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TSITOKES PROJECT

Awareness Toolkit

Booklet with infographics

to present the results of the

SURVEY ON JUSTICE, RIGHTS & VALUES

Call: CERV-2025-CITIZENS-CIV
(Citizens' engagement and participation)

CERV-2025-CITIZENS-CIV

Proposal number: 101253449

Proposal acronym: TSITOKES

TSITOKES PROJECT SURVEY RESULTS

JUSTICE, RIGHTS & VALUES

Comparative Survey Analysis & Active Citizenship Booklet

Project Reference: 101253449

Promoted by:

Aurive Social Cooperative (Italy) & Municipality of Lezhë (Albania)

Bilateral Pilot Events Timeline: April 2026 (Borgosesia, Italy) & June 2026 (Lezhë, Albania)

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Section 1: Executive Summary & Project Background

The TSiTOKES project (Tempus, Spiritus I Tokës, project reference 101253449) explores the intersection of youth entrepreneurship, intergenerational solidarity, and cultural/natural heritage as driving forces for sustainable, green regional development. Operating as a bilateral initiative between partner organizations in Italy (Aurive Social Cooperative) and Albania (Municipality of Lezhë), and co-funded by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme of the European Union. The project aims to foster a deep sense of European belonging, active citizenship, and awareness of core EU values, notably fundamental rights, gender equality, and the rule of law.

This briefing booklet presents a comparative, data-grounded analysis of the survey results from two key pilot events both titled 'Opening civic dialogue on EU cohesion and cultural identity' implemented within the TSiTOKES project. The first event took place in Borgosesia, Italy in April 2026, and the second was held in Lezhë, Albania in June 2026. By examining feedback from a participant sample of 55 participants (17 from Italy and 38 from Albania), this document maps the demographic profiles, baseline legislative knowledge, civic habits, and transformational outcomes of both activities, providing a rigorous analytical base also useful for the development of the upcoming TSiTOKES project activities.

Questionnaires were collected and analysed to assess the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the activity and to gather participants' perceptions of their experience.

The questionnaire addressed key aspects related to the activity's objectives, including the relevance of the topics, the quality of the organisation and methodology, and the extent to which the activity contributed to participants' knowledge and awareness. The evaluation also explored participants' perceptions of European values, fundamental rights, democratic principles and active citizenship. Particular attention was given to cross-cutting issues such as equality, non-discrimination, inclusion and equal opportunities, as well as to the creation of a respectful environment in which participants could express their views and engage in dialogue.

A further focus concerned civic participation and EU citizenship, including participants' awareness of their rights and responsibilities, interest in European affairs and willingness to engage in civic and community life. The collected feedback provided both quantitative and qualitative information to support the assessment of the activity's immediate outcomes, identify strengths and areas for improvement, and inform the design of future project activities. The evaluation therefore forms part of the project's monitoring and quality assurance process, ensuring that participants' perspectives are taken into account in assessing the effectiveness and relevance of the activity.

Key Findings at a Glance

Analytical Dimension	Borgosesia (Italy) Workshop	Lezhë (Albania) Workshop
Core Participant Profile	Intergenerational (53% aged 55+), civic-led, strong senior female presence.	Capacity Building (50% aged 25-34), professional-led, NGO & public body staff.
Overall Event Assessment	4.88 / 5.00 average score. Outstanding reception.	5.00 / 5.00 perfect score from all 38 participants.
Key Personal Benefits	5.0/5.0 for awareness and cooperation; 4.88 for knowledge; 4.82 for skills.	5.0/5.0 across ALL benefit dimensions (100% of participants rated 5/5).
Transformative Impact	76.5% report definitive change in perception regarding EU cohesion and cultural identity.	100.0% report definitive, permanent change in perception.

Section 2: Participant Demographics & Event Profiles

A key value of the survey lies in highlighting the starkly different participant structures of the two events, revealing how similar thematic workshop model can adapt to distinct local needs and stakeholders.

- **Borgosesia (Italy): An Intergenerational Hub.** The Italian event was heavily skewed towards senior age groups, with 53.0% (9 out of 17) of the participants being 55 or older, and a strong presence of young professionals in the 25-34 range (29.4%) [8]. Females made up 70.6% (12 of 17) of the group, reflecting a strong civic mobilization of female local leaders, many working in civil society cooperatives or retired.
- **Lezhë (Albania): A Professional Capacity Building Workshop.** The Albanian event attracted a highly professional, young-to-mid-career cohort: 50.0% were aged 25-34 (19 participants) and 42.1% were aged 35-54 (16 participants). The gender ratio was balanced with 57.9% males and 42.1% females, representing local public officials, NGO advocates, and university/secondary educators [8].

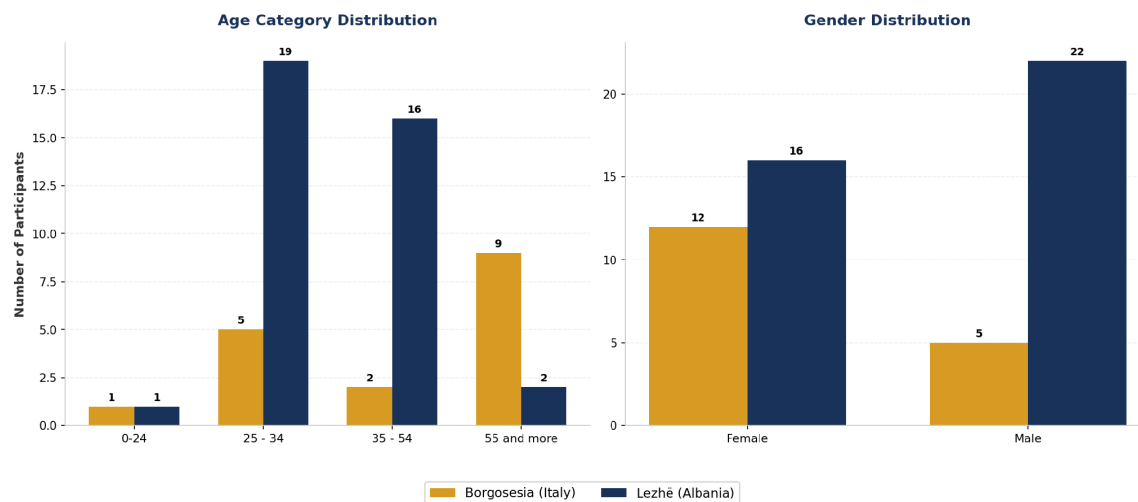


Figure 1: Side-by-side comparison of participant Age Categories and Genders across both pilots [8].

Section 3: Event Assessment & Participant Benefits

The feedback from participants indicates that both pilot workshops were resounding successes, scoring near-perfect and perfect marks across the board [9]. This points to the highly engaging format, clear relevance of the topics, and exceptional organization of both bilateral events [9].

- **Perfect 5.0 Scores:** In Lezhë, 100% of the 38 participants assigned an absolute score of 5/5 to the overall assessment and to all four benefit dimensions [9]. In Borgosesia, participants also rated the event exceptionally highly, yielding an average overall assessment of 4.88 / 5.00 [9].
- **Awareness and Cooperation:** In both locations, participants unanimously agreed (average score of 5.00 / 5.00) that the event successfully increased their awareness of the topics and fostered mutual cooperation [9]. The high ratings for cooperation reflect the bilateral nature of the events, where the presence of the Albanian delegation in Borgosesia and Italian partner insights in Lezhë were highly appreciated by local attendees [9].

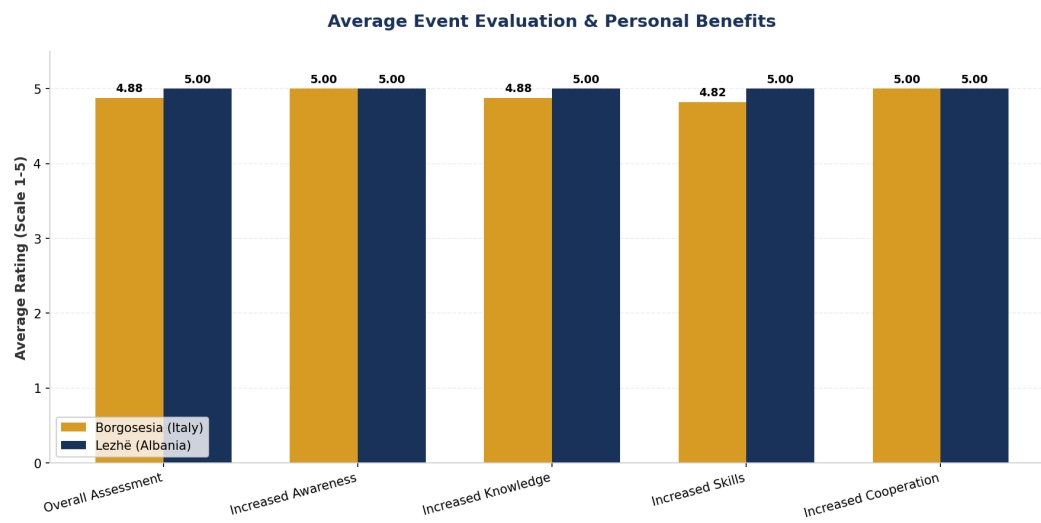


Figure 2: Average ratings on overall assessment and specific participant benefits (Scale 1-5) [9].

