plastic in 2018 (48).

Taking inspiration from Iceland, we also recommend welcoming travellers with clear signage that encourages people to drink from the fountains upon entering the old town.

As we have demonstrated, there is a lot of material for our first brand story that connects Šibenik to the huge natural abundance that surrounds the city.

BRAND STORY TWO

ŠIBENIK IS A LIGHTHOUSE FOR CULTURE, ART & INNOVATION

Šibenik's old town has a rich cultural history marked by moments of pioneering creativity and innovation, so our second brand story focuses on this aspect of the destination. In this section, we will start by looking at the history as well as the current cultural state of affairs in the city. We will then be exploring the power of cultural tourism accompanied by two successful international best practice examples. The final part will present our strategic steps to bring Šibenik's stories and romantic streets even more to life through art and culture.

Historically, unlike other cities on the eastern side of the Adriatic coast that have Greek, Illyrian or Roman origins, Šibenik is the first authentic Croatian city, whose existence was first documented in the year of 1066. Over the centuries, the city had been ruled by various powers including Venice, Byzantine, Hungary, as well as the Hapsburg and Austrian monarchies (49). In terms of architecture, Šibenik is primarily famous for its UNESCO-protected St. James's cathedral that attracts many culture-loving visitors. As of late, the city's cultural offer has been enhanced by the restoration of its four fortresses, which historically helped the citizens of Šibenik resist Ottoman forces. These impressive structures boast magnificent views out onto the Dalmatian islands and each one has its own unique qualities.

To begin with, the large St. Nicholas fortress boldly welcomes those entering from the sea and is located next to St. Anthony's channel.

This fascinating fort that was built during the Venetian era is the second UNESCO-protected site in Šibenik. St. Nicolas is the final fortress to complete its reconstruction and is the only fortress under regional responsibility.

The three remaining fortresses have been restored and enlivened through the visionary efforts of Šibenik's public-private 'Fortresses of Culture' initiative supported by EU development funding (50). The first one to complete revitalisation was St. Michael's Fortress, which is located in the city's historic old town and has now been established as an open-air arena and event space with a notable track record of performers. The second restored fortress was Barone, which has been turned into an intimate indoor and outdoor educational and event space where visitors can experience the history of the city through the lens of augmented reality.





In order to break down barriers for local residents, the 'Friend's Club' scheme has been introduced so that they can freely visit both fortresses for a small annual fee.

St. John's is the most recent fortress to be restored and was officially opened in June 2022. It brings additional value to the cultural valorisation of the fortresses as it is built to be an educational centre for the creative and cultural industries through life-long learning programmes. The space has three classrooms and accommodation that can host up to 50 students and teachers. This latest project is part of the Mayor's vision to extend the city's seasonality so that it is attractive to education-driven visitors all year round. Moreover, the next step of the vision is to connect St. John's and St. Michael's fortresses together via cable car. Nina Obuljen Koržinek (the Croatian minister of Culture and Media) summarised the success of the 'Fortresses of Culture' institution well:

'This city now has an amazing complex of four fantastically equipped fortresses, and I am sure that a cable car project will be realised that will connect all the fortresses. Šibenik has become the most successful city in the transformation and investment in cultural heritage. As for the project of rebuilding the fortress of St. John, it was a pleasure to discover the layers that were neglected and show how a cultural monument can be transformed and serve not only the people of Šibenik, but also visitors from other cities' (51).

As the Fortresses of Culture project has shown, Šibenik is adding value to its existing historic sites in an innovative and creative way that is uplifting its cultural status. To this end, the current Šibenik tourism tagline for the destination goes 'City is a Stage.' Finally, the same institution has also recently revived the old town arthouse cinema naming it after Šibenik's famous poet and singer, Arsen Dedić. Arsen is a modular arthouse cinema that also hosts performative art workshops for adults and children.

To bring some global perspective, cultural tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in the industry, making up 40% of the world market. There are several sub-sectors that belong to cultural tourism including the arts, heritage, gastronomy, film and creative tourism. In a travel landscape that is increasingly homogenised - where many places feel, look, taste and even smell the same - finding unique destinations that maintain and indeed work on their own distinct cultural, aesthetic and artistic edge is highly valued by both domestic and international tourists (52).

From an economic point of view, cultural tourism is also profitable as culturally-driven guests spend more money and stay longer in such destinations. Culturally-rich places also attract a wide audience from younger to older tourists.

