**Usseaux demonstrates how volunteers enhance cultural heritage and environmental protection actions in small communities - 5th event of Project “BEYOND”**

Project “BEYOND – Rural Communities pushing BEYOND COVID-19” is co-funded by the European Union via the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (i.e. CERV Programme); call for proposals “Networks of Towns”. It has been approved for a grant amounting to €148.015,00. The project started in 01/12/2022 and it will be implemented until 30/11/2024 (duration: 24 months). The lead partner is the Municipality of Cestica and the partners include the Municipality of Heiningen (Germany), The Municipality of Ormož (Slovenia), Zavod Sopotniki (Slovenia), The Municipality of Cavriago (Italy), the Municipality of Usseaux (Italy) and Sásd és Térsége Nonprofit Kft (Hungary).

The 5th event of project BEYOND (Rural Communities pushing BEYOND COVID-19) was held from May 13th, 2024 – May 15th, 2024 in the Municipality of Usseaux, Italy. All activities of the event were held in-situ. The activities were organized in order to achieve the following objectives:

* To demonstrate how active citizenship continued to be promoted and encouraged during the pandemic period and how citizens retained a sense of belonging during this difficult period (COVID-19).
* To raise awareness on how volunteer-based actions contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and European identity.

On Day 1 of the event (Monday, May 13th, 2024), the Municipality of Usseaux organized an opening conference at the Punto Museo “Brunetta d’Usseaux” in Usseaux. The purpose of this first part was to introduce citizens to the town and its practices. It was emphasized from the beginning that the models created by Usseaux’s citizens are very specific due to the town being in a mountainous, sparse and remote area of Italy. The first presentation was on how the town conducts active governance via the MANSIA model. The presenter, Thomas Augier, described how the person assigned as the MANSIA regularly organizes efforts to assist citizens in times of need. It was emphasized that this model ensured that the community remained united in solidarity during the times of the COVID-19 pandemic. After this initial presentation, the other associations and bodies from the town presented on their activities. The presentations included the following:

* Pro Loco 5 Borgate – Thomas Augier
* Cooperativa Escartons – Marco Cipriani
* Biblioteca Comunale – Armanda Mellone
* Amici del Mulino Canton - Erica Anselmino
* Alpe Sport A.S.D. – Alessia Brunet

To close the first day, the participants took part in an online interactive survey regarding the participants feelings and opinions towards living in rural areas and cities. By taking in this approach, participants were able to discuss what governance models are working and what elements need to improve in their community. The first day ended with a networking dinner where local culinary dishes from the area were presented and enjoyed by the participants.

Day 2 of the event (Tuesday, May 14th, 2024) was organized as a series of site visits to areas of cultural significance. The visits focused on sites that have been revived and maintained by volunteers in the community. The first site visit was to the Fenestrelle Fortress where representatives and volunteers from Usseaux described the historical and cultural significance of the site while also describing how volunteers have ensured that the site has remained preserved over the years. As a means to show how Usseaux has preserved its cultural and culinary history, representatives of the municipality and volunteers from Amici del Mulino Canton association organized a demonstration of the revitalized water mill, which makes flour in the same way as it was 150 years ago. Participants were able to see how flour would be flavoured with locally-grown ingredients and had the opportunity to engage with local volunteers. By organizing a lunch and dinner event based on local food and tradition and seeing the outcomes of volunteer actions, participants were able to understand how volunteers have played a vital role in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in the Usseaux area.

On Day 3 (Wednesday, May 15th 2023) a project meeting was held in Usseaux, at the Punto Museo ““Brunetta d’Usseaux” in Usseaux. The meeting was held in a different format which allowed any interested participant to take part and add inputs to the project. At the meeting, the consortium discussed the project model. The organizers of the next events (from Sasd, Hungary and Ormož, Slovenia)

were able to talk about the contents of the next events, and the participants were able to provide their inputs and feedback about the event in Usseaux and the organization of future events in the project. By taking this approach, the partnership was able to set the dates for future events, understand what changes needed to take place to ensure more effective project implementation and move the project ahead in the upcoming months. To end the event, visitors were provided a guided tour of the dairy “Challier farm in Balboutet” where participants learned about how cultural/culinary assets of the region have been preserved via EU integration and the efforts of local citizens.

Via this approach to organizing and implementing the event, participants learned:

* How active governance models (such as “MANSIA”) that rely on the efforts of volunteers contribute to solidarity, mutual understanding and a sense of belonging in the community (even in times of crisis such as COVID 19);
* How the efforts of volunteers ensure that the cultural assets of rural areas are promoted and preserved;
* How citizens can engage in actions that preserve traditions, nature and cultural assets and that also

 contribute to EU integration

You can access the documents from the event on the following links:

* Agenda for the event (document “Agenda\_for\_Usseaux\_event.pdf”
* Presentations from Day 1 via this .zip file (“Final presentations – web”)
* A summary of the survey results – from Day 1 (document “Survey results - event 5.pdf”)
* Summary of the results of the event (“Event Description Sheet – Event 5)
* Photos

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