Section 4: Legislative Awareness of EU Values

As part of the CERV program evaluation, the survey measured baseline familiarity with core EU regulations and initiatives, exposing key differences in knowledge depth between pre-accession Albania and member state Italy [10].

- **CERV Programme Familiarity:** Reflecting excellent project promotion, awareness of the CERV Programme itself was extremely high in both groups: 94.7% in Lezhë and 88.2% in Borgosesia [10].
- **Familiarity with EU Rights:** The professional nature of the Lezhë audience translated into extraordinary baseline knowledge, with 97.3% stating they know what the Charter of Fundamental Rights, GDPR, Equal Pay Day, and victims' rights are [10]. In Borgosesia, awareness was more moderate and varied: 58.8% knew the Charter of Fundamental Rights and GDPR, and 41.1% knew about victims' rights legislation, indicating a greater need for introductory civic education in community-based settings [10].

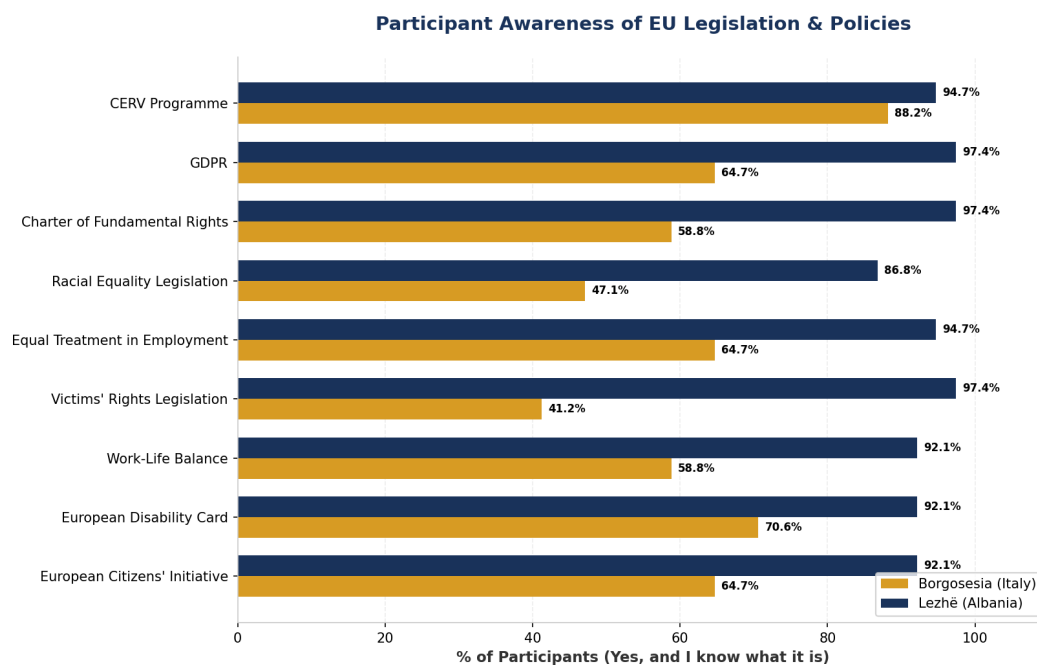


Figure 3: Comparison of legislative awareness (% of participants who know what the initiative is) [10].

Section 5: Civic Engagement & Active Citizenship

Fostering active citizenship and transforming participant perspectives on European cohesion are primary CERV metrics [11]. The survey tracks both the existing civic habits of participants and the transformative power of the workshops [11].

- **Strong Voting and Information Habits:** In both pilots, voting in elections is the most established civic habit, practiced by 76.5% of Borgosesia and 71.1% of Lezhë participants [11]. Obtaining information online was also extremely common (76.5% in Borgosesia, 39.5% in Lezhë) [11].
- **Deep Transformative Impact:** When asked if their perception of the topic has changed as a result of the event, the response was overwhelmingly positive: 100% of Lezhë participants and 76.5% (13 of 17) of Borgosesia participants declared a definitive change [11]. The remaining 23.5% in Borgosesia reported a change 'to some extent' [11]. Not a single participant in either event reported that their perception remained unchanged [11].

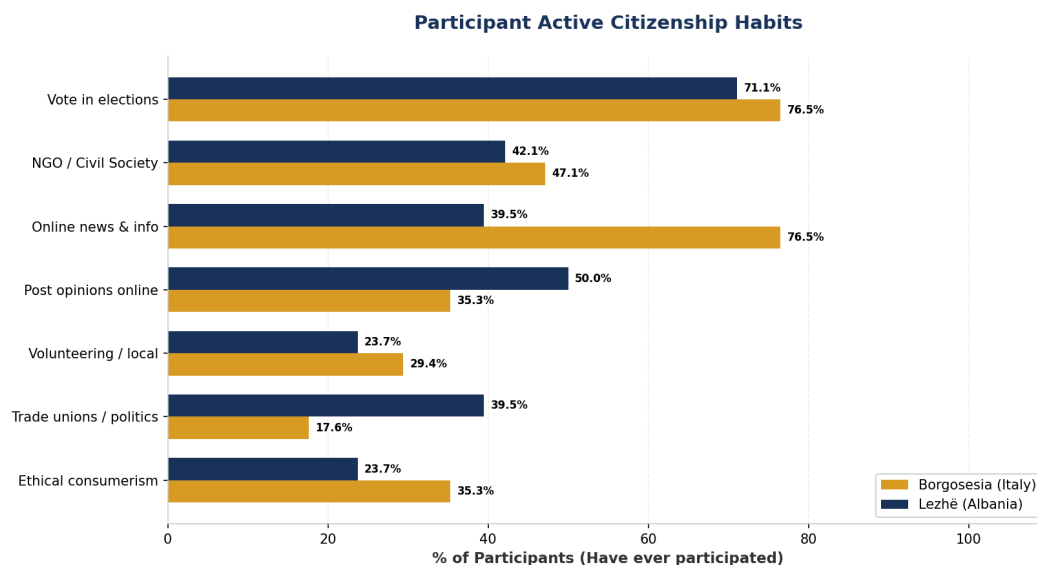


Figure 4: Self-reported civic and political participation habits of participants prior to the event [11].

Section 5: Infographics - Survey Results on Justice, Rights and Values, with Citizens' and Stakeholders' Quotes from TSITOKES Events



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LIVING ROOTS, SHARED FUTURE

Intangible & Environmental Heritage as Key Drivers for European Cohesion

TSITOKES Toolkit with Infographics for Social Media Campaign

A Cross-Border Partnership: Italy & Albania

54 Active Participants | 39 from Albania | 17 from Italy | 100% Engaged in Physical Dialogues

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OUR BALANCED & ACTIVE COMMUNITY

Representing diverse backgrounds and strong youth leadership



Gender Balance

51% Female

49% Male

Perfect representation
reflecting inclusive
engagement across
communities.

Strong Youth Presence

44% Aged 25 - 34

33% Aged 35 - 54

20% are 55+

**and 4% under 24, enabling robust
intergenerational exchange.**

Diverse Sectors

42% Public Bodies

31% Civil Society

13% Research/Education

**and 13% other local
stakeholders.**

"Cultural heritage becomes a living resource when communities are recognized as active actors rather than passive beneficiaries. Creating spaces where young people and older citizens work together allows communities to preserve collective memory."

Francesca Bellomo — Project coordinator - European Youth Policy projects manager





TRANSFORMING MINDSETS AND PERCEPTIONS

Measuring the real immediate outcomes of our workshops

Mindset Change After the Event

92.7% — Changed Perception Definitively

My perception of the topic has changed permanently.

89.1% — Will Act Differently

I am likely to react differently when confronted with similar issues.

85.5% — Everyday Application

I will definitely use what I learnt in my everyday life and work.

