

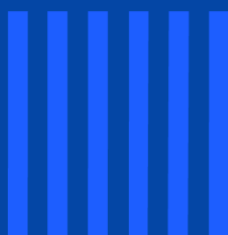
DELIVERABLE N. 3.1 • THE GUARDIANS OF THE SOURCE

“The Source” Handbook

A handbook of good practices:
fountains for environmental
education and heritage
engagement

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Summary

“The Source” Handbook is a free guide to using public fountains and springs as tools for learning about the environment and for connecting people with their local heritage. It was created by four organisations from Bulgaria, Croatia, Spain and Italy who work together in a new EU funded project, “THE GUARDIANS OF THE SOURCE”, and it is free to download from their websites.

The handbook has three parts:

1. The Introduction explains why fountains matter, who the handbook is for and how to use it.
2. The next part reviews tried and tested ways of using heritage in education and shares what the partners learned by working together on the ground in Croatia and Bulgaria, starting from a methodology called “HOP” for bringing heritage to life.
3. The Best Practices section is a gallery of initiatives from across Europe, each told through the same four lenses (context, approach, results and local feedback), so you can compare them and adapt them. Together they show that a “well used” fountain can link free public water and less plastic with culture, identity and community life.

Introduction

Context

“THE GUARDIANS OF THE SOURCE” is a two year cooperation project, co-funded by the European Union, that looks at public fountains and springs as shared cultural and environmental heritage. It brings together four organisations: the Red History Museum in Dubrovnik (Croatia), EUTOPIA in Italy, FUNPASOS in Spain, and Razvitie na Sotsialna Kapital in Bulgaria, which coordinates the project.

Public fountains and springs are located in squares, parks and promenades across Europe. They are easy to overlook, but answer several needs at once: they offer free and safe drinking water, they make it possible to refill instead of buying bottled water, reducing single use plastic, and they hold local memory and identity. This makes them low cost, familiar starting points for teaching people about water, sustainability and shared heritage. What educators and cultural workers in Europe have often lacked is a practical and shared guide for looking at fountains as tools for learning and engagement.

That is what this handbook offers. During 2026, the partners studied each other’s fountains and traditions through working visits in Croatia and Bulgaria, and gathered what they found into these pages so that others can use it too.

Purpose

This handbook is a practical guide, not an academic paper. It gathers proven ideas and examples for using fountains and springs as tools for environmental education and heritage engagement, so that educators, cultural workers and community groups do not have to start from scratch. It is deliberately not a technical manual for building or repairing fountains. The aim is to give a usable starting point, grounded in examples professionals can adapt to their own town, budget and audience.

Who this handbook is for

The handbook is written for three main groups:

1. Teachers and educators, in schools and beyond, can use it to build activities around a nearby fountain, linking lessons on water and sustainability to a place their learners already know.
2. People who work with culture and heritage, including museums, historic sites and local authorities, can use it to open their spaces to wider participation and to see fountains as living heritage.
3. Community groups and associations can use it to bring residents together around water as a shared good.

How to use this handbook

You can read the three parts this handbook is made of in order or dip into the one you need.

If you want the thinking behind the approach, start with the next part. If you want ideas you can act on straight away, go to the Best Practices, where every example follows the same four steps (context, approach, results and local feedback), so they are quick to scan and compare.

The handbook is free to download from the partners’ websites and is shared through partners’ communication channels, so please pass it on to colleagues, networks and local stakeholders.



Content

This part is the heart of the handbook: first the background and methods for working with heritage in learning, then the collection of examples from several European countries.

State of the Art

This part reviews well established ways of working with tangible heritage in education. It complements them with what the partners learned during their joint working visits in Croatia and Bulgaria in 2026, and with "HOP," a methodology for bringing heritage to life that three of the four current partners co-developed in a previous, now concluded, project.

Tangible heritage in education: methods and approaches

Cultural heritage is still often managed as a set of objects to be protected. Alongside this, however, a different approach has gained ground in Europe: heritage as a shared resource that communities help to define and use. The Council of Europe's Faro Convention (2005) describes heritage as a common good and affirms the right of everyone to take part in the cultural life of their community, shifting attention from the monument to the people who give it meaning. Seen this way, a fountain is not (only) stone and water but a place around which a community can gather.

Across the European Union, the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018 and the plan that followed encouraged an approach built on inclusion, sustainability and participation. Heritage education runs through it as a way to widen access and to link heritage with everyday sustainability, which gives a handbook like this one a firm footing. Two teaching traditions are especially useful in this context: a) object based learning, which uses real, tangible things as a hands on starting point, letting learners see, touch and question them rather than only read about them; b) place based learning, which ties activity to a specific local site, drawing on what the community already knows and making the subject feel immediate. Fountains are at the meeting point of both: they are real objects and fixed places woven into daily life.

From interpretation to environmental education

Good interpretation is what turns a site into something to learn from. Freeman Tilden, in his classic "Interpreting Our Heritage" (1957), described interpretation as revealing meaning and connections through real objects and firsthand experience, opposed to simply reciting facts, and he insisted that it must connect to the visitor's own life to hold their attention. Applied to a fountain, interpretation asks not only when it was built but what its water means to the people who use it, which is where engagement begins.

That step leads straight into environmental education: a public fountain is a visible part of the water system, so it can carry lessons about water as a shared and limited resource, about public space, and

about using less plastic. Learning that connects a familiar place to bigger questions, and pairs knowledge with the confidence to act, is precisely what education for sustainability aims for. Used well, a fountain becomes a small local doorway into those larger lessons.

Fountains earn their place in this handbook because they are already meeting points. Think about it: set in squares, parks and promenades, they invite people of different ages and backgrounds to stop and meet, and they make natural platforms for a message about water and sustainability. Inviting residents to help care for a fountain tends to build a sense of ownership and pride, which is the foundation that heritage engagement and environmental education rest on.

WHERE THESE IDEAS COME FROM

Council of Europe, Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, 2005. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention>

European Commission, European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage, 2018.

<https://culture.ec.europa.eu/document/european-framework-for-action-on-cultural-heritage>

European Commission, Cultural heritage and education. <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-heritage/cultural-heritage-in-eu-policies/cultural-heritage-and-education>

Freeman Tilden, Interpreting Our Heritage, 1957. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heritage_interpretation

UNESCO, Education for Sustainable Development. <https://www.unsdglearn.org/unesco-cross-cutting-and-specialized-sdg-competencies/>

The same methods, at work across Europe

Across Europe, some towns and cities already use their fountains, aqueducts and springs in exactly these ways: in the Athens suburb of Chalandri, the Cultural HIDRANT project brought a forgotten Roman aqueduct back to life, not as a monument to admire but as a working resource the neighbourhood helps to manage. Residents built a local archive from their own memories, oral histories and guided walks, and the water itself was put back to use for irrigation. It is object-based and place based learning turned into daily civic life, and a clear case of the Faro idea that heritage belongs to the people who give it meaning.

