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Guidelines for mentorship activities D.2.3.1



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Abstract	The ARCHAEODIGIT Train the Mentors programme aimed to strengthen professional capacities and establish sustainable mentorship practices within the archaeological tourism sector. Delivered in two integrated phases, 12 hours of online training and 96 hours of site-specific, one-to-one mentoring, the programme provided participants with theoretical frameworks and practical skills in governance, heritage valorisation, storytelling, digital tools, and adaptive management. Eight participants from four test areas engaged in reflective and applied learning, tailored to the operational realities of their sites. The programme enhanced mentoring competence, strategic and operational capacity, and digital literacy, while fostering cross-border collaboration and peer learning networks. The outcomes demonstrate the programme potential for long-term institutional impact, sustainable professional development, and sector-wide innovation. The accompanying document provides practical guidelines, methodological frameworks, and recommendations for replicating the programme in diverse archaeological and heritage tourism contexts.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ARCHAEODIGIT “Train the Mentors” programme was developed as a strategic capacity-building intervention aimed at strengthening peer learning and mentorship mechanisms within the field of archaeological tourism. The programme responded to the increasing need for structured upskilling pathways for cultural and tourism operators, particularly in contexts characterised by digital transition, sustainability imperatives, and innovation in heritage interpretation. Its primary purpose was to establish a foundational group of trained mentors capable of supporting long-term professional development and creating sustainable mentoring ecosystems within the sector.

The programme consisted of two integrated phases. The online training component, delivered in English over 12 hours across three days, provided participants with theoretical grounding in governance and valorisation of cultural heritage, mentoring and management of archaeological parks, and the use of digital tools for monitoring and adaptive management. Interactive lectures, case studies, and reflective discussions encouraged participants to contextualise learning, critically assess operational challenges, and apply conceptual frameworks to their own sites.

The post-training, on-site mentoring phase consisted of 96 hours of practical engagement, during which participants engaged in one-to-one mentoring tailored to the needs of their specific sites: Archaeological Park of Sepino, Underwater Archaeological Site Trstenik-Kaštel Sućurac, Archaeological Site of Fulfinum–Mirine, Omišalj, and Archaeological Area of Helvia Ricina, Macerata. Participants translated theoretical knowledge into actionable strategies in areas such as planning and management of archaeological parks, storytelling, and digital interpretation. Cross-border delivery between Italy and Croatia reinforced methodological consistency and fostered comparative learning.

The programme aimed to:

- develop a shared understanding of mentoring as a structured developmental relationship, distinct from coaching, consultancy, or supervision
- equip participants with practical competencies in communication, relationship-building, ethical mentoring practice, and reflective facilitation
- create sustainable peer learning ecosystems within the ARCHAEODIGIT test areas
- produce a replicable model adaptable to diverse archaeological and heritage tourism contexts, including online, in-person, and hybrid formats.

Eight participants, selected on a voluntary basis among Project Partners staff and members of Local Hubs, with two representatives per test area, constituted the initial mentor group. The programme was led by UNIPU, with methodological and organisational support from UMC and external experts.



This document presents practical guidelines and recommendations based on the concrete delivery of the Joint “Train the Mentors” programme. It combines:

- a conceptual and sectoral framework for mentoring in archaeological tourism
- a detailed description of the programme design, structure, and implementation
- a methodological framework for online, on-site, and blended mentoring
- step-by-step guidance for replication and adaptation in other contexts
- tools, templates, and evaluation mechanisms supporting ongoing professional development.

Beyond documenting an activity, this deliverable seeks to contribute to the professionalisation and sustainability of mentoring practices within European archaeological tourism. By establishing transferable frameworks and actionable guidance, it provides institutions, networks, and organisations with the means to implement effective mentorship programmes that strengthen operational capacities, foster innovation, and enhance the overall quality and sustainability of heritage tourism experiences.



1. INTRODUCTION

Mentorship, as a structured developmental process, occupies an increasingly significant position within contemporary professional learning ecosystems. In sectors characterised by interdisciplinarity, rapid technological transformation, and complex stakeholder environments, such as archaeological tourism, traditional models of professional development based solely on formal training are often insufficient. Sustainable competence-building requires relational learning formats that combine experiential knowledge, contextual insight, and reflective practice.