100% Overall Satisfaction Rate

- 96.4% rated the event 5/5
- 3.6% rated the event 4/5

Core Benefits Achieved (Priceless Outcomes)

- 100% reported increased awareness (5/5)
- 100% reported increased cooperation (5/5)
- 96.4% reported increased knowledge (5/5)
- 96.4% reported increased skills (5/5)





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EU VALUES & LEGISLATIVE AWARENESS

Visualizing policy familiarity with Eu initiatives to design future community training paths

Strong Policy Familiarity

- ✓ 92.7% aware of Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV)
- ✓ 87.3% aware of EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- ✓ 87.3% aware of Europride & LGBTQI+ Pan-European Events
- ✓ 85.5% aware of Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU
- ✓ 85.5% aware of Equal Treatment in Employment & Occupation

Lower Familiarity (Growth Paths)

- ⚠ 80.0% aware of Legislation on Victims' Rights
- ⚠ 78.2% aware of Code of Conduct against online hate speech
- ⚠ 74.5% aware of Legislation on Racial Equality
- ⚠ 74.5% aware of EU Roma Week for Integration

Strategic Training Target:

Future modular educational paths should incorporate simple visual infocards specifically targeting equal rights frameworks to easily upskill non-professional citizen groups.



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REINTERPRETING TRADITIONS FOR THE DIGITAL ERA

Using contemporary tools to protect local folklore and shared values

Digital Media & Countering Hate Speech

78.2% Aware of the EU Code of Conduct

"Digital tools allow young people to share traditional stories, countering hate speech online by promoting values of inclusion and respect. Reinterpreting folklore securely builds active civic identities". **Noemi Rubinelli**

Citizens proposal for initiatives:

- ✓ Creating podcasts on local legends & digital video mapping
- ✓ Equipping citizens with tools to defend European rights online
- ✓ Transitioning folklore from history textbooks to social media

"Traditional music, dances, local celebrations, food and stories shared between generations remain alive not because we describe them as important, but because people continue to practise them, share them and give them meaning in their own lives. If young people only hear about traditions as something belonging to the past, they feel distant from them."

— **Keler Sufja, Director of Culture, Musician & Advocate, Lezhë**





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FROM ROOTS TO GREEN GROWTH

Connecting traditional heritage to local youth entrepreneurship

Youth-led Sustainable Development

The 44% Young Adult Cohort (25-34)

"Young people are transforming heritage from historical static memory into active economic engines through agritourism, eco-tourism, and sustainable agriculture, such as the successful Nardis Farm model in Fishtë, Albania.

"Heritage meets green, innovative start-ups. Transnational tourism links local food with EU curiosity. Authentic agricultural traditions survive via economic viability" — Noemi Rubinelli, Active Participant, Italy

"This project stands out as an extraordinary initiative that beautifully connects youth entrepreneurship with cultural and natural heritage as key resources for intergenerational solidarity and sustainable development. Bridging the gap between generations fostered a unique exchange where traditional knowledge met youth-led innovation."

— Noemi Rubinelli, Active Participant, Italy



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NATURE & CULTURE: THE GREEN ALLIANCE

Connecting ecological responsibility with active European citizenship

Environmental Heritage as a Civic Catalyst

90.9% Satisfied with Local Democracy

"Our primary objective is to ensure that all citizens and local residents are informed and made aware of the issues. We also strive to involve them in activities such as environmental cleanups and, critically, in reporting violations on the ground. This assistance is invaluable to us."

— Besiona Simoni, Protected Areas Management Specialist, Lezhë

"Active citizenship starts on the ground. By engaging citizens in protecting biodiversity hotspots like the Vain-Kunë Nature Reserve, local communities transform environmental duty into active democratic participation".

Ideas for civic engagement are:

- ✓ Citizen-led biodiversity monitoring and lagoons cleanup
- ✓ Active reporting of environmental violations on the ground
- ✓ Local green actions reinforcing high-level EU values





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A WIDER EUROPEAN CULTURAL SPACE

Local dialogues reinforcing a shared sense of European belonging

100% Feel the Strength of EU Citizenship

- 83.6% feel definitely like EU citizens
- 16.4% feel like EU citizens to some extent

100% Knowledge of European Rights

- 70.9% know their rights definitely
- 29.1% know their rights to some extent



"Cultural heritage is not only something inherited from the past; it is something that can bring people together in the present and give younger generations a stronger sense of where they come from.

Preserving and sharing our heritage can strengthen dialogue, mutual respect and social cohesion, helping citizens feel part of both their local community and a wider European cultural space."

— Pjerin Ndreu, Mayor of Lezhë



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BRIDGING GENERATIONS THROUGH MEMORY

How sharing our history preserves local and transnational trust

80% Definitively Aware of Shared History

Participants comments:

- *"Cultural memory is the foundation of solidarity. By bringing seniors and youth together, the project strengthens transnational trust between Italy and Albania.*
- *Traditional music (the lahuta and çifteli) as cultural anchors*
- *Oral histories preserve local knowledge before it disappears*
- *Transnational workshops establish a shared European narrative*

Preserving the Narrative

"Heritage is not preserved only through monuments, archaeological objects or museum collections. It also survives through the stories people tell, the traditions families maintain and the memories that are passed from one generation to another."

— Paulin Zefi, Director of Museum and Cultural Heritage, Lezhë





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THE JOURNEY FORWARD: STRATEGIC ACTIONS

Our community's active checklist to strengthen democratic cohesion

Active Bottom-Up Democratic Faith

94.5% Agree:
"My voice counts in the European Union"

98.2% Agree:
"I understand how the European Union works"

3 Concrete Strategic Goals

Proposals from the citizens

- 1. Bilingual Digital Platforms**
Allow citizens to collaboratively upload and preserve oral stories, photographs, and regional history.
- 2. Youth Heritage Ambassadors**
Actively involve schools and universities to mobilize young citizens as custodians of traditional values.
- 3. Italy-Albania Citizens' Forums**
Establish permanent, regular bilateral dialogue spaces on cultural policy rather than isolated occasional events



national responsibility inspires innovation



RASHKIA LEZHE

Section 6: Participant Voices & Practical Testimonies

Beyond statistical metrics, the qualitative feedback gathered during the consultations and forum reveals the human, intercultural, and intergenerational depth of the project. These qualitative contributions represent a wide selection of reflections from both events [12, 24].

The feedback outlines three core pillars of impact:

1. **Intercultural Exchange:** The bilateral presence of delegations was highly praised for building cross-border networks [9, 14].
2. **Value of Active Citizenship:** Deep reflection on how local actions represent broader European values [14].
3. **Generational Solidarities:** Elderly and youth groups finding common ground through cultural heritage assets [14].

★ CIVIC PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK - BORGOSIESIA, ITALY [12]

This project stands out as an extraordinary initiative that beautifully connects youth entrepreneurship with cultural and natural heritage as key resources for intergenerational solidarity and sustainable development. Bridging the gap between generations fostered a unique exchange where traditional knowledge of our heritage met youth-led innovation. Collaborating on bilateral projects between Italy and Albania served as a fantastic catalyst for joint initiatives, strengthening youth participation, and active citizenship.

★ **PIERIN NDREU - MAYOR OF LEZHË [34]**

Cultural heritage is not only something inherited from the past; it is something that can bring people together in the present and give younger generations a stronger sense of where they come from. Preserving and sharing our heritage can strengthen dialogue, mutual respect and social cohesion, helping citizens feel part of both their local community and a wider European cultural space.

★ **LEZHË CITIZENS AND MUNICIPAL REPRESENTATIVES [28, 31, 32]**

Our history becomes more valuable when we share it with visitors from other countries. Their curiosity also helps us rediscover our own heritage. Young people should have more opportunities to discover local traditions directly, not only read about them in school. Traditions stay alive when they are shared between generations.

Expert Perspective on Civic Engagement

Francesca Bellomo (European Youth Policy Expert & Eurodesk Coordinator) highlights that cultural heritage becomes a living resource when communities are recognized as active actors rather than passive beneficiaries [46]. She notes that geographical isolation in rural/mountain areas can be a barrier to participation, but creative regeneration initiatives (like using abandoned spaces for art and theatre) can foster social innovation [47, 48]. Furthermore, intergenerational dialogue is key: 'Creating spaces where young people and older citizens work together allows communities to preserve collective memory while developing new interpretations of traditions through contemporary tools' [49].