Cultural tourism has to be seen from both the perspective of the past - by restoring and maintaining cultural sites, as well as the present - by regenerating urban areas as well as attracting and supporting contemporary artists. Society, artists, and cultural practitioners are constantly (re)creating culture and art, and therefore fostering a thriving contemporary cultural scene has to be supported and valued just as much as historical culture. A focused effort and investment into art and culture is not only attractive for tourists who love to visit such places, but it's also known to boost a local sense of identity and connectedness.

It has been well documented that travelling to other cultures has a positive ripple effect on both travellers and locals. In our increasingly divided world, art and cultural tourism emerges as a beacon for empathy and connection.



Research shows that tourists who travel to cultures different from their own are 68% more likely to have empathy for other cultures and 77% increase their communication skills with diverse people when they return home. The power of art to grip visitors' hearts and imaginations fosters greater connection and positive feelings towards foreign places and people. A growing body of research also shows that by increasing intercultural dialogue, cultural tourism bolsters much-needed peace in our increasingly divided world (53).

BEST GLOBAL CULTURAL PRACTICES IN TOURISM

Numerous cities around the world have been transformed and elevated by artistic interventions. Most notably is Bilbao, an industrial city in the Basque part of Spain, whose status was transformed when the prestigious Guggenheim Museum was constructed there, as possible. The 'Bilbao Effect' refers to the massive tourist boost the city received after the intervention that has attracted over 20 million guests to date (54).

While such high investment into culture is valuable for bigger cities, humble creative innovations in smaller towns can also put places onto the cultural map, as we can see from the two eclectic examples below:

Margate used to be a dead resort town on the coast of the **UK**. Then in 2011, the place was revived with the arrival of the Turner Contemporary art gallery. One of its keys to success was that the curators involved the local artists and community into the curatorial process as much as possible. Since its opening, the gallery has attracted over 3.6 million visitors and created over 80m euro for the local economy. This ripple effect has stimulated the opening of new creative local businesses due to the influx of all-year-round visitors as well as the migration of thousands of artists to the town. As a local gallerist said about the project:

'What that museum has done is to bring so many more people, people that would never have come otherwise...Art can change hearts and minds, and Margate has changed my life forever...' (55)



Asilah is a small fortified town of 30,000 inhabitants on the Moroccan coast that has become a recognised cultural hotspot. The roots of this phenomenon go back to 1978 when two local pioneers invited artists to paint on the city walls. This event turned into a summer festival that includes concerts, lectures, poetry readings and international artists that cover the city walls with colourful graffiti. The event and public art displays that infuse the streets has put this little Moroccan town onto the international art map. (56)

‘Displaying art is an easy and relatively cheap way to add interest and personality to public spaces’ (57).

STEP THREE | FROM THE STAGE TO THE STREETS

It is clear that art and culture has the power to uplift destinations especially when locals are part of the creative process. In order to revitalise the whole city of Šibenik, we suggest extending the current concept of ‘City is a Stage’ to reach beyond the fortresses so that this creative spirit is also brought down to the streets of the old town. From our perspective, the tagline ‘City is a Stage’ suggests the notion that destinations are places to solely be consumed and observed. While the numerous attractive events and festivals in the peak season put Šibenik on the cultural traveller map, this focus needs to be taken further to fully revive the cultural life of the city in a regenerative way.

Our research with the local community and tourists alike reveals that the cultural life of the old town has the potential to be a creative hotspot that extends beyond the peak season in July and August. The local art scene, international cultural projects and creative entrepreneurs require support from the local municipality and other public institutions so that the old town can live and buzz all year long. This support can take various forms including:

- Providing empty or abandoned public spaces to local and national artists as studio spaces.
- Commissioning temporary and permanent public contemporary art so that the city becomes an ‘open art gallery’.
- Creating cross-cultural exchange programmes by inviting international artists to bring fresh creative energy to the city and also send local artists abroad to get inspiration.
- Creating local artist residency programmes in order to produce art on relevant cultural topics that are open to local and international artists.

Despite being in the high season, the Supertoons Festival is a great example of the way that art can enliven the streets of the old town. This animation and comics film festival attracts artists from all over the world who showcase their films in open-air cinemas and meet in galleries while people fill the streets to enjoy the entertainment.

Running for almost 60 years to date, Šibenik's renowned 'International Children's Festival' also demonstrates the city's capacity to bring a lively buzz to the old town with its numerous children's activities and creative spirit.