The ARCHAEODIGIT project identified mentorship as a strategic instrument capable of addressing several structural needs within the sector:

- the reinforcement of peer learning mechanisms
- the consolidation of digital and innovative practices introduced through project activities
- the strengthening of local capacity in geographically dispersed test areas
- the establishment of sustainable upskilling pathways beyond the project lifetime.

In response to these needs, the “Train the Mentors” activity was designed to create the foundational conditions for effective mentorship relationships in each participating territory. Rather than directly implementing a large-scale mentoring scheme, the project adopted a multiplier approach: selected participants were trained as mentors, and supported in initiating real mentor–mentee relationships within their professional environments.

This document therefore serves a dual purpose.

First, it documents the conceptual framework, structural design, pedagogical methodology, and implementation process of the programme as delivered within the ARCHAEODIGIT framework.

Second, and more importantly, it distils practical guidelines and recommendations for replication. The intention is to provide cultural institutions, archaeological site managers, tourism organisations, local authorities, and heritage networks with adaptable model that can be tailored to their specific contexts.

The document is grounded in the following guiding principles:

- **Professional discipline** – Mentorship is treated as a structured competence requiring training, ethical awareness, and reflective practice, rather than as an informal or spontaneous exchange



- **Sectoral specificity** – While mentoring frameworks exist across many disciplines, the present model is tailored to the realities and challenges of archaeological tourism
- **Replicability** – The framework is articulated in operational terms, allowing institutions to reproduce or adapt it independently
- **Sustainability** – The emphasis is placed on long-term capacity-building rather than short-term training impact
- **Digital adaptability** – Particular attention is given to online and hybrid formats, recognising the geographical dispersion and resource constraints typical of heritage networks.

In methodological terms, the document integrates insights from experiential learning theory, reflective practice frameworks, peer learning methodologies, and competence-based training design. However, it deliberately avoids excessive theoretical abstraction. The objective is not to provide an academic treatise on mentoring theory, but to translate relevant principles into actionable guidance for practitioners operating within archaeological tourism ecosystems.

The structure of the document reflects this dual orientation toward conceptual clarity and operational applicability. Following this introduction, the next sections outline the broader context and purpose of mentoring in archaeological tourism, describe the design and delivery of the “Train the Mentors” programme, analyse the methodological approach adopted, and present structured guidelines for future replication. Lessons learned, quality assurance mechanisms, and practical tools are also included to enhance usability.

By articulating the experience of the ARCHAEODIGIT mentoring initiative in a systematic and transferable format, this document aims to contribute to the professionalisation of mentoring practices within European archaeological tourism and to support the creation of resilient, knowledge-sharing communities across heritage territories.



2. PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS

The establishment of a structured mentoring framework within the ARCHAEODIGIT project must be understood against the broader transformation of archaeological tourism and the evolving professional demands placed upon heritage operators. This chapter outlines the structural changes affecting the sector, examines mentorship as a strategic capacity-building instrument, and clarifies the strategic purpose of integrating a mentoring model within the ARCHAEODIGIT framework. By situating the programme within its wider socio-professional and policy context, the following sections provide the conceptual foundation upon which the design and implementation of the “Train the Mentors” initiative were developed.

2.1. The Changing Landscape of Archaeological Tourism

Archaeological tourism has undergone profound structural, technological, and conceptual transformation. What was once predominantly a site-centred model of heritage consumption, focused on physical visitation, static interpretation panels, and expert-led narratives, has evolved into a multifaceted ecosystem characterised by digital mediation, participatory engagement, experiential learning, and sustainability-oriented governance.

This transformation is neither superficial nor merely technological. It reflects deeper shifts in the way heritage is understood, valued, and managed within contemporary European societies. Archaeological sites are no longer perceived solely as repositories of scientific knowledge or monuments of national history. They increasingly function as dynamic cultural spaces that must reconcile conservation imperatives with visitor expectations, community involvement, educational missions, and economic viability.

Several interrelated dynamics define this changing landscape.