Other places show how heritage can hold a community's attention on water simply by staying alive: in Valencia, the Water Tribunal has met in the open every Thursday for a thousand years, settling irrigation disputes in front of anyone who cares to watch; it is at once a working court, a weekly public ritual and UNESCO listed heritage. The lesson is the same as in Chalandri, Greece: heritage that still does what it should keeps people interested far better than heritage kept behind glass.

A third group of examples brings the fountain up to date: digital maps turn scattered information into something people can use almost daily, as the Andalusian catalogue "Know your Sources" does in the pages that follow, and presenting fountains as relief from summer heat gives them a fresh public health purpose in a warming climate. These are simple ways to make an old resource matter now.

Some of this work has also been packaged so that others can copy it: the Global Network of Water Museums, supported by UNESCO, shares teaching tools and a method for mapping water heritage together with local communities, a reminder that a good practice is most useful when it is built to be widely shared. The examples in the next part of this handbook put these same methods to work in Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy and Spain.

Institutions are also learning to programme water as culture on a grand scale: in France, the Département of Isère has dedicated an entire cultural season, "Eau, quelle histoire !" (2026-2027), to

water: nine exhibitions and four thematic routes across the departmental museums, more than fifty events at partner sites and three artist commissions, most of them free, built with local partners, schools and media. The season also reaches the places where water was once everyday work: at the Domaine de Vizille, fashion and graphic design students from the Lycée Argouges in Grenoble hung “Eau Utile / Eau Puissante”, a series of textile studies of water’s states, forces and uses, inside the estate’s old lavoir, the communal wash house. The season runs until September 2027, so its results are still to come, but the model, a local authority with real water responsibilities spending a whole season telling water’s story, is one to watch.



“Eau Utile / Eau Puissante”, textile studies by students of the Lycée Argouges (Grenoble), hung in the lavoir of the Domaine de Vizille for the Isère cultural season “Eau, quelle histoire !”. Photo: EUTOPIA.

WHERE THESE EXAMPLES COME FROM

Cultural HIDRANT, Chalandri (Athens), Urban Innovative Actions programme. <https://culturalhidrant.eu>

Water Tribunal of the plain of Valencia, UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (2009). <https://tribunaldelasaguas.org>

Global Network of Water Museums (WAMU-NET), under UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme. <https://www.watermuseums.net>

“Eau, quelle histoire !”, cultural season of the Département de l’Isère (2026–2027). <https://saisonculturelle.isere.fr>

What the partners learned in Croatia and Bulgaria

In April 2026 the partners met in Dubrovnik for three days, hosted by the Red History Museum, and worked with the city's fountains on three themes: fountains as cultural heritage, fountains as an everyday water service, and water as a public good. Specifically, they: 1. visited local communities and places, including the Gruž market, an environmental group that removes plastic from the sea and rivers, and the museum itself. 2. followed a walking tour that traced Dubrovnik's water from its source, along the old aqueduct, to the historic Onofrio fountains. 3. mapped fountains in the field using a simple phone app, photographing each one and noting details about it. 4. sat down together to compare notes, swap examples and plan next steps.

The meeting confirmed the first examples for this handbook, including the “2DRINK campaign” from 2hands Macerata (Italy), and the resident led Vodek fountains on the Lapad promenade in Dubrovnik. The Bulgarian partner previewed the Ruse fountain stories, the Italian partner shared its Macerata fountains walking tour, and the Spanish partner led the design of a shared form for recording fountains in the field.

Then, in June 2026, the Red History Museum brought the city's fountains into contemporary art: the Dubrovnik painter Klara Knego took the stone fountains and their carved faces, the maskeroni and vodorige that have watched passers-by for centuries, as the subject of the solo exhibition “Grad 020” at the Sebastian Art Gallery. The opening gathered the community to look again at details they pass every day, and the practice (how to activate a fountain as a site of cultural participation through art) is now part of the partners' shared toolbox.



A maskeron water spout in Dubrovnik's Old Town, one of the city's carved “stone guardians”. Photo: Red History Museum.



Klara Knego, from the exhibition “Grad 020”, Sebastian Art Gallery, Dubrovnik, 2026: a maskeron reinterpreted. Image courtesy of the artist and the Red History Museum.

In early July 2026, the partners met for the second capacity-building event, in Ruse and the Ruse region of Bulgaria, hosted by Development of Social Capital under the title “Water and People: Natural, Cultural and Social Heritage”. Where Dubrovnik had shown a walled city built around one aqueduct, Ruse offered a contrasting body of water heritage: a Danubian city whose fountains, riverfront and port shape public life, and a rural hinterland where springs are held as spiritual and communal assets.

The partners again worked in several ways: 1. a guided tour read the fountains of the city centre, the Courthouse fountain, the fountain at the Municipality building and the fountains of the pedestrian area, as both cultural heritage and living civic infrastructure, alongside the Danube riverfront. 2. site visits then followed the water out of the city: to the holy spring (ayazmo) of St Marina Monastery at Karan Varbovka, to the Gyur karst spring at Buzovets and along the Rusenski Lom eco-trail, linking water to spirituality, biodiversity and local communities. 3. facilitated discussions worked through set prompts, water as a driver of local development and water as intangible cultural heritage, while field data collection and a “Water and People” photo challenge.

For this handbook, the Bulgarian meeting did two things: a) it consolidated the Ruse strand of good practice presented in the gallery that follows, from the roadside fountains of the region to the springs and legends of Lipnik Forest Park, and it added a register that Dubrovnik had only hinted at: sacred water. The springs of the Ruse region show that fountains teach not only history and ecology but also the beliefs and rituals that communities build around water. b) facilitated partners’ review of the shared pool of good practices, confirmed the contributions from Italy (2DRINK), Spain (the springs and aquifers of Extremadura and the Andalusian catalogue Know your Sources) and Croatia (the artist’s exhibition in Dubrovnik and the practices gathered by the Red History Museum), and agreed the final collection timetable so that this handbook could be completed, against a working target of twenty practices collected and the twelve published here.



The chapel of the holy spring (ayazmo) at St Marina Monastery, Karan Varbovka, visited by the partners in July 2026. Photo: Development of Social Capital (DSC).