Section 7: Tsitokes Project: Recommendations for Heritage, Intergenerational Solidarity and European Cohesion

The survey findings provide clear, quantitative, and qualitative directions for the Tsitokes project intended to guide future civic dialogues and regional heritage-driven entrepreneurship initiatives [14]. Based on the analysis, the following four concrete recommendations are proposed:

1. Design Modular Educational Paths [15]

Because participant profiles differ drastically (professional and administrative in Albania vs. civic and intergenerational in Italy), the European follow up project/initiatives should offer:

- A 'Professional Capacity Building Track' focused on technical EU policies, public funding, and direct project management [15].
- A 'Community Engagement Track' focused on intergenerational storytelling, green local entrepreneurship, and hands-on cultural activities [15].

2. Integrate EU Value Micro-Learnings [15]

While familiarity with general programs like CERV and GDPR is extremely strong, knowledge of specific civil protections (such as victims' rights, equal treatment, and accessibility frameworks) is lower in

community-based cohorts [10, 15]. The European follow up project/initiatives should integrate simple, visually-appealing infocards explaining these topics to easily upskill non-professional citizen groups [15].

3. Formalize Intergenerational Heritage Formats [16]

The outstanding feedback regarding intergenerational exchange (e.g., senior craft and history experts working with youth entrepreneurs) should be formalized [16]. The European follow up project/initiatives could include concrete templates and lesson plans for organizing 'Intergenerational Heritage Hackathons' or cooperative workshops, drawing directly on the successful Italian pilot methodology [16].

4. Leverage Active Online Sharing Habits [16]

A huge portion of participants (especially in Borgosesia and Lezhë) actively post opinions and consume news on online social networks [16]. The European follow up project/initiatives should feature a dedicated chapter on 'Digital Advocacy for Core Values', giving participants structured guidance and customizable graphic templates to safely counter hate speech online and champion European rights within their personal digital spheres [16].

This survey results booklet was prepared to synthesize the feedback for the TSiTOKES consortium.

All findings are strictly grounded in participant survey data collected between April and June 2026.

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Booklet with infographics to present the results of the SURVEY ON JUSTICE, RIGHTS & VALUES

ANNEX Citizens' Consultation on Civic Participation and the Role of Communities in Safeguarding Cultural and Natural Heritage

Opening Civic Dialogue on EU Cohesion and Cultural Identity

DATE OF ALBANIAN EVENT: 25 June 2026

LOCATION: Lezhë, Albania

Project / Projekti: CERV – Tempus, Spiritus i Tokës | T2.4

Introduction: this section presents a synthesis of citizens' contributions collected through the transnational activities of the *Tempus, Spiritus i Tokës* project, including the international event held in Lezhë, Albania, in June 2026, jointly managed with the Italian delegation. It brings together quotes, declarations, micro-stories, and the results of the *Justice, Rights and Values* survey, reflecting participants' experiences, perspectives, and recommendations on cultural and natural heritage, civic participation, European identity, and sustainable development.

The consultation involved citizens, young people, local authorities, civil society organisations, cultural practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders through conferences, public forums, workshops, thematic consultations, and cross-border dialogue activities in Italy and Albania. Particular attention was given to intangible cultural heritage as a resource for European identity, social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and sustainable development, and to the role of citizens and local communities in safeguarding and transmitting traditions, knowledge, collective memory, and cultural practices.

The findings provide qualitative evidence of citizens' awareness, engagement, priorities, and expectations, while identifying opportunities to strengthen participatory heritage governance,

democratic participation, and cross-border cooperation. As a key project output, the consultation contributes to the dissemination, evaluation, and policy objectives of the CERV Programme, offering recommendations for relevant stakeholders and demonstrating how citizen engagement can reinforce shared European values, cultural diversity, social cohesion, and sustainable territorial development. The results will be shared online and with local authorities to promote visibility and further dialogue.

Citizens' Voices – Qualitative Results of the Consultation
Participants reflections event in Albania JUNE 2026
(reflections in Lezhe history within Eu framework)

1. “Living in Lezhë, we sometimes forget how much history surrounds us. Learning more about ancient Lissus made me look at my city differently.” - A.K., 34 local resident, Lezhë
2. “I was surprised to learn how important Lissus was even in ancient times. Knowing that kings and Roman leaders came here makes our history feel much closer.” - E.M., 27, young professional, Lezhë
3. “The ancient walls are not only stones. They show us that Lezhë has survived many different periods and has always remained an important place.” - M.P., 41, municipal employee, Lezhë
4. “When I heard that Philip V described the fortifications of Lissus as admirable, I felt proud that something built here more than two thousand years ago could leave such an impression.” - G.N., 45, community representative, Lezhë
5. “We often speak about Lezhë through Skanderbeg, but this project reminded me that the history of the city began many centuries before him.” - S.K., 30, cultural sector representative, Lezhë
6. “Knowing that the Illyrian king Gentius stayed in Lissus makes the ancient history of Lezhë feel more real, not just something we read in books.” - D.P., 38, local participant, Lezhë
7. “It was interesting to discover that events connected with Julius Caesar, Pompey and Mark Antony also reached this territory. Lezhë was connected to much wider European history.” - K.A., 26, university graduate, Lezhë

8. “For me, the expression ‘Immortal City’ describes Lezhë very well. The city has changed many times, but its history has never disappeared.” - *P.L., 52, local resident, Lezhë*
9. “Anna Komnene described Lezhë as a fortified city that seemed to rise into the air. When you look at the castle today, you can understand why.” - *Eva Marku(40), local resident, Lezhë*
10. “Sometimes we pass by historical places every day without thinking about the people who lived there centuries before us.” - *B.M., 36, project participant, Lezhë*
11. “The visit made me realise that protecting the remains of ancient Lissus is also a way of protecting the identity of today’s Lezhë.” - *Ndue Luli, municipal representative, Lezhë*
12. “Our history becomes more valuable when we share it with visitors from other countries. Their curiosity also helps us rediscover our own heritage.” - *Vasilika Laska , (28) , Director of the Directorate of Strategic Projects, Lezhë*

Quotes (participant reflections on cultural heritage and exchange)

1. “Growing up in Lezhë, I was always surrounded by history, but this project made me pay more attention to the stories behind the places I see every day.” - *Brikena Vuksani , Deputy Mayor , Lezhë*
2. “Meeting participants from Italy showed me that traditions may look different, but the importance of family, community and memory is very similar.” - *Erion Brahimi, (23) , university student, Lezhë*
3. “Sometimes we take our own traditions for granted. Seeing the interest of visitors made me realise how valuable they really are.” - *Altin Prenga , (42), local entrepreneur, Lezhë*
4. “I knew Lezhë had a long history, but learning more about ancient Lissus made me see the city from a completely different perspective.” - *Mario Sata (35), local professional, Lezhë*

5. “The old walls and the castle are not only monuments. They are part of the story of the people who have lived here for centuries.” - *Eueda Molla , Deputy Mayor , Lezhë*
6. “Young people should have more opportunities to discover local traditions directly, not only read about them in school.” - *Anjeza Lekstakaj, (42), municipal representative, Lezhë*
7. “Sharing our music, food and stories with the Italian participants was a simple way of showing who we are.” - *Paulin Zefi , (40), cultural sector representative, Lezhë*
8. “What I enjoyed most was listening to people from another country talk about their traditions and then finding similarities with our own.” - *Fridion Ndoj, Albania (29), local entrepreneur, Lezhë*
9. “The project reminded me that cultural heritage is not only about protecting old buildings; it is also about keeping memories and traditions alive.” - *Jurgen Marku , (28), municipal representative, Lezhë*
10. “When visitors are curious about the history of Lezhë, it also makes us more curious about our own city.” - *Amarilda Preçi (36), project participant, Lezhë*
11. “I think traditions stay alive when they are shared between generations. If young people are involved, they can give them a new life.” - *Aferdita Gjoni, Albania (44), representative of Local NGO*
12. “For me, the most valuable part of the exchange was understanding that cultural heritage can bring people from different countries closer together.” - *Florida Zyberi, Albania (43), local administration representative*

Storytelling (participant storytelling on cultural heritage and exchange)

Pjerin Ndreu – Mayor of Lezhë

My connection with cultural heritage goes back to my early experiences of living in a territory where history and traditions are part of everyday life. Listening to older generations speak about the past,

seeing local traditions continue over time and being surrounded by places with a strong historical meaning gradually made me understand how closely identity is connected to heritage.

Today, as Mayor of Lezhë, I see this connection from another perspective. Cultural heritage is not only something inherited from the past; it is something that can bring people together in the present and give younger generations a stronger sense of where they come from.

Over the years, I have understood that protecting local identity does not mean closing ourselves within it. On the contrary, knowing our own history helps us understand and respect the histories of other communities. This initiative helped me understand more clearly the connection between the preservation of cultural heritage and the strengthening of European identity and citizenship, through the exchange of experiences, the sharing of local traditions and the dialogue between people from different European communities.