First, digital transformation has significantly altered interpretative practices. The integration of augmented reality applications, virtual reconstructions, interactive displays, immersive storytelling platforms, and online visitor engagement tools has redefined the visitor experience. Digital mediation allows archaeological content to transcend spatial and temporal constraints, reaching audiences beyond the physical site. However, the introduction of digital tools also generates new professional demands. Operators must acquire competencies related to digital literacy, content management, data interpretation, and technological procurement. Importantly, digital innovation must be critically assessed and strategically implemented; technological adoption without pedagogical coherence risks undermining interpretative quality.



Second, archaeological tourism has become increasingly experiential. Contemporary visitors seek meaningful engagement rather than passive consumption. This shift requires site managers and cultural operators to design interpretative strategies that facilitate interaction, dialogue, and emotional connection. Archaeological heritage must be communicated not only as factual information but as lived human experience. This demands interdisciplinary collaboration between archaeologists, educators, designers, storytellers, and tourism professionals.

Third, participatory heritage models have gained prominence. Local communities are no longer considered peripheral stakeholders but central actors in heritage governance. Community archaeology initiatives, co-creation of interpretative narratives, and participatory planning processes are increasingly regarded as best practice. Consequently, professionals in archaeological tourism must develop skills in facilitation, stakeholder engagement, and conflict mediation.

Fourth, sustainability has become a defining policy and operational framework. Archaeological tourism must align with environmental sustainability principles, responsible visitor management, and socio-economic resilience. Balancing visitor access with conservation needs requires strategic planning, data-informed decision-making, and cross-sector coordination. European cultural and tourism policies emphasise integrated territorial development, digital innovation, and green transition, further intensifying the complexity of professional roles within the sector.

Within this evolving environment, operators in archaeological tourism, including site managers, curators, heritage interpreters, local tourism providers, municipal authorities, and cultural mediators, face escalating professional expectations. They are required to:

- integrate digital tools for interpretation and visitor engagement in a manner that enhances rather than replaces scholarly integrity
- develop inclusive narratives responsive to diverse audiences, including international visitors, young people, underrepresented communities, and individuals with specific accessibility needs
- align heritage management with sustainable tourism principles, balancing conservation, education, and economic objectives
- enhance economic resilience through innovation, networking, and cross-sector collaboration.

These expectations imply not only technical competence but adaptive capacity. Professionals must continuously update their knowledge, reflect on practice, and engage in collaborative learning processes.

Despite these demands, structured professional development pathways specifically tailored to archaeological tourism remain fragmented. Formal academic education in archaeology, heritage



management, or tourism studies provides foundational disciplinary knowledge but rarely addresses the integrative and practice-oriented challenges encountered in site-based work. Continuous professional development often occurs informally, through peer exchange, participation in short-term projects, or experiential trial and error.

While informal learning can be valuable, it lacks systemic support and quality assurance. Without structured frameworks for knowledge transfer and reflective practice, innovation risks remaining isolated, and expertise may be unevenly distributed across territories.

In this context, mentorship emerges as a particularly relevant and potentially transformative mechanism for structured upskilling within archaeological tourism.

2.2. Mentorship as a Strategic Capacity-Building Tool

Mentorship is conceptualised in this document as a structured, developmental relationship in which a trained or experienced individual, the mentor, supports the professional growth of another individual, the mentee, through sustained dialogue, reflective questioning, guidance, and constructive challenge. It is essential to distinguish mentoring from adjacent practices.

Unlike consultancy, mentoring does not primarily deliver external solutions. The consultant provides expertise to resolve a defined problem; the mentor facilitates the mentee's capacity to analyse and address challenges independently.

Unlike supervision, mentoring does not rely on hierarchical authority. The supervisory relationship entails formal oversight and performance evaluation, whereas mentoring is developmental and non-evaluative in nature.

Unlike coaching, which often focuses on short-term goal achievement and performance enhancement, mentoring tends to encompass broader professional identity formation, career development, and reflective learning.

This distinction is particularly important in archaeological tourism contexts, where organisational hierarchies may be rigid and professional roles highly specialised. Mentorship creates a protected relational space within which professionals can critically examine their practice without fear of formal assessment.

From a strategic perspective, mentorship offers several advantages in the archaeological tourism sector.