The HOP methodology

“HOP”, short for History of People, is a [methodology](#) for changing the way history and heritage are shared with visitors. It was co-created by three of the partners in this consortium, EUTOPIA, the Red History Museum and Development of Social Capital, within a previous European cooperation project (HOP - History of People) co-funded by the Creative Europe programme (2022-2025, grant agreement n. CREA-CULT-2022-COOP 101098484). Over three years the methodology was built, tested and validated in Italy, Croatia, Bulgaria and North Macedonia, then released free of charge under a Creative Commons licence.

The HOP methodology starts from a familiar problem: a guided tour that simply lists correct facts often leaves people bored, while a “well made” experience, even at a small site, can stay with them for years. Defining what “well made” means was the HOP consortium's work. It resulted in the HOP methodology and its three pillars, which a good heritage experience should meet at the same time.

Getting the facts right

the experience should be as accurate as possible in its evidence and in how it explains the past, so that what people take away is sound.

Telling a human story

the experience should build stories that let people connect with the human beings who actually lived in the past, not just with dates and objects.

Designing for people

the experience should be shaped around the people it is meant for, with real attention to who they are and how they will encounter it.

The HOP methodology also argues that no single organisation usually has all three strengths at once. The answer is teamwork: museums and heritage sites are encouraged to join forces with businesses, associations and universities, sharing resources and skills around common goals. To make this practical, the HOP methodology offers the [HOP Canvas](#), a one page planning tool that teams use to design, test and improve heritage experiences that are accurate, engaging and memorable. The methodology was piloted in all four partner countries.

For this handbook, the HOP methodology is a useful lens for reading the examples that follow. A fountain becomes a real heritage experience when its history, its human stories and the needs of its visitors are handled together, which is the balance the best examples in the next part manage to strike.

LEARN MORE

[the HOP \(History of People\) methodology](#) and the [HOP Practical Guide \(PDF\)](#), EUTOPIA, associazioneeutopia.org.



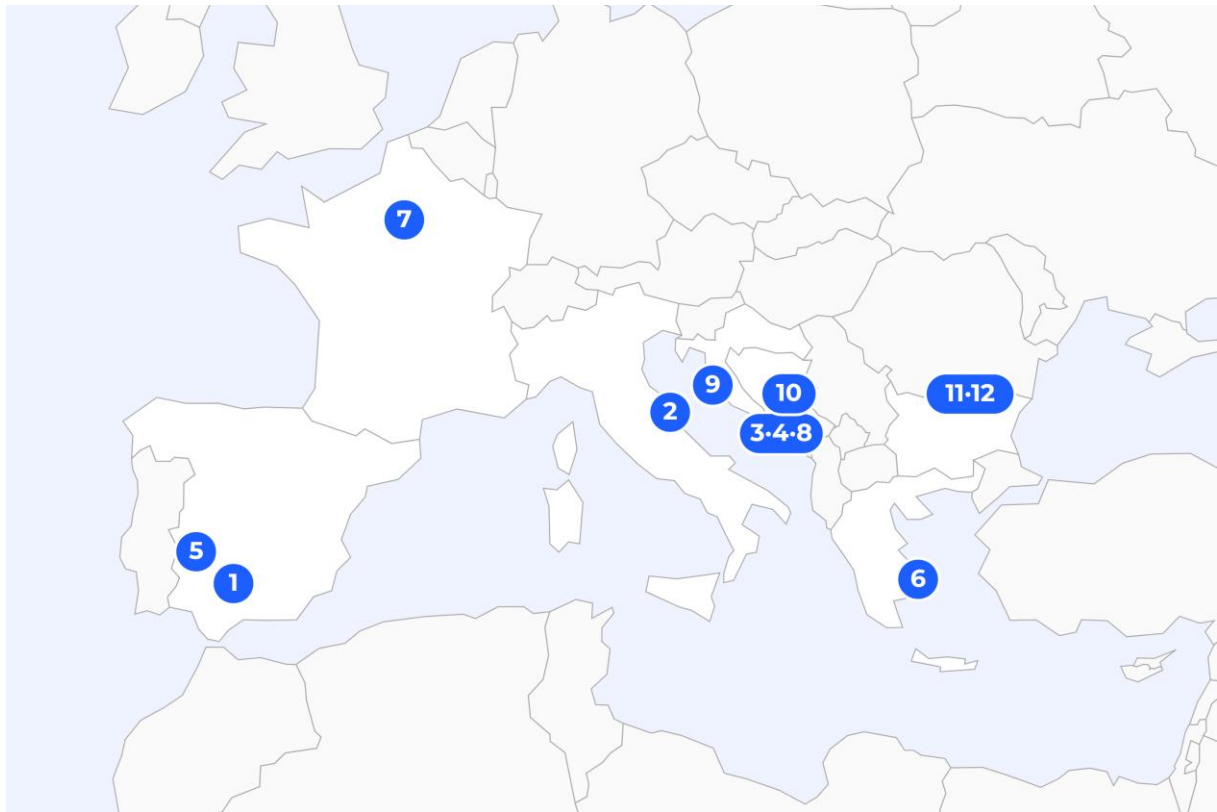
Best practices

This part is a gallery of twelve initiatives: nine were gathered by the partners in their own countries and through their wider networks; two, Chalandri and Paris, are European case studies using the same methods, researched and proposed by Susannah Bain, historian specialising in the history of water management and Grants Advisor at KB, the National Library of the Netherlands; the Sarajevo practice, MAP4WATER, was shared by the institute behind it, the Green Building Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Green Council), which has been mapping and championing the city's public fountains for more than five years. They are grouped as a shared toolbox, ordered so you move from digital tools, through community projects, to heritage and storytelling. Every example follows the same four steps, so it is easy to scan and compare: Context, the situation and the need; Approach, what was done and how; Results, what it achieved, with real figures; and Local feedback, how people responded.

THE TWELVE PRACTICES SUM UP:

1	Know your Sources ANDALUSIA, SPAIN	A citizen catalogue of 12,000+ springs, every record validated by university science.
2	2DRINK MACERATA, ITALY	A grassroots campaign turning the fountains a town already has into a real service.
3	Maritimo Recycling DUBROVNIK, CROATIA	Plastic from seas, rivers and lakes remoulded into self-financing design objects.
4	Vodek fountains DUBROVNIK, CROATIA	Seven promenade drinking fountains proposed and chosen by residents.
5	Springs and fountains of Extremadura EXTREMADURA, SPAIN	Walking routes reading water, landscape, memory and community as one system.
6	Cultural HIDRANT CHALANDRI, GREECE	A Roman aqueduct switched back on as shared water, co-managed by the neighbourhood.
7	Wallace fountains PARIS, FRANCE	An 1872 philanthropic gift turned into a citywide anti-plastic water network.
8	The Great Onofrio's Fountain DUBROVNIK, CROATIA	A 1438 fountain restored and stewarded by a citizens' heritage society.
9	Trg Pet bunara ZADAR, CROATIA	A siege-era cistern preserved intact and reborn as a beloved public square.
10	MAP4WATER SARAJEVO, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	A citizen map of the city of a thousand fountains, awarded the New European Bauhaus prize.
11	Roadside fountains RUSE REGION, BULGARIA	Fountains built by families as gifts to travellers, documented before they disappear.
12	The White Girl and the Black Girl LIPNIK PARK, BULGARIA	Healing springs and their guardian sculptures, restored and kept alive by their community.