For me, this is where cultural heritage connects with European identity and citizenship. Europe is built on different local identities, histories and traditions, but also on shared values. Preserving and sharing our heritage can strengthen dialogue, mutual respect and social cohesion, helping citizens feel part of both their local community and a wider European cultural space.

Paulin Zefi – Director of Museum and Cultural Heritage

My interest in cultural heritage began before it became part of my professional life. My first connection with the past came through the stories and memories shared by older generations and through the historical places that form part of the identity of Lezhë.

As I later began working with museums, archaeology and cultural heritage, I started to look at those memories differently. I realised that heritage is not preserved only through monuments, archaeological objects or museum collections. It also survives through the stories people tell, the traditions families maintain and the memories that are passed from one generation to another. This experience helped me better understand the connection between preserving cultural heritage and strengthening European identity and social cohesion, through the sharing of memories, traditions and cultural experiences among communities with different histories but common European values.

This experience has taught me that people protect heritage more naturally when they can see part of their own story in it. A historical place can have an official meaning, but it can also carry a personal memory or a family story that gives it another dimension.

For me, this is also an important connection with European identity. Every local story contributes to Europe's wider cultural heritage. When communities preserve their own memories while sharing and discovering those of others, cultural diversity becomes a source of dialogue rather than distance. In this way, heritage can strengthen European citizenship, mutual understanding and social cohesion.

Keler Sufja – Director of Culture and Cultural Heritage

My first connection with cultural heritage came through the traditions that were present in everyday

community life. Traditional music, dances, local celebrations, food and stories shared between generations were not things that I initially thought of as “cultural heritage”; they were simply part of the way people lived, celebrated and expressed who they were. Later, through my professional work in culture, I began to understand the deeper value of these experiences. I realised that traditions remain alive not because we describe them as important, but because people continue to practise them, share them and give them meaning in their own lives. This initiative helped me understand more clearly the connection between the preservation of cultural heritage and the strengthening of European identity, citizenship and social cohesion, through cultural exchange, participation and the opportunity to discover both the similarities and the differences between European traditions. This has also made me think particularly about younger generations. If young people only hear about traditions as something belonging to the past, there is a risk that they will feel distant from them. When they have the opportunity to experience, understand and reinterpret them, heritage can become part of their own identity as well. For me, this is also where local culture connects with European identity and citizenship. Discovering our own cultural roots can help us appreciate the traditions of other European communities and recognise both our differences and the values we share. Culture and heritage can therefore become important resources for social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and sustainable development in Europe.

Short Stories / Micro-narratives / Voices from the Field

The following section presents the stories and reflections of key testimonials and stakeholders involved in the *Tempus, Spiritus i Tokës* project.

Each contributor was invited to answer three questions related to the main themes of the project:

1. What can be done to improve civic engagement in the protection and promotion of cultural heritage?
2. What is the connection between the recovery of cultural heritage and European identity?
3. What is the impact of EU cultural policies at local level?

Contributor Profile - Francesca Bellomo

European Project Designer | Youth Policy Expert | Eurodesk Coordinator



Civic engagement: Through over twenty years of work in youth policies and European project design, I have seen that young people engage more when they are recognised as active actors. Volunteering, non-formal education, mobility and community projects can build skills and responsibility. My experience in rural and mountain areas has shown me the importance of overcoming geographical isolation. Intergenerational

activities can also connect young people with the memories and knowledge of older generations.

European identity: Through my work with Eurodesk and European mobility programmes, I have seen that local and European identities can reinforce each other. When young people experience other cultures, they often return with a stronger appreciation of their own traditions, landscapes and communities. Local heritage thus becomes part of a wider European story, where diversity is a shared strength.

EU cultural policies: European programmes such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps can bring Europe closer to small communities by creating opportunities for mobility, cooperation and active citizenship. Projects such as Green Agent have also shown me how youth participation can connect cultural and natural heritage with environmental responsibility and sustainable development.

Contributor Profile - Luca Martelli

Social Innovation Expert | European Project Designer | Partnership Development Specialist



Civic engagement: Through my work in social innovation and European project design, I have learned that heritage protection should start from the real needs of communities. Citizens should be involved from the identification of priorities to the design and implementation of solutions. Partnerships between local authorities, associations, young people, cultural organisations and other stakeholders are essential to create lasting impact. Heritage can thus become a resource for inclusion, innovation and sustainable development.

European identity: I see cultural heritage as a bridge between local belonging and European identity. Europe is built on different histories, traditions, landscapes and forms of knowledge, and every local heritage contributes to this shared cultural mosaic. European cooperation allows communities to exchange experiences, recognise common values and strengthen their identity without losing their uniqueness.

EU cultural policies: From my experience in project design and partnership development, European programmes provide more than financial resources: they offer methodologies, networks and opportunities for cooperation. Their impact is particularly important in rural and less populated areas, where they can reduce isolation, strengthen local capacities and create opportunities for younger generations. When communities are empowered to design solutions

based on their own resources and needs, heritage becomes a driver of social cohesion and sustainable development.

Contributor Profile

Andrea Avogadro

Social Impact Manager | Digital Inclusion Coordinator | Cultural Innovation Promoter



Civic engagement: My work in social services, digital inclusion and territorial projects has shown me that people engage when they recognise themselves in the story of a place. Heritage includes memories, traditions and local knowledge as well as monuments. Digital storytelling, video mapping and creative tools can involve younger generations and make heritage more accessible, provided that technology remains inclusive and supported by education and participation.

European identity: My experience working with the Val Grande National Park has shown me how natural landscapes, cultural memory and local communities are interconnected. I believe digital

innovation can create a dialogue between tradition and new generations, helping people rediscover their local heritage while understanding its place within Europe's shared cultural diversity.

EU cultural policies: European cultural policies can connect heritage with social inclusion, digital innovation and sustainable development. Through my experience in managing projects linked to natural areas and in coordinating digital inclusion initiatives, I have seen how European approaches can help communities develop new ways of promoting their cultural and natural heritage. European programmes can support cooperation between local authorities, cultural organisations, young people and communities, while encouraging the use of digital tools such as video mapping and storytelling. At the same time, innovation must remain accessible and inclusive, ensuring that different generations and social groups can participate. In this way, European policies can turn heritage into a resource for stronger communities, local identity and sustainable territorial development.

Contributor Profile - Rezart Pepa

Visual Artist | Photographer | Cultural Storyteller | Intercultural Dialogue Promoter



Civic engagement: As a photographer and visual artist, I believe civic engagement starts by creating emotional connections between people and places. Through photography and visual storytelling, I can preserve memories, give visibility to local stories and encourage dialogue between generations. My experience as an Albanian who moved to Italy more than twenty-five years ago has shown me how cultural associations can create spaces for

participation and mutual understanding. I believe young people should be actively involved through photography, digital storytelling and creative projects that allow them to reinterpret and protect heritage.

European identity: My personal journey between Albania and Italy has taught me that identity evolves through encounters, exchanges and shared experiences. I see European identity as a dialogue between different cultures, histories and communities. Migrant communities are also part of Europe's living heritage, contributing new memories and perspectives. Through my work promoting Albanian-Italian cultural relations, I have experienced how sharing stories and traditions can strengthen mutual understanding, belonging and respect for diversity.

EU cultural policies: As an artist involved in territorial cultural projects, I see European policies as an opportunity to connect communities, artists and young people and give greater visibility to local heritage. European cooperation can support intercultural dialogue and participation, while photography, video mapping and multimedia storytelling can bring heritage closer to new generations. At local level, culture can become a shared space for inclusion, creativity and social cohesion.

Voices from the Field

Massimo Folliero

Concert Pianist | Cultural Ambassador | Music Education Promoter



Civic engagement: As a concert pianist and music educator with extensive international experience, I believe cultural heritage becomes alive when people can experience, learn and transmit it. Music is a powerful form of intangible heritage because it carries memories, traditions and emotions across generations. Through concerts, master classes and educational activities, I encourage young people to develop creativity and become active participants in cultural life. Intergenerational exchange is essential: experienced artists can transmit knowledge, while younger generations bring new perspectives and ways of communicating culture.

European identity: My performances across Europe and countries in Asia, America and Oceania have shown me that music can overcome linguistic and cultural barriers. European identity is strengthened through encounters between different traditions, not by eliminating differences.

Music creates a shared space for dialogue and mutual understanding, allowing people to value both their roots and the diversity of European culture. For young people, cultural exchange and mobility can foster openness, curiosity and a stronger sense of European citizenship.