Firstly, it enables contextualised learning. Archaeological sites differ significantly in terms of scale, governance structure, visitor profile, funding models, and socio-political environment. Generic training programmes may provide theoretical frameworks but often fail to address specific local constraints. Mentoring relationships, by contrast, allow developmental processes to be anchored in the mentee's real professional context. The mentor supports the mentee in interpreting general principles within site-specific realities.

Secondly, mentorship fosters peer learning communities. Archaeological tourism is inherently interdisciplinary, combining archaeology, heritage interpretation, digital technologies, education, tourism management, and community engagement. No single professional can master all these domains. Mentoring relationships encourage knowledge exchange across disciplinary boundaries and create informal networks of support. Over time, these networks can evolve into communities of practice that sustain innovation beyond project cycles.

Thirdly, mentorship contributes to institutional memory and succession planning. Many archaeological tourism initiatives are project-based and subject to funding volatility. Staff turnover may lead to the loss of institutional knowledge and accumulated experience. Mentoring relationships can reduce this risk by facilitating intergenerational knowledge transfer and by supporting early-career professionals in navigating complex organisational environments.

Fourthly, mentorship is adaptable to digital and geographically dispersed contexts. In many regions, archaeological sites are located in rural or peripheral areas with limited access to centralised training opportunities. Online mentoring frameworks, when carefully designed, can maintain relational depth while ensuring accessibility. Digital tools for communication, documentation, and reflection can enhance continuity and flexibility.

Importantly, mentorship should not be perceived as an informal or spontaneous exchange. Effective mentoring requires preparation, ethical awareness, boundary management, and structured reflection. Without training, well-intentioned mentors may unintentionally replicate hierarchical dynamics or provide directive advice rather than facilitating autonomous learning. Therefore, the professionalisation of mentoring practice is essential.

2.3. Strategic Relevance within the ARCHAEODIGIT Framework

Within the ARCHAEODIGIT project, the decision to establish a structured mentoring framework emerged from a strategic assessment of long-term impact. The project introduced innovative digital and methodological approaches to archaeological tourism within selected test areas. However,



innovation introduced through project activities risks remaining episodic unless embedded within sustainable professional practices.

Two interrelated needs were identified.

The first concerned consolidation. Digital tools, interpretative innovations, and collaborative practices developed during the project required internal champions capable of sustaining and disseminating them after the formal conclusion of activities. Training mentors was understood as a mechanism for consolidating project outcomes within local professional communities.

The second concerned multiplication. Rather than directly training a large number of operators within the limited timeframe of the project, the mentoring model aimed to create multipliers, individuals equipped to support others in their territory. This approach enhances scalability and local ownership. By empowering participants to assume mentoring roles, the project invested in endogenous capacity-building rather than external dependency.

The “Train the Mentors” programme was therefore conceived not as a standalone educational event, but as a foundational intervention within a broader capacity-building architecture. The programme combined structured training with supervised practical application to ensure that mentoring competencies were not merely understood conceptually but enacted in real professional contexts.

The mentoring framework within ARCHAEODIGIT responded to structural transformations in archaeological tourism, addressed identifiable professional development gaps, and operationalised a sustainable multiplier strategy.



3. DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF THE TRAIN THE MENTORS PROGRAMME

This chapter presents the structure, pedagogical logic, and operational implementation of the ARCHAEODIGIT “Train the Mentors” programme. Building upon the conceptual foundation outlined in the previous section, it details the selection of participants, the design of the blended training model, the thematic and methodological components of the online and in-person phases, and the integration of academic expertise within the mentoring framework. Particular attention is given to the coherence between strategic objectives and delivery mechanisms, ensuring that the programme functioned not merely as a training intervention but as a structured and replicable capacity-building model tailored to the specificities of archaeological tourism.

3.1. Profile of Participants and Institutional Context

The effectiveness of a mentoring framework depends fundamentally on the professional profile and institutional positioning of the participants. Within the ARCHAEODIGIT “Train the Mentors” programme, eight participants were selected across four test areas. Each test area nominated two representatives on a voluntary basis.