THE TWELVE PRACTICES · WHERE THEY ARE



- 01 Andalusia, Spain
- 02 Macerata, Italy
- 03 Dubrovnik, Croatia
- 04 Dubrovnik, Croatia
- 05 Extremadura, Spain
- 06 Chalandri, Greece

- 07 Paris, France
- 08 Dubrovnik, Croatia
- 09 Zadar, Croatia
- 10 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 11 Ruse region, Bulgaria
- 12 Lipnik park, Bulgaria

The twelve practices of this handbook, from Andalusia to the Ruse region. Numbers follow the order of the gallery; Dubrovnik carries practices 3, 4 and 8, and the Ruse region practices 11 and 12. Base map: Natural Earth (public domain).



The fountain of Plaza de la Fuenseca, Córdoba, one of 12,000+ sites in the catalogue. Photo: FUNPASOS / conocestusfuentes.com.

Know your Sources, the citizen catalogue of Andalusia's springs (Spain)

ANDALUSIA, SPAIN

A citizen-science catalogue that has mapped more than 12,000 springs and fountains across Andalusia, every record checked by university hydrogeologists.

CONTEXT

Springs are the visible face of groundwater, and groundwater is under pressure everywhere: climate change, intensive pumping and land-use change are drying out sources that have watered Andalusian villages for centuries. Yet most of these thousands of small rural springs appeared in no official inventory, so a spring could silt up, be built over or simply vanish without anyone recording that it had ever existed. What is not documented cannot be defended.

RESULTS

More than 12,000 springs and fountains catalogued across the eight Andalusian provinces, over 35,000 georeferenced photographs, and a network of some 3,000 active collaborators, from village elders to doctoral researchers: one of Europe's largest participatory hydrogeological databases. The dataset now underpins doctoral theses and peer-reviewed research on drought and climate change, and the project has collected national and regional awards for citizen science and open data.

APPROACH

Conoce tus Fuentes (Know your Sources), launched in 2007 by the Water Institute of the University of Granada with the regional Ministry of Environment of the Junta de Andalucía, answers with citizen science. Anyone can file a standardised datasheet on an open web GIS portal: coordinates, historical names, flow state, architectural features, photographs and local lore. University hydrogeologists check every submission before publication, and seminars, school workshops, guided walks and an annual photo contest keep the volunteer network growing. The data feed monographs, atlases and thematic maps.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

Two decades in, the lesson is plain: people volunteer when science connects to the heritage they already care about, and volunteered data becomes scientifically robust when experts validate it. Any partner city can copy the recipe with free tools: a shared form, a public map, a university that checks the facts.



Drinking from a reusable 2DRINK bottle on the Adriatic coast, from the campaign by 2HANDS, Macerata. Photo: 2HANDS.

2DRINK, Macerata and the Marche region (Italy)

MACERATA, ITALY

A grassroots campaign that turns the fountains a town already has into a real service, helping people swap bottled water for tap water.

CONTEXT

Italy gets through about 11 billion plastic bottles a year, roughly 7 billion of which are never recycled, which makes it the biggest user in Europe. With no widespread bottle deposit scheme, reuse stays low while waste and emissions stay high. 2HANDS, an environmental non profit set up in 2021, decided to tackle the everyday habit at its root, with simple ideas that anyone can copy.

RESULTS

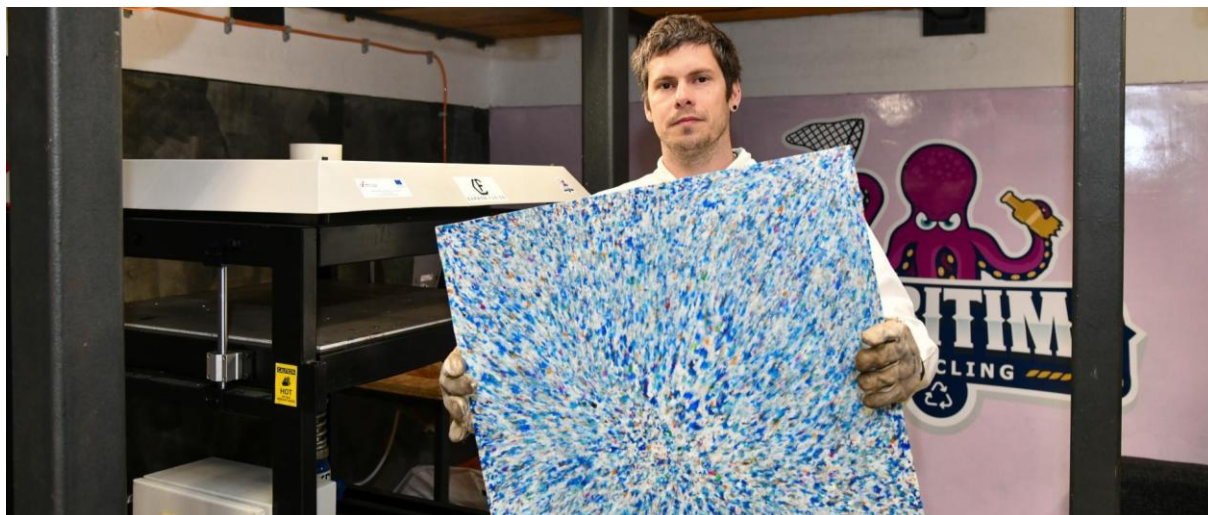
2DRINK was chosen as one of the first examples when the partners met in Croatia, presented by the 2HANDS team, Giulia Rapazzetti and Hadil Tarhouni. In Macerata the project is still in its planning stage, with the next steps being to map local water points, bring in volunteers and launch it locally. Its strength is a low cost, easy to copy model that builds on what a town already has.