EU cultural policies: From my perspective as an artist, European cultural policies are important because they support mobility, cultural exchange, education and cooperation. These opportunities allow artists, students and communities to build connections beyond national borders. At local level, European initiatives can strengthen cultural participation, education and the attractiveness of territories, while connecting local traditions with wider European networks. Culture can therefore become a shared space for creativity, dialogue, respect and solidarity.

Contributor Profile - Irmo Caretti

Community Leader | Volunteering Promoter | Intergenerational Dialogue Advocate



Civic engagement: Through my long experience in social participation, volunteering and community engagement, including my role as President of Anteus VCO, I have seen how active participation can strengthen communities. I believe citizens should be recognised as active contributors, sharing their time, skills, memories and knowledge. Volunteering creates opportunities for people to meet and work together, while intergenerational activities connect older generations, who preserve traditions and collective memory,

with young people and their creativity and new perspectives.

European identity: I believe European identity is rooted in the memories, traditions and experiences of local communities. My experience in the voluntary and social sector has shown me the important role of older generations as custodians of knowledge and collective memory. At the same time, heritage must remain a living resource, creating dialogue between generations and communities. Solidarity, cooperation and respect for diversity are values that connect local belonging with European citizenship.

EU cultural policies: From my experience in volunteering and community engagement, I believe European cultural policies can turn European values into concrete opportunities for participation and social cohesion. European programmes can support local organisations, volunteering and intergenerational cooperation, helping communities exchange experiences and develop new approaches to heritage preservation. Their greatest value is bringing European citizenship into everyday life and showing that even small communities contribute to Europe's cultural richness and shared identity.

Contributor Profile

Keler Sufja - Director of Culture and Cultural Heritage, musician and Cultural Advocate



I'm Keler I am the Director of Culture and Cultural Heritage of the Municipality of Lezhë, where I lead initiatives aimed at strengthening the city's cultural life, promoting artistic expression and preserving its rich historical and cultural heritage. Within the local government, I also contribute to areas related to education, youth and sports, supporting policies and programmes

that encourage community engagement, youth development and cultural participation.

In my role as Director of Culture, I organise and support a wide range of cultural events, artistic performances and heritage initiatives that celebrate Lezhë's identity and traditions. I work closely with local cultural organisations, including the "Ndoc Gjetja" Literary Club, to organise literary and artistic events in important heritage locations such as Lezhë Castle. I am particularly committed to involving younger generations through literature, poetry, music and cultural education, helping them develop a stronger connection with Albania's history and heritage. I also contribute to the Municipality of Lezhë's civil emergency coordination structures, supporting local preparedness and community resilience.

Alongside my public role, I am an Albanian singer-songwriter and musician. I gained national attention in 2013 through my participation in the Kënga Magjike festival with the song Frymemarrje, and in 2014 I performed as a guest at TEDxTirana. Since then, I have continued performing at cultural events, concerts and festivals in Albania and across Europe, particularly in Italy, combining original compositions with acoustic reinterpretations. Through both my institutional and artistic work, I see culture as a powerful instrument for community development, education, identity and international cultural exchange.

Voices from the ground - read following or view the full interview here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFKieA-r43Q>

Civic engagement: I am the Director of Culture and Cultural Heritage. Lezhë is a fairly large city in Albania, and for us, the connection between culture, cultural heritage and everything else is vitally important. We believe we need to start from our roots, since our city has deep historical foundations. Yet young people today sometimes struggle to understand the city or treat it with the proper respect.

These projects are essential not only for us locals but also for tourism. They help visitors from abroad better understand and appreciate the city, recognising the true value of Lezhë and its cultural heritage. The projects we are currently undertaking, as well as those we hope to launch in the future, will help put Lezhë and Albania on the map for tourists, encouraging them to visit and gain a deeper understanding of the local culture, the people and the way citizens live here.

European identity: I believe that dialogues, meetings and connections—not just within a single nation, but by fostering exchanges between Italy and Albania, or Italy and Belgium or France, and among the peoples of Europe—are vital.

While I know there are things we might interpret differently, there are also many things we understand very well together. Projects like the one we are working on here in Lezhë today show us that, even if we sometimes think we are different or hold different views on certain matters, we often see the world in the same way.

That is why all these dialogues and debates help us understand one another and realise that, ultimately, we are not far from our desired destination. This is crucial because, for a long time, we held the idea that our goal was incredibly distant—something almost unattainable or extremely difficult. Yet, through these dialogues and activities, we are realising that this isn't the case.

This realisation helps us, first and foremost, understand that we aren't far off. When you realise you are close to a finish line, it becomes easier to actually reach it. Projects like this, and future ones involving the European Union, will help us become more optimistic, not just about reaching that long-awaited goal, but about the journey itself.

EU cultural policies: Europe—both in Albania generally and here in Lezhë specifically—is closer than ever in every sense: culturally, and also in terms of the processes currently underway.

As you know, Albania is in the midst of developing the state procedures and other mechanisms required for its path towards the European Union. We want to join the EU, yet we do not wish to change who we are; rather, we want to bring the European Union here, bringing it together with our own culture and roots.

I believe that Europe needs us for who we truly are. We do not want to be a people who simply follow Europe's lead or mimic its actions. Instead, we want to be a people who embrace Europe—its culture and its development—while remaining true to ourselves.

That is of the utmost importance to us.

Contributor Profile Paulin Zefi

Director of Museum and Cultural Heritage - Historian, Archaeologist, and Cultural Heritage Specialist



Paulin Zefi is a historian, archaeologist, and cultural heritage specialist who serves as the Head of Cultural Heritage and Director of the Archaeological Museum and the Gjergj Kastrioti Memorial in the Municipality of Lezhë, Albania. He is widely recognized as one of the region's leading experts in the protection, documentation, and promotion of the historical and cultural identity of Lezhë (ancient Lissus).

With specialized training in history, archaeology, and scientific research, Zefi's academic and professional work focuses on the Illyrian civilization, the medieval period, and the era of Albania's national hero, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg. His research and public engagement have significantly contributed to advancing knowledge of the region's archaeological and historical heritage.

As Head of Cultural Heritage, Zefi oversees the management, preservation, and interpretation of Lezhë's most significant historical sites and museum collections. He has led numerous heritage conservation initiatives, including the restoration of monumental bronze sculptures in Lezhë and Shëngjin, as well as conservation projects within the Gjergj Kastrioti Memorial. His work also extends to the preparation and supervision of restoration projects for protected cultural

monuments, including the historic house of Father Gjergj Fishta, one of Albania's most celebrated literary figures.

Beyond conservation, Zefi plays an active role in promoting cultural heritage through research, public education, exhibitions, and institutional cooperation. As a representative of the Municipality of Lezhë, he participates in international cultural exchanges and official delegations, strengthening partnerships with European municipalities and cultural institutions, including the twin city of Spoleto, Italy.

Through his leadership, scholarship, and dedication to heritage preservation, Paulin Zefi continues to make a significant contribution to safeguarding Albania's archaeological and historical legacy while fostering greater public appreciation of the country's rich cultural heritage.

Voices from the ground - read following or view the full interview here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhKf6UjXCc4>

Civic engagement: I care deeply about the new generations—young people, students, and pupils in middle schools and even at the primary level. It is essential that they know their past; without knowledge of the past, they cannot understand where they are going. They need to understand their history, their cultural heritage—and the importance of that heritage—as well as the world and the Europe of which we are a part. We must prepare them for the future through specific projects, as these subjects are not typically covered in standard school curricula. We need to develop educational courses not only for students—including the youngest ones—but also for public administrators, so they better grasp the significance of cultural heritage and history, as well as the deep connections we share with the West—and specifically with Italy. Throughout our history—dating back to prehistoric times—we have always been linked to Italy, particularly Southern and Central Italy. We must place great emphasis on this; we hope to look to Italy as a model for our own future, given that—as the whole world knows—70% of cultural heritage is located in Italy, with 45% of that found in the city of Florence alone. While we may not be Italy, we possess many artifacts, cultural monuments, and heritage sites here in Albania that are comparable to Italy's in terms of historical, archaeological, and architectural value, and we hope to play a meaningful role in this context.

European identity: As a Director of Cultural Heritage—with at least twelve years of experience in the field—I have observed that our region (including the city of Lezhë, its surrounding villages, the town of Shëngjin, and all of Northern Albania) is home to numerous monuments, particularly those dating back to antiquity and the Middle Ages. These sites require intervention, conservation, and restoration so that future generations can appreciate our

glorious future and the culture we share with Western Europe; indeed, many of these monuments have strong historical ties to Italy and to Western Europe in general.