Creative entrepreneurs are also an integral part of bringing life to the old town and go hand-in-hand with a thriving cultural and artistic scene. They include owners of local restaurants, bars, cafes; local food, cosmetics, arts and crafts shops; galleries; markets selling local produce and so on. The limited number of existing entrepreneurs that sell authentic local goods and services in Šibenik need to be recognised more, while such new businesses require subsidies to incentivise them to open in the old town. These cultural creatives are important as they feed the soul of the city, create economic prosperity and give a uniqueness to the old town that cannot be replicated by generic goods and services. As mentioned earlier with local gastronomers, the 'Lighthouse Label' can also be extended to those businesses that fulfil certain criteria, such as promoting local culture, high levels of creativity or selling local products.

Finally, we recommend the introduction of old town aesthetic measures such as banning poorly designed and plastic furniture and signage in order to enhance the beauty of the city. This aesthetic aspect has been stressed by our tourist research who highlighted the need to avoid unconsidered design that doesn't fit into the historical architecture of the old town.

A BLEND OF BRAND STORIES: GREEN CULTURAL INITIATIVES

The following local best practices were chosen because they both combine our key brand stories together. As we explored earlier, cultural initiatives are a wonderful way to engage and help people empathise more with important topics such as the environment.

Green Eye Film Festival

Strengthening partnership branding between Krka National Park and Šibenik's old town can be achieved through more tangible cultural efforts that also act as sophisticated marketing strategies. An excellent example of this type of collaboration with NP Krka was the Green Eye Film Festival that was launched in Šibenik's old town in 2017. The festival, dedicated to nature conservation, was held outdoors and also inside the Šibenik museum (58). The festival also built a stronger brand bond with the NP Krka. In the next few years, we would love to see the festival take place outside of the high season, attract more domestic visitors, and improve its marketing reach and approach.

Flora Dalmatica Platform and Festival

Another best practice example is the recently launched platform and nature festival 'Flora Dalmatica', inspired by Robert Visiani who was a renowned botanist born in Šibenik in 1800. The creators of the initiative are civic organisations and public institutions that include 'Kolektiv 4B' NGO, 'Mihovil Šibenik' tour guide association, the Faust Vrančić Memorial Centre, the Museum of Šibenik, the public institution 'Nature of Šibenik-Knin County', the Šibenik tourism office, and the local public company 'Green City'. The idea is to dedicate the month of April to Robert Visiani in order to valorise his contribution to botanical science for the promotion and restoration of the old town's ecology, botany, and landscape architecture. To this end, Flora Dalmatica organises workshops and different educational tours around green areas of the city, the grave of Robert Visiani and the St. Lovre botanical garden.

Ultimately, the platform aims to regenerate Šibenik's green spaces by turning them into edible and herbal gardens. This platform also works on promoting historical stories that connect nature and culture such as that of local 'witches' Dobra and Mrna through which Šibenik's ethnobotanical heritage is told (59).

STEP 4 | INSPIRING INNOVATION

Another part of the city's pioneering heritage that deserves to be brought to light is its history with technological innovation and pioneering spirit. Going back to the 16th century we firstly have to acknowledge the visionary inventor and Šibenik-born Faust Vrančić. Along with many other achievements including modern mill and bridge innovations, Vrančić is famous for developing Leonardo da Vinci's original parachute idea into a successful invention.





If we look forward to the 19th century, one cannot ignore the momentous occasion that put the city on the world map forever thanks to the pioneers of the time; the inventor and architect Vjekoslav Meichsner and the entrepreneurial Mayor Ante Šupuk who recognised his brilliant vision. The 'Šupuk & Meichsner' venture led to the building of the Krka hydropower plant using Tesla's alternating current electricity system. Thus, on the 28th of August 1889, the Krka power plant was launched and lit up the street lights of Šibenik, making it one of the first of such initiatives in the world. The second hydropower plant Jaruga was built in 1902 and still works today, while only foundations of the Krka plant remain. In collaboration with a few local entrepreneurs, 'Šupuk & Meichsner' also created a technology park that produced ice, pasta, textile and furniture (61).

The local pioneering energy combined with the river Krka brought life and huge progress to the city, just like the introduction of public tap water to the old town in our first brand story. Since 2016, with the initiative of Zoran Lučić Luca, the city has celebrated this special anniversary with the annual 'Light is Life' festival. This is a great initiative that we would like to see extended beyond the festival so that it is incorporated more into the branding of the city itself.