APPROACH

Its 2DRINK campaign works in three easy steps: map the public fountains and dispensers a town already has, noting where they are and whether they work; check each one to see if it is usable or needs repair; and then bring the network to life with a simple online map, a QR code, stickers around the town and a nudge towards reusable bottles. In the Marche region it links up with a fountains walking tour in Macerata, prepared with EUTOPIA, that presents the town's fountains as a bridge between heritage and everyday sustainability.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

The campaign runs on direct action and community spirit, and its appeal is a clear, shareable message: small actions add up. Choosing a fountain over a bottle is an easy step, and simply making water easy to find is what gets people to take it.



The Maritimo Recycling workshop in Dubrovnik: shredded plastic remoulded into panels. Photo: Maritimo Recycling, via the Red History Museum.

Maritimo Recycling, from water waste to design objects, Dubrovnik (Croatia)

DUBROVNIK, CROATIA

A non-profit that collects plastic from seas, rivers and lakes and remoulds it into sunglasses and everyday objects, so every clean-up pays for the next one.

CONTEXT

Maritimo Recycling is a Dubrovnik-based non-profit association founded in 2021, dedicated to cleaning not only the Adriatic Sea but also Croatia's rivers and lakes, and to turning the plastic collected from all of them into durable everyday products. What began as informal beach clean-ups on fishing trips grew into a small in-house workshop and a wider team, which now organises clean-up actions along coastlines, riverbanks and lakeshores alike.

RESULTS

More than 300 volunteers have taken part in clean-up actions across seas, rivers and lakes, collecting over 5,000 kg of plastic waste, and eight employees now work daily on recycling in the workshop. The association collaborates with the Dubrovnik Museums, has produced items for the seafood brand Rio Mare, is developing sample products for Coca-Cola from collected bottle caps, and its approach has been recognised with industry awards.

APPROACH

The flagship product, Floaties, are polarised sunglasses made from ten recycled plastic bottle caps each, shredded and injection-moulded in-house into a lightweight frame that, fittingly, floats. The same shredded material is also cast into keychains shaped like local wildlife, coasters, earrings and custom commissions, with every design and mould made entirely on site. Every euro from sales stays inside the association, funding new clean-up actions, boat rental, equipment, workshops and staff wages; a broken frame can be sent back, reground and remoulded into a brand-new pair. The workshop also employs people placed through the probation office, adding a social dimension to the environmental one.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

Presented by the Red History Museum during the project's capacity building in Croatia, Maritimo shows how turning collected plastic into sellable, wearable objects gives clean-up work a visible, self-financing outcome: a model any partner, coastal or inland, could replicate at a small scale.



One of the seven Vodek drinking fountains on the Lapad promenade, Dubrovnik (2025). Photo: Red History Museum / City of Dubrovnik.

Vodek fountains, Lapad promenade, Dubrovnik (Croatia)

DUBROVNIK, CROATIA

Seven public drinking fountains delivered on Dubrovnik's busiest seaside promenade, proposed and chosen by residents themselves.

CONTEXT

In a Mediterranean city like Dubrovnik the summer heat is intense, and people need water along promenades, playgrounds and walking paths. Yet public drinking water was almost absent in the Lapad district, and the promenade, one of the city's most used public spaces, had none at all. Away from home, the only option was to buy a plastic bottle, even though water is a public right.

RESULTS

The project was included in the city's 2025 budget and delivered seven stainless steel Vodek fountains along the Babino Kuk promenade and near the Solitudo playground, at a total cost of 56,200 euro, about 8,000 euro per fountain. Each one is a three in one design, with a tap to drink from, a nozzle to refill a reusable bottle, and a basin at floor level so animals can drink too. Vodek is an award winning Croatian design, made in Zadar and installed at more than 80 places around the country.

APPROACH

The project used the city's participatory budgeting scheme, a simple form of direct democracy in which residents propose ideas, vote for them online with a secure national login, and see the winners funded. Lapad residents shaped the idea in community workshops in 2023, an expert panel confirmed it in June 2024, and residents voted it through later that month.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

The city sums it up in the residents' own words: your neighbourhood, your rules, your budget. The appeal is that the idea came from residents, was voted for by residents and serves residents, with no red tape in between, putting free water exactly where it is needed most.



Left: part of the hydraulic heritage ensemble of Valverde de Burguillos, protected as a Site of Cultural Interest. Right: signposts of a “Ruta de las Fuentes”, one of the fountain walking routes of Extremadura. Photos: FUNPASOS / Junta de Extremadura.

Springs and fountains of Extremadura (Spain)

EXTREMADURA, SPAIN

Regional research and walking routes that read springs and fountains as a living system linking water, landscape, memory and community.

CONTEXT

In Extremadura the climate means hot, dry summers and constant water scarcity, which has shaped where people settle, how they farm and how they build for thousands of years. Villages grew up around springs, and their very layout follows the logic of managing water. From the late 1950s, machines, piped water and people moving to the cities left the old public springs without a job, and they slowly passed from tools of survival into symbols of shared memory.

RESULTS

The small village of Valverde de Burguillos, home to about 280 people, shows the idea in practice: a protected water heritage site where every spring connects to irrigation channels, orchards, animal paths and shared spaces, and where an old washing place now serves as a meeting spot for young people. The routes add rest areas, leaflets and maps, and draw in schools, guides and volunteers.

APPROACH

The regional research, presented by FUNPASOS, treats water heritage as a whole system rather than a set of separate monuments, linking springs, animal troughs, water wheels, storage tanks and mills, and joining the physical structures to the stories, healing traditions and legends attached to them. This thinking is put to work through heritage walking routes, such as the fountains route in Navalmoral de la Mata, created in 2013 with schools and guided tours, and a 7.5 kilometre circular springs route at Jaraicejo, near the Monfragüe National Park.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

The research describes springs as democratic architecture, built for and by the community, unlike the castles and cathedrals tied to the powerful. As one of the cited authors puts it, springs do not simply point to the past; they connect us to the changes that have shaped our present and will shape our future.



Surviving arches of Hadrian's Aqueduct at Nea Ionia, on the aqueduct's course through the northern suburbs of Athens. Photo: George E. Koronaiois, via Wikimedia Commons.

Cultural HIDRANT, Chalandri (Athens, Greece)

CHALANDRI, GREECE

A forgotten Roman aqueduct switched back on as shared water and a living heritage archive, co-managed by the neighbourhood.

CONTEXT

Beneath the Athens suburb of Chalandri runs Hadrian's Aqueduct, a Roman channel completed around 140 AD that carried water to the city for almost 1,800 years before falling out of use. Chalandri had grown into a busy consumer district with little green space and little sense of its own heritage, and the aqueduct, though it still carried water, was hidden underground and largely forgotten, its flow lost to the sea.