EU cultural policies: We hope to join the European Union as soon as possible. Once we are part of the EU—like other developed nations—I believe that through collaborative projects involving the local municipality, Albania’s Ministry of Culture, and the ministries of culture of other EU member states, we can launch major initiatives to preserve these cultural assets. We can invest, promote, and take action—while also training a new generation of specialists and experts in fields like cultural heritage, archaeology, and history—to show the world, and especially the West, who we truly are: a part of the West, as we have historically been and always will be.

Contributor Profile - Anton Ndreca - Archaeological Culture Specialist

Anton Ndreca - I am an archaeologist, academic and specialist in Albanian archaeological culture. My professional work is dedicated to the research, preservation and interpretation of Albania's rich archaeological heritage, contributing to a deeper understanding of the country's historical and cultural development. Throughout my career, I have developed extensive expertise in archaeological research, fieldwork and cultural heritage studies. I have participated in and supported projects focused on the documentation, study and protection of archaeological sites, combining academic research with a strong commitment to preserving Albania's historical legacy. My academic work also includes teaching, publications and collaboration with cultural and educational institutions. Through these activities, I contribute to advancing archaeological knowledge and sharing it with students, researchers and the wider public. I am particularly committed to promoting greater public appreciation of Albania's archaeological heritage and to ensuring that its historical resources are properly studied, protected and transmitted to future generations. I believe that archaeology is not only a way of understanding the past, but also an important tool for strengthening cultural identity, historical awareness and the connection between communities and their heritage. Through my research and professional engagement, I continue to contribute to the sustainable conservation of Albania's archaeological resources and to the promotion of its cultural heritage as an essential part of the country's identity and wider European historical context.

Voices from the ground - view full interview

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

Civic engagement: We need to prepare some new stuff on social media for example because nights are very very useful to all if you use incorrect way, maybe we need some let’s say some organization that can train us that can help us to. Let’s say to go on the next level and of course we ne the help of our government in order to prepare ourselves in the way.

European identity: Also members of my family when we discuss this kind of topic and they all say the same thing we need to be part of European Union. It's like not like a desire, but it's like a feeling a strong feeling that idea would need to be part of European Union because we are Europeans too, and that's why it's a strong feeling among young generation Albania because we need to be part. It's like an obligation to be part of European Union and what's European Union represents to not only to our continent to the whole world?

EU cultural policies: I am an archaeologist, actually on the asking this type of question meaning a lot because in order to be part of European Union, we need to protect our culture and we need to preserve it and to be able to. Let's say to create some new values from our addition and I'm think that Europe has done a lot for us and I hope they will do also in future a lot go to work in good stuff with this project and the other projects to help younger generation to do our bad in order to protect our culture.

Contributor Profile - Florind Myrtezaj - Project Coordinator



I am a dedicated Project Coordinator committed to delivering projects efficiently, on schedule and within scope. My work focuses on project planning, stakeholder communication and cross-functional team coordination, supporting the successful implementation of projects from initiation through completion.

I have strong organisational and problem-solving skills and am experienced in managing timelines, monitoring project progress, coordinating resources and ensuring clear communication among clients, team members and leadership. I pay close attention to detail and continuously look for ways to improve workflows, anticipate and mitigate risks, and contribute to process improvement.

I am known for my reliability, adaptability and collaborative approach. I believe that successful project coordination depends not only on achieving measurable results, but also on building strong and constructive working relationships among all stakeholders.

Whether managing multiple priorities or supporting strategic initiatives, I remain focused on maintaining high standards of quality and professionalism while ensuring that project objectives are effectively achieved.

Voices from the ground - view full interview

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CO0uiey_-Y

Civic engagement: I believe that these are very important projects that should be improved and should also be in courage to do more because like these, they have to more exchange as you have seen at Lezha least I has many hotspots of cultural heritage and history and even tourism our history Heritage goes our national hero Skënderbeu be where this is it's resting place, and we have all the castle that now quietly overseas, the city was infinite penetrable Fortress battleground for defending this right city that we are standing right here right now and projects like this they encourage further cultural exchange between our people, and I think that these are a must.

European identity: Citizen to the cultural heritage as we sold for groups, I think that there are multiple ways that we can inform people about this activities. One of them inform me directly, make them active active citizens with municipality of Lezha they can encourage further people to take part and then more activities they are the main heart of activities like this and also in the media written and visual media as well publicity it's a very strong influence in a way that we can do.

EU cultural policies: Policies prioritize "opening doors" to non-traditional audiences, allowing marginalized groups to take an active role in local heritage and events.

Strengthens democratic identity: Local networks and municipal partnerships build bottom-up trust, translating high-level EU democratic values into tangible local identities.

Contributor Profile - Besiona Simoni

Management Specialist / Regional Administration of Protected Areas, Lezhë Country

Besiona Simoni – Environmental Expert and Protected Areas Management Specialist

Besiona I am an environmental expert and a representative of the Regional Administration of Protected Areas (AdZM) in Lezhë, Albania. I focus on the conservation and sustainable management of protected natural areas, particularly the Vain-Kunë Lagoon, one of Albania's most important coastal ecosystems. As Manager of the Vain-Kunë Nature Reserve, I work to protect biodiversity and monitor emblematic species such as flamingos and the Dalmatian pelican, while balancing ecosystem conservation with sustainable management practices. I strongly promote sustainable tourism and

ecotourism through activities such as cycling, birdwatching and guided boat tours. My work aims to increase awareness of the area's natural heritage while supporting responsible local development and attracting both national and international visitors. I also raise awareness of environmental challenges, including biodiversity protection, protected-area management and coastal erosion in the Kunë area. I believe that effective conservation requires cooperation between public institutions, local communities and environmental stakeholders. Through my collaboration with the Municipality of Lezhë and other local and national institutions, I contribute to integrated territorial management and sustainable conservation strategies. My goal is to protect Albania's natural heritage while promoting responsible development, environmental awareness and stewardship for future generations.

Voices from the ground - view full interview

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

Civic engagement: Indeed, this is a crucial aspect of our promotional endeavors. While we have invested significant efforts in promotion, we must intensify our efforts to enhance our profile as a prominent destination, facilitate enhanced collaboration, and initiate projects that draw tourists from diverse global regions to visit us.

European identity: Our primary objective is to ensure that all citizens and local residents are informed and made aware of the issues. We also strive to involve them in activities such as environmental cleanups and, critically, in reporting violations on the ground. This assistance is invaluable to us, as it enables timely intervention to prevent illegal activities.

Eu cultural policies: In relation to the assistance you may provide or the measures that could be implemented for the protected areas, our primary requirement pertains to monitoring and guiding. We necessitate comprehensive training to effectively address these aspects and to facilitate the visitation of tourists to the most significant areas and key locations where they can observe the natural environment and biodiversity of the lagoons.

Contributor Profile - Renaldo Xhanej - Director of Tourism Lezhë, Municipality of Lezhë



I serve as the Director of Tourism for the Municipality of Lezhë, where I lead initiatives aimed at promoting the region as a cultural, historical and nature-based tourism destination. My role involves developing tourism strategies, improving visitor experiences and supporting the sustainable growth of Lezhë's tourism sector. I work closely with public institutions, local businesses, cultural organisations and environmental stakeholders to promote Lezhë's rich archaeological heritage, Adriatic coastline, protected natural areas and diverse cultural traditions. I focus on increasing the visibility of the municipality through destination marketing, tourism product development and partnerships that can encourage tourism throughout the year. I am particularly committed to

sustainable tourism and local economic development. I advocate for responsible tourism practices that protect the region's natural and cultural heritage while creating new opportunities for local communities. Through strategic planning, cooperation and promotion, I contribute to positioning Lezhë as an attractive and sustainable destination for both domestic and international visitors.

Voices from the ground - view full interview

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

Civic engagement: I'm Director of Tourism, I am dedicated to promoting and preserving our cultural heritage. To achieve this, I prioritize implementing best practices, providing comprehensive training to citizens, and effectively promoting our protected area. By doing so, we can safeguard our economy and expedite the development of our protected area.

European identity: The European community, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and our municipality of Lezhë, must establish a synergy to enhance and safeguard these cultural sites. This initiative will foster community awareness, enabling residents to develop a sense of self-awareness and actively participate in the preservation of their cultural heritage.

EU cultural policies: The impact is beneficial for our collective well-being, as it fosters improvements and community involvement, encompassing cultural aspects and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Given the synergy created by EU cooperation, it is imperative to develop cultural tourism, raise awareness about its preservation, and establish sustainable tourism practices.

It is more advantageous for us to collaborate with the community, NGOs, and operators to safeguard cultural tourism within our region.

