**Kick Off Meeting of CROCUS Project to Address Socio-Economic Challenges in Rural and Remote Areas through Cultural and Creative Tourism**

Aalborg, Denmark - April 19, 2024 - The University of Aalborg is pleased to announce the kick off meeting of the CROCUS project, which will take place from April 22 to 24, 2024, at Aalborg University. CROCUS, an acronym for "Cultural and Creative Tourism in Rural and Remote Areas: Sustainable Business Models, Cooperation, and Policies," aims to address socio-economic challenges faced by rural and remote areas (RRA) through the promotion of cultural and creative tourism (CCT).

RRA are rich in cultural heritage, yet many suffer from socio-economic issues such as an ageing population, out-migration, and low incomes. Cultural and creative tourism has the potential to alleviate these challenges by creating sustainable jobs and investment opportunities.

However, three key challenges and associated knowledge gaps must be overcome:

1. Place-Specific Business Models: Different types of cultural heritage and community needs require tailored business models.
2. Balanced and Sustainable Tourism Development: Tourism growth must be managed to ensure it is sustainable and benefits local communities.
3. Supportive Policies: Policies at different scales should facilitate cooperation between RRA.

CROCUS aims to tackle these challenges by:

* Generating knowledge about suitable CCT business models for different types of heritage and rural areas.
* Establishing eight cross-border living labs to prototype sustainable CCT business models.
* Developing macro-regional and cross-border policy scenarios for four EU macro-regions.
* Synthesizing knowledge and experience to create tools and resources for RRA across Europe.

The project features a multi-scalar research design, innovative cross-border living labs, and participatory processes for sustainable business model prototyping. The consortium includes leading scholars and practitioners with extensive experience in cross-border tourism development, stakeholder engagement, and policy analysis. CROCUS represents the first systematic study of cross-border CCT cooperation in RRA.

"We are excited to kick off the CROCUS project and work collaboratively to unlock the potential of cultural heritage as a driver of sustainable innovation in rural and remote areas across Europe," said Henrik Halkier Project Coordinator and Professor, Department of Culture and Learning · Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities

at the University of Aalborg.

CROCUS is coordinated by the University of Aalborg and involves ten countries, including Italy (University of Bergamo), the Netherlands (Association for Tourism and Leisure), Slovenia (University of Maribor), Finland (University of Oulu), Bulgaria (Zangandor Research Institute), Croatia (University of Rijeka), Estonia (University of Tallinn), Spain (Foundation Society and Culture), and Hungary (University of Pannonia).

For more information about the CROCUS project, please visit <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101132454/it>