RESULTS

The project aimed to regenerate about 8,500 square metres of public space, build roughly five kilometres of water network with two mobile tanks, and save an estimated 25,000 cubic metres of drinking water a year by using aqueduct water for irrigation. A digital local history archive was launched, and the idea now feeds a wider revival of Hadrian's Aqueduct across Athens. These are the project's own targets and outputs; an independent evaluation of the finished results has not yet been published.

APPROACH

Between 2020 and 2024, with European Urban Innovative Actions funding, the municipality and the Athens water company reactivated the aqueduct as a civic resource. Residents built a local archive from their own memories, oral histories, guided walks and sensory mapping, feeding a digital storytelling platform and a public festival. In parallel the project laid a network to carry the aqueduct's non-potable water for irrigation, and set out to form a citizen water community to help manage it.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

Response is best read through participation rather than survey data. By 2022 around sixty residents had registered early interest in joining the water community, and the archive and festival work drew people in as contributors rather than onlookers. The project's own reviewers note, honestly, that a living community around the water takes time to grow and cannot simply be designed into being.



Left: André Gill, *Une fontaine Wallace* (Musée Carnavalet, Paris). Right: a worker shuts off the water supply of a frozen Wallace fountain, December 1919 (Bibliothèque nationale de France). Both via Wikimedia Commons.

Paris: Wallace fountains and sparkling-water fountains (France)

PARIS, FRANCE

An 1872 philanthropic gift turned into a citywide, anti-plastic public water network run by a re-municipalised utility.

CONTEXT

During the 1870 to 1871 siege of Paris, drinking water became scarce and costly for the poor. The British art collector Richard Wallace donated fifty cast-iron drinking fountains, designed with the sculptor Charles-Auguste Lebourg, to give free clean water and an alternative to alcohol. The first opened in 1872 and drew long queues; the dark green fountains, their four caryatids standing for kindness, simplicity, charity and sobriety, are now a symbol of Paris.

RESULTS

Eau de Paris distributes 563,000 cubic metres of drinking water a day at one of the lowest prices in the region, keeps about 390 fountains open through winter for vulnerable people, and has retrofitted five Wallace fountains with hidden misting crowns for hot days. In 2022 it marked the fountains' 150th anniversary by installing an original in the courtyard of the Musée Carnavalet, reframing the working network as heritage worth interpreting.

APPROACH

Since 2010 the water service has been run by Eau de Paris, a publicly owned company that manages the whole cycle from source to fountain. It treats the network as both heritage and behaviour change: it maintains around 120 historic Wallace fountains and 17 free sparkling-water fountains, added modern refill masts as a 2024 Olympics legacy, and runs a "Here, I choose Paris water" scheme with more than 1,100 shops that refill bottles for free.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

Eau de Paris publishes an annual user survey. In 2025 an independent agency polled a representative sample of 1,000 Parisians: 87% judged tap-water quality satisfactory, up three points on the year, and eight in ten drink tap water at home, while exclusive bottled-water use fell from 21% to 17%. The utility notes honestly that it commissions the survey itself, though the method and sample are published and the results are stable year on year.



The Great Onofrio's Fountain in Dubrovnik, with the reduced dome that replaced the cupola lost in the 1667 earthquake. Photo: via the Red History Museum.

The Great Onofrio's Fountain, Dubrovnik (Croatia)

DUBROVNIK, CROATIA

A fountain built in 1438 at the end of a twelve-kilometre aqueduct, still flowing today and restored not by the state but by a citizens' heritage society.

CONTEXT

Built in 1438, the Great Onofrio's Fountain was the visible end point of the old Dubrovnik aqueduct, which carried drinking water twelve kilometres from the spring of Rijeka dubrovačka into the city walls. Designed by the Neapolitan architect and hydraulic engineer Onofrio della Cava, the polygonal fountain has sixteen carved mascarons through which water still flows today, and holds the highest, zero-category protection status. Its original cupola was far more monumental: the Great Earthquake of 1667, which killed roughly a fifth of Dubrovnik's population, destroyed the dome, and it was never rebuilt in its original form.

RESULTS

Nearly six centuries after it was built, the fountain still delivers drinking water through its sixteen mascarons and remains an everyday meeting point of the old town. Its restored stonework stands as visible proof that citizens, and not only institutions, keep the city's water heritage alive.

APPROACH

In 2016 the fountain underwent a full restoration led not by a state agency but by the Society of Friends of Dubrovnik Antiquities (DPDS), a heritage association founded in 1968 by citizens and enthusiasts devoted to protecting the city's cultural monuments. DPDS financed roughly 1.5 million kuna of conservation works, carried out by the Dubrovnik construction firm Građevinar Quélin in partnership with the Croatian Conservation Institute's Split office, combining civic initiative with professional restoration expertise.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

For the partners, the key ingredient is civic ownership: a centuries-old piece of water infrastructure stays alive not through top-down management alone but through a local heritage society willing to fund and steward its own restoration, a model directly transferable to any partner town with an ageing public fountain and an engaged citizens' association.



The five stone wellheads of Trg Pet bunara in Zadar, above the sixteenth-century underground cistern. Photo: via the Red History Museum.

Trg Pet bunara, the Square of the Five Wells, Zadar (Croatia)

ZADAR, CROATIA

A sixteenth-century siege cistern crowned by five stone wellheads, preserved intact and reborn as one of Zadar's best-loved public squares.

CONTEXT

Trg Pet bunara, the Square of the Five Wells, was raised in the second half of the sixteenth century, when Zadar lived under constant threat of Ottoman attack. Above a former defensive moat the city built a huge underground cistern for drinking water, its surface marked by the five decorative wellheads that gave the square its name, designed to guarantee the population a water supply if the city came under siege.

RESULTS

Once its defensive and water-supply function faded, the square was not abandoned but reused: today it is one of Zadar's best-loved public spaces, framed by the Captain's Tower on one side and the Queen Jelena Madijevka Park on the other. It regularly hosts summer concerts and civic events and remains a favourite spot for evening walks, its original stone fabric fully preserved while its function shifted from military necessity to everyday civic life.

APPROACH

What set Zadar's system apart was its reach beyond the walls: water was channelled into the cistern by an aqueduct running all the way from Vransko jezero (Lake Vrana), a genuine engineering feat for its time. The system gave the city both a stable, secure water supply and a strategic advantage in wartime, and stands as a symbol of the technical sophistication of its sixteenth-century builders.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

For the partners, Pet bunara shows how a purely functional piece of water heritage can be preserved intact while gaining an entirely new civic life, without erasing the visible trace of its original purpose: a directly transferable model for partner cities with disused wells, cisterns or reservoirs.