Contributor Profile Llesh Prenga - Artist Rhapsode Instrumentalist, and Preserver of Albanian Folk Heritage



Llesh Prenga is a renowned Albanian rhapsode and instrumentalist, recognized as one of the most prominent figures in the cultural heritage and traditional folk music of the Municipality of Lezhë. Throughout his career, he has dedicated himself to preserving, performing, and promoting Albania's rich musical traditions, becoming a respected ambassador of the country's intangible cultural heritage.

Prenga is particularly celebrated for his mastery of traditional folk songs and dances, as well as for his commitment to safeguarding the distinctive musical traditions of northern Albania. An accomplished performer of the *lahuta* and the *çifteli*—two iconic instruments of Albanian folk music—he has played a vital role in ensuring that these centuries-old traditions continue to thrive and inspire new generations.

His performances at cultural festivals, heritage events, and public celebrations have helped keep the spirit of Albanian folklore alive while strengthening community identity and appreciation for traditional arts. Through his artistry, mentorship, and cultural advocacy, Llesh Prenga has made a lasting contribution to the preservation and promotion of Lezhë's rich cultural legacy.

Today, he remains a respected cultural figure whose lifelong dedication to traditional music and folklore continues to enrich Albania's artistic heritage and inspire audiences both locally and beyond.

Voices from the ground - view full interview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgZ3S9P03Wc>

Civic engagement: it is undeniable that Europe has made significant contributions to Albania's folklore. Notably, it has secured UNESCO recognition for the Malesise costume and the *lahuta* of the malesise, thereby preserving and promoting these cultural artifacts. Nevertheless, it is

imperative that Europe extends its support to ensure that a broader range of traditional costumes and instruments are recognized and protected by UNESCO.

European identity: Fortunately, the advent of democracy has facilitated communication with Europe, providing a valuable opportunity for the youth. Many of them have had the privilege of witnessing the experiences of their parents or relatives who have emigrated to European countries. This exposure has enabled them to gain insights into the European perspective on the well-being of the Albanian state and its citizens.

EU cultural policies: To be honest, Albania is part of Europe, and we are happy about it; successive governments have worked towards this, as we live on European soil. We will do our utmost to join the European community as soon as possible by diligently meeting all the requirements set by Europe.

Contributor Profile - Adelina Koleci - Nardis Farm Fishtë



Adelina Koleci is a dedicated professional at **Nardis Farm** in Fishtë, where she contributes to the promotion of sustainable agriculture, rural development, and agritourism. Through her work, she supports initiatives that showcase the rich agricultural traditions, local gastronomy, and natural heritage of the Lezhë region.

Committed to preserving rural landscapes and promoting locally produced food, Adelina actively participates in activities that connect visitors with authentic farm experiences. Her work emphasizes sustainable farming practices, environmental responsibility, and the value of local products in strengthening the regional economy and preserving cultural identity.

As a contributor to the development of rural tourism, Adelina helps create meaningful experiences that highlight the traditions of Fishtë, encouraging visitors to explore the area's agricultural heritage, cuisine, and community life. Through collaboration with local producers and tourism stakeholders, she supports initiatives that promote sustainable livelihoods and enhance the visibility of the region as a destination for authentic rural experiences.

Voices from the Field - full interview here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWjEDRhJ3IU>

Civic engagement: It is imperative to cultivate a profound love for one's country and firmly believe that through unwavering dedication and perseverance, any endeavor can be accomplished. Our journey commenced from humble beginnings, perhaps with a modest flock

of birds we had acquired. While profitability was not always a guaranteed outcome, it is through relentless effort, exertion, and unwavering determination that success can be achieved. For the past 15 years, we have dedicated ourselves to our work in the village of Fishta, alongside my husband. Presently, our two children have joined our team, each contributing in their unique manner, becoming invaluable sources of support and assistance.

European identity: Why not start by visiting our country, where we can welcome them as guests? Albania offers much more than just Fishta; it boasts many beautiful tourist destinations. God has blessed Albania with natural beauty, so why not host visits and excursions here? This is the greatest contribution one can make to Albania.

EU cultural policies: We have a variety of experiences here; foreigners come to visit as tourists but also work alongside us, lending a helping hand while spending two or three weeks on vacation. They contribute by sharing experiences from their home countries and insights into how they manage their businesses—since Europe is more advanced than us in this regard. We are moving towards Europe, but we still have work to do; we must accept this reality.

Personal Reflections

Participants expressed the following reflections:

- *"Before participating, I considered heritage mainly as monuments. Now I understand that traditions, language, music and local knowledge are equally important."*
- *"The consultation made me realise that safeguarding heritage is everyone's responsibility."*
- *"Dialogue between generations should become a regular activity rather than an occasional event."*
- *"European cooperation gives local communities the opportunity to learn from one another without losing their own identity."*
- *"Citizens need more opportunities to contribute to local cultural policies."*
- *"Digital tools should complement—not replace—face-to-face community participation."*

Some participants also expressed concerns:

- *"Many traditional practices risk disappearing because younger generations are moving away from rural areas."*
- *"Participation often depends on European projects, but more permanent local initiatives are needed."*
- *"Small municipalities sometimes lack financial and technical resources to support cultural heritage activities."*

Cultural Heritage & EU Values

Across all consultation activities, several common themes emerged regarding the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and European values.

Participants agreed that:

- *cultural heritage strengthens the sense of belonging to both local communities and Europe;*
- *protecting cultural diversity contributes to mutual respect and peaceful coexistence;*
- *democratic participation increases when citizens feel connected to their local identity;*
- *intergenerational dialogue is essential for preserving community knowledge;*
- *cultural heritage promotes inclusion by creating opportunities for participation regardless of age or social background;*
- *cross-border cooperation enriches local communities while reinforcing shared European values.*

Some participants also highlighted that European identity should complement—not replace—local and regional identities.

Key Moments

Several activities generated particularly meaningful discussions.

- The storytelling sessions encouraged participants to share personal memories connected to traditions, local landscapes and family history.
- Mixed discussion groups composed of Italian and Albanian participants generated new perspectives on common challenges affecting rural communities.
- Interactive mapping exercises revealed how places of memory contribute to citizens' sense of belonging.
- Young participants proposed innovative ways of preserving traditions through podcasts, social media and digital storytelling.
- During the final plenary discussion, participants collectively identified practical recommendations addressed to municipalities and cultural organisations.

Participant Comments

The consultation revealed several recurring recommendations.

Strengthening civic participation

- Citizens should be involved from the early stages of planning cultural initiatives.
- Local administrations should organise regular public consultations on cultural / natural heritage enhancement.
- Community participation should continue beyond the duration of European-funded projects.

Supporting young people

- Schools should integrate local heritage into educational activities.
- Young volunteers should be encouraged to participate in community cultural events.
- Exchanges between young people from different European countries should become more frequent.

Improving cooperation

- Municipalities, cultural associations and schools should work together more systematically.
- Greater cooperation between Italy and Albania could generate long-term cultural networks.
- More opportunities should be created for citizens to exchange experiences across borders.

Promoting sustainable heritage

- Traditional knowledge should be documented before it disappears.
- Digital technologies should be used to preserve oral history while maintaining community ownership.
- Cultural heritage should be considered a resource for sustainable local development and responsible tourism.

Future Follow-up Ideas

Participants proposed several actions for the continuation of the project:

- *Establish an annual Italy–Albania Citizens' Forum on Intangible Cultural Heritage.*
- *Create a bilingual digital platform where citizens can upload stories, photographs and oral histories.*
- *Develop a network of Youth Heritage Ambassadors involving schools and universities and elderly associations.*
- *Organise annual community heritage festivals alternating between Italy and Albania.*

- *Produce educational **European follow up project/initiatives for teachers focusing on local traditions and European citizenship.***
 - *Promote **participatory mapping of intangible cultural heritage involving citizens of all ages.***
 - ***Support small community-led projects through local micro-grants.***
 - *Create **permanent dialogue mechanisms between municipalities and citizens on cultural policies.***
 - *Expand **the consultation methodology to additional European partner countries participating in future CERV initiatives.***
 - ***Monitor the long-term impact of citizen participation through follow-up surveys and community workshops.***
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Overall Qualitative Findings

The consultation highlighted a **broad consensus that intangible cultural heritage represents a shared responsibility requiring active cooperation among citizens, public authorities and civil society.** Participants consistently recognised the importance of civic participation as a key factor in safeguarding traditions, strengthening social cohesion and promoting democratic values.

While perceptions differed regarding priorities and available resources, there was **widespread agreement that cross-border cooperation between Italy and Albania generated new knowledge, reinforced mutual trust and encouraged citizens to play a more active role in preserving cultural heritage** as a living component of European identity and sustainable community development.