The old town's historical relationship with light is a strong narrative that can be used more boldly to put the city on the world map. Furthermore, the legacy of its innovative industrial past characterised by local production could also be included in this branding narrative as a part of the shift towards greater localisation of other economic sectors that feed into various tourism.

HARNESSING THE DIGITAL NOMAD TREND

Building on this theme of historical inventions, the current technological advancements that enable remote working can be taken advantage of to further rejuvenate life in the old town throughout the year. With the opening of St. John's fortress boosting out-of-season visitor interest, Šibenik has the potential to become a hotspot for digital nomads. As mentioned earlier, this is especially true in the context of Croatia's new policy to attract digital nomads to the country by offering them one-year visas (62). As a result, Croatia has become an attractive place for wandering workers. Among other factors such as good internet and coffee, digital nomads are attracted to places that have an interesting cultural scene so that they can meet like-minded people and spend their time doing interesting activities.

By implementing our destination strategy (especially the art, culture and innovation elements), digital nomads will be more inclined to stay in Šibenik for longer periods outside of the peak season.

'TOURISM 4 ALL': SOCIAL INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Finally, an important aspect that destinations cannot have to take into account is social accessibility and inclusivity. What began as human and social rights issues (specifically, the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPWD) in 2006), is now being turned into a competitive business advantage. 'Tourism4All' claims to be a 'game changer' for destinations around the world as it looks to build back better tourism practices after the pandemic. To that end, the recently published Inclusive Recovery Guide from the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) shows the importance of placing inclusivity at the centre of recovery plans and provides key recommendations for achieving this. While much progress has been made, the guide makes clear that persons with disabilities and seniors encounter barriers preventing them from fully enjoying tourism experiences and even more so during the pandemic (63).

This tourist accessibility issue is morally and ethically important so that all people can have a smooth travel experience regardless of their physical capacities. Taking this issue seriously also makes economic sense as Anna Grazia Laura, president of the European Network for Accessible Tourism states:

'The accessible tourism market is worth €150 billion in Europe alone but many businesses mistakenly consider this as a 'niche' market with high outlays and little profit. In fact, good access and inclusive customer service should be everybody's business! We see that tourist destinations and suppliers who create inclusive, accessible offers are gaining more customers as a result.'

The continuous political endorsement of accessibility policies and conventions clearly illustrates the fact that local policymakers can no longer ignore such frameworks. On the contrary, by embracing the 'universal design approach' and actively promoting social inclusivity for tourists and locals alike, cities, towns and tourism destinations are rewarded by a whole variety of EU co-funding incentives and other forms of political, social and economic support. An example of such a funding opportunity was the recent EU 'Tourism4All' Interreg project between Italy and Croatia, in which Šibenik's tourism office was actively involved. The project summary report clearly showed that Šibenik's old town tourist structures were far from being socially accessible despite some recent improvements (especially around the fortresses). To remedy this, we suggest following the recommendations described in this report.

One particular recommendation that we would like to highlight is the formation of a '4 Accessibility' working group within the local municipality that consists of architects, conservationists, spatial planners, IT experts as well as all relevant public sector stakeholders (64). In the meantime, some progress has been made in the area of public transport as the local municipality has recently purchased new local buses designed for easy access for disabled people and young families with baby trolleys. Operational from the autumn of 2022, they will drive across 17 stops with digital information of the regular schedule and a mobile app for ticket purchasing.

CONCLUSION

Our brand stories and strategies are inspired by the history of Šibenik, feedback from the visitor and local stakeholders as well as other regenerative destinations. The task of the Šibenik tourism board and municipality is to create an action plan to carry out this vision.

In full co-creative spirit, we presented the core of our strategy to the local community in April 2022 in order to see how they resonated with the ideas. As a result, this final iteration of the strategy takes their most recent feedback into full consideration.

This strategy comes at a timely moment, when both locals and visitors agree that Šibenik is the only prominent city on the Dalmatian coast that has not been spoiled by overtourism - such as Split or Dubrovnik. Local stakeholders are highly aware of this potential future and are therefore motivated to push Šibenik in a more responsible and regenerative direction in terms of tourism. From an industry point of view, this is also a more intelligent approach because a boutique form of tourism focused on culture, nature and innovation is not only less detrimental, but also more lucrative for local stakeholders. The research clearly shows that doing good is good for business too.

Šibenik has a unique opportunity to mark history just like it has done in the past. **Are you ready to join the regeneration?**



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