A historic public fountain (česma) in Sarajevo. Photo: MAP4WATER / Green Building Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

MAP4WATER, Sarajevo City of Thousand Fountains (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

SARAJEVO, BOSNIA AND
HERZEGOVINA

A community-driven map of the city of a thousand fountains, awarded the New European Bauhaus prize and pushing public water back onto the political agenda.

CONTEXT

Sarajevo has built and cherished public fountains for centuries: more than a thousand of them, each with its own design, story and legend, made drinking water part of everyday public life. After the 1992–1995 war the fountains slipped down the list of priorities: many remain unrestored, few new ones are built, while climate change, paving and concrete push urban temperatures up and bottled water is promoted despite abundant natural sources.

RESULTS

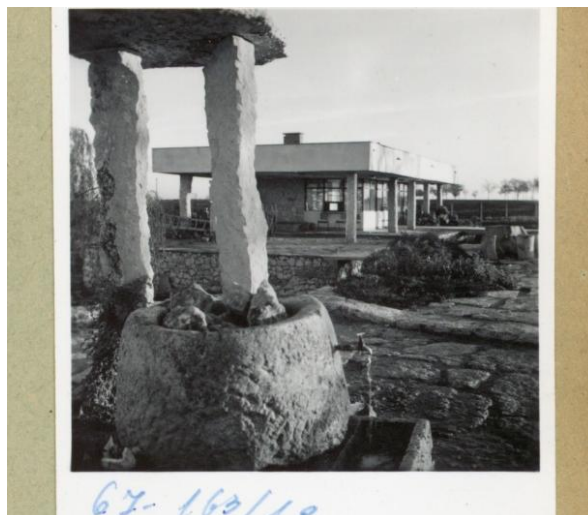
The MAP4WATER map lets residents and visitors locate public fountains and read each one's location, history and cultural significance, with QR codes on the fountains themselves planned next. A member of the Sarajevo Canton Assembly tabled an initiative, adopted by the Canton Government, for a cost-benefit analysis and action plan for the fountains, and the recognition of water as a public right is now being pursued through constitutional amendments at Federation level. Citizens donated artworks and joined fundraising for the restoration of the Queen Katarina Fountain.

APPROACH

MAP4WATER, initiated by the Green Building Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, began by surveying the condition of the city's fountains, recording each one on a field card, and grew through public discussions with citizens, public authorities, academia, civil society and international partners. Political support and the credibility brought by the New European Bauhaus Award turned a local survey into a broader platform, and the council now works on the map, on advocacy and on strategic documents for the fountains' future.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

The strongest lesson is that fountains are not just infrastructure: people attach memories, stories and a sense of belonging to them, and are willing to engage and take responsibility when treated as partners in preservation rather than users of a service. That genuine involvement, more than any institution, is what carries the initiative.



Roadside fountains of the Ruse region, in pages from an archival photographic album. Photos: State Archives, Ruse, provided by Development of Social Capital (DSC).

Roadside fountains of the Ruse region (Bulgaria)

RUSE REGION, BULGARIA

The roadside fountains that once watered travellers between Ruse and its villages: hospitality built as public infrastructure, documented before it disappears.

CONTEXT

Before modern roads and piped water, travellers between Ruse and villages such as Basarbovo, Ivanovo, Nikolovo and Chervena Voda depended on roadside fountains. Set along old roads and agricultural routes wherever a spring surfaced, they watered travellers, farmers, shepherds and animals, and the small resting places built around them grew into natural stopping points and modest centres of community life.

RESULTS

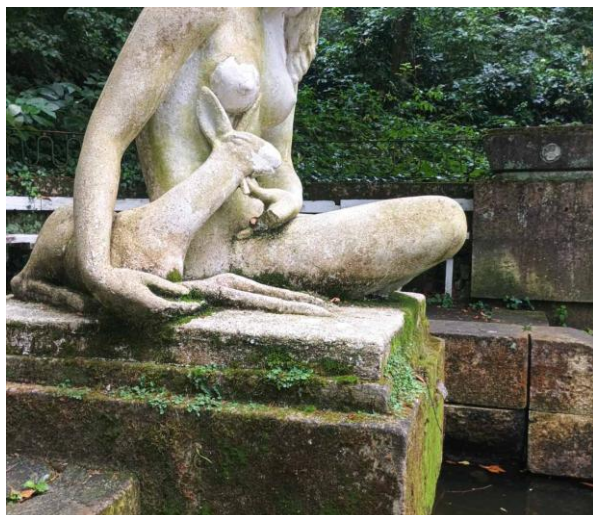
Some structures survive with their inscriptions, stories and symbols of hospitality intact; many others have been neglected or lost their water as spring flows declined and cars and bottled water replaced their everyday role. Within THE SOURCE (WP4, Fountains Data Collection) the Bulgarian team is studying and documenting the sites and the memory attached to them, while local interest grows in restoring them as places of rest, education and connection with nature.

APPROACH

Each fountain used the natural potential of a local spring and the materials the place offered, stone, brick or concrete, and very often began as a personal gesture: a donation in memory of a loved one, an expression of gratitude, the wish to leave something of lasting benefit to the community. Residents built and maintained them together, passing knowledge and responsibility for the water from one generation to the next, a working model of what would today be called sustainable management of local water resources.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

For the partners, the roadside fountain is proof that a very small water structure can carry environmental, social, cultural and economic value all at once. The message these places still convey is the simplest in this handbook: water is a common resource, and caring for it is the responsibility of every generation.



Left: “The White Girl” at her spring in Lipnik Forest Park. Right: “The Black Girl”, inscribed “the Guardian of the Spring”, restored by the community after being destroyed. Photos: Development of Social Capital (DSC).

The White Girl and the Black Girl, Lipnik Forest Park (Bulgaria)

LIPNIK FOREST PARK,
NIKOLOVO, BULGARIA

Healing springs, their legends and two guardian sculptures, kept alive by the community of a forest park near Ruse.

CONTEXT

Lipnik Forest Park, near the village of Nikolovo in the Municipality of Ruse, holds several springs wrapped in local legend, and the centuries-old sacred spring of the Lipnik Teke of Hasanli Ali Baba, revered by people of different religious communities as a source of health, hope and blessing. When the park was created in the second half of the twentieth century, this water heritage was woven into its new role as a place of recreation and culture.

RESULTS

The springs and their guardians have become symbols of local identity strong enough to defend themselves: when “The Black Girl” was destroyed, the community’s reaction led to her restoration, and the sites are continuously cared for, from cleaning the spring and improving drainage to reinforcing the basin. The ensemble of forest, lakes, springs, sculptures and legends now anchors walking trails and nature-based tourism without new heavy infrastructure.

APPROACH

Two sculptures became the faces of the springs: “The White Girl”, tied to the legend of a blind child who regained her sight after touching her face with the spring’s water, and “The Black Girl”, a bronze figure of a young Rhodopean girl with a pitcher whose pedestal names her the Guardian of the Spring. The legends make the water approachable, turn a walk to a spring into an experience, and carry the stories from older generations to children.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

Residents treat the sculptures and springs as part of who they are, which is exactly the point: people protect water when it belongs to their own story. The model needs no unique sculpture or legend to travel: any spring, well or fountain with a story attached can find its own guardians.



Conclusions

Read together, the twelve practices in this handbook tell one story in five movements. First, make the water visible: Andalusia's citizen catalogue, 2DRINK's QR-coded bottles and Sarajevo's MAP4WATER map solve the same problem, that a fountain nobody can find is a fountain nobody uses. Second, let the community own it: the Vodek fountains of Lapad exist because residents proposed and voted, and the Great Onofrio's Fountain flows because a citizens' heritage society funded its restoration. Third, pair the fountain with a story: in the legends of Extremadura, in the healing springs of Lipnik and their guardian sculptures, in the five wellheads of Zadar, in a Dubrovnik painter's blue maskeroni and in the roadside fountains that Ruse families once built in memory of their loved ones, the story is what turns infrastructure into heritage. Fourth, connect it to climate and health: Paris's anti-plastic network protects people, and Maritimo Recycling turns the plastic that pollutes the water into objects that pay for the next clean-up. And fifth, bring the institutions in: the utilities of Paris and Athens show that the organisation that runs the pipes can be heritage's strongest ally, and in Sarajevo a citizens' map has pushed fountains onto the government's agenda, up to a proposed constitutional right to water.

None of these lessons requires a metropolis or a millions-of-euros budget. The cheapest practices in this gallery, a mapping walk with students, a public meeting held beside a dry fountain, one artist and one room, are also among the most effective, because a fountain is the smallest unit of public water infrastructure that a community can love. That is what makes it such a good classroom: it is local, it is free, and it is already there.

What comes next

For the partners of “THE GUARDIANS OF THE SOURCE”, this handbook is a beginning: it closes the first eight months of the project, the capacity building phase in which the four organisations studied each other's fountains and traditions and gathered the good practices collected in these pages, and opens a next step. Everything the project does from now on builds on the present handbook. The next step is to turn these lessons into a shared Methodology (“THE SOURCE Methodology”) for using fountains and springs in environmental education and heritage engagement, drawing on the HOP methodology presented earlier. “THE SOURCE Methodology” will not stay only on paper: each partner will test it in a local pilot project, at real fountains with real communities, and it will guide the project's fountain database and environmental data collection, with partners mapping the fountains and recording the condition and quality of their water. The results, what worked, what did not and what surprised us, will be shared publicly, so stay tuned: [you can follow the project's progress through the partners' channels:](#)

 Development of Social Capital (Bulgaria) – [Развитие на социалния капитал](#)

 EUTOPIA (Italy) – [@associazioneculturaleeutopia](#)

 FUNPASOS (Spain) – [@funpasos](#)

 Red History Museum (Croatia) – [@redhistorymuseum](#)



Annexes

Annex A: the good practices in this handbook and where they come from

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Know your Sources (Conoce tus Fuentes), catalogue of the springs and fountains of Andalusia (Spain), by the Water Institute of the University of Granada and the Junta de Andalucía, contributed by FUNPASOS. |
| 2 | 2DRINK, from bottled water to public fountains, Macerata and the Marche region (Italy), by Giulia Rapazzetti, President of 2HANDS Macerata. |
| 3 | Maritimo Recycling, from water waste to design objects, Dubrovnik (Croatia), by Maritimo Recycling, contributed by the Red History Museum. |
| 4 | Vodek fountains, Lapad promenade, Dubrovnik (Croatia), by the City of Dubrovnik and DURA, contributed by the Red History Museum. |
| 5 | Springs and fountains as water heritage and walking routes, Extremadura (Spain), by the Junta de Extremadura, contributed by FUNPASOS. |
| 6 | Cultural HIDRANT, reviving Hadrian's Aqueduct as shared water and heritage, Chalandri (Athens, Greece), researched and proposed by Susannah Bain, historian specialising in the history of water management and Grants Advisor at KB. |
| 7 | Wallace fountains and sparkling-water fountains, run by Eau de Paris, Paris (France), researched and proposed by Susannah Bain, historian specialising in the history of water management and Grants Advisor at KB. |
| 8 | The Great Onofrio's Fountain, restored by the Society of Friends of Dubrovnik Antiquities (DPDS), Dubrovnik (Croatia), contributed by the Red History Museum. |
| 9 | Trg Pet bunara, the Square of the Five Wells, Zadar (Croatia), contributed by the Red History Museum. |
| 10 | MAP4WATER, Sarajevo City of Thousand Fountains (Bosnia and Herzegovina), by the Green Building Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina. |
| 11 | Roadside fountains as part of the water heritage of the Ruse region (Bulgaria), by Development of Social Capital. |
| 12 | The White Girl and the Black Girl, springs and legends of Lipnik Forest Park, Nikolovo (Bulgaria), by Development of Social Capital. |

The wider pool of good practices collected by the partners (working target: twenty collected, twelve published here) is kept in the project's shared archive and feeds the project database.

Annex B: pictures and credits

PHOTOGRAPHS IN THIS HANDBOOK

The photographs of the Vodek fountains (Lapad), of the fountains and springs of the Ruse region, of the Dubrovnik fountains, maskeroni and artworks, of the Maritimo Recycling workshop, of the Great Onofrio's Fountain, of Trg Pet bunara in Zadar, of the 2DRINK campaign, of the springs and routes of Extremadura, of the springs and guardian sculptures of Lipnik Forest Park, and of the Fuenseca fountain in Córdoba (from the Conoce tus Fuentes catalogue) are project material provided by the partners (Red History Museum; City of Dubrovnik / DURA; Development of Social Capital; FUNPASOS / Junta de Extremadura), by the artist Klara Knego, by 2HANDS and by Maritimo Recycling, and are used with their permission within the project.

The photograph of Hadrian's Aqueduct at Nea Ionia (Athens) is by George E. Koronaios, via Wikimedia Commons. The photographs of the Wallace fountains of Paris (a painting by André Gill, Musée Carnavalet, and a 1919 photograph, Bibliothèque nationale de France) are via Wikimedia Commons.

The photograph of the Sarajevo fountain is project material provided by MAP4WATER / the Green Building Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and are used with their permission within the project.

The archival photographs of the roadside fountains of the Ruse region are from the State Archives in Ruse, provided by Development of Social Capital.