Participants were professionals directly involved in the management, interpretation, and governance of archaeological heritage:

- employees of archaeological parks located within the designated test areas
- museum professionals engaged in heritage interpretation and public programming
- representatives of municipal administrations responsible for cultural heritage and tourism governance.

This diversity was deliberate and strategically aligned with the interdisciplinary nature of archaeological tourism. By including professionals operating at the intersection of site management, museology, and local governance, the programme sought to foster cross-institutional dialogue and systemic thinking.

Motivation, institutional commitment, and willingness to engage in reflective practice were considered essential criteria. The voluntary nature of participation reinforced ownership and ensured that mentoring would be embraced as a developmental opportunity rather than perceived as an administrative obligation.



3.2. Structure of the 12-Hour Online Training Component

The initial 12-hour training component was delivered online in English and organised over three consecutive days, with four hours of structured sessions per day. The delivery format was designed to balance theoretical rigour with interactive engagement.

An external expert was engaged to lead the online training. The thematic focus of the lectures included:

- Governance and valorisation of cultural heritage
- Mentoring and management of archaeological parks
- Monitoring, digital tools and adaptive management.

These themes were intentionally selected to situate mentoring within broader strategic and managerial dimensions of archaeological tourism. Rather than treating mentoring as an isolated interpersonal technique, the training embedded it within governance structures, management practices, and digital transformation processes.

3.2.1. Methodological Design

The online sessions were designed as interactive learning environments rather than lecture-based knowledge transmission. Each thematic block followed a structured pedagogical sequence:

- Conceptual framing of the topic
- Presentation of international examples and good practices
- Applied discussion relating concepts to participants local contexts
- Guided reflection and synthesis.

The theoretical components were consistently supported by case studies drawn from archaeological parks and cultural heritage institutions. Examples of good practice illustrated how governance models, digital tools, and monitoring systems can directly influence site valorisation and visitor engagement.

Crucially, participants were actively encouraged to relate each topic to their own archaeological sites and institutional environments. For example:



- when discussing governance models, participants analysed decision-making structures within their own organisations
- during sessions on digital tools, they assessed existing digital capacities and identified gaps
- in conversations about adaptive management, they reflected on visitor flows, conservation challenges, and stakeholder coordination at their sites.

This reflexive approach ensured that theoretical input was continuously translated into contextualised understanding. The discussions frequently led to constructive comparative analysis between test areas, fostering peer learning and cross-territorial insight.

3.2.2. Thematic Integration with Mentoring Competencies

Although the thematic focus extended beyond mentoring theory, the integration was deliberate. Governance, monitoring, digitalisation, and adaptive management are not peripheral topics; they constitute the professional environments within which mentoring relationships unfold.

By addressing these themes, the training:

- strengthened mentors strategic awareness
- enhanced their capacity to guide mentees in complex decision-making processes
- contextualised mentoring within organisational and territorial realities.

The 12-hour online component functioned as both conceptual preparation and strategic orientation.

3.3. Structure of the 96-Hour Post-Work Mentoring Component

The post-work phase represents the applied core of the “Train the Mentors” programme, translating conceptual knowledge from the online sessions into site-specific professional practice. This component ensured that mentoring competencies were not only understood theoretically but enacted within the operational realities of each participant institution. The following sections describe the design of the mentoring interactions, participant engagement in structured one-to-one relationships, and the thematic and site-specific implementation across the four test areas.



3.3.1. Mentoring Design and Participant Engagement

Each of the eight participants engaged in 12 hours of structured, one-to-one mentoring, amounting to a cumulative total of 96 hours. This format was deliberately selected to provide in-depth, personalised, and confidential professional guidance. Unlike group workshops, one-to-one mentoring allowed participants to explore site-specific challenges, critically reflect on professional roles, and develop tailored action plans.

The sessions were organised and delivered by experts affiliated with the University of Juraj Dobrila in Pula (UNIPU), ensuring methodological consistency, academic rigour, and sector-specific expertise. Mentors facilitated structured dialogue, reflective exercises, and problem-solving activities, while guiding participants in applying conceptual frameworks from the online phase to their operational contexts.

A cross-border dimension was incorporated, with mentoring activities conducted in both Italy and Croatia within the same operational week. This approach reinforced the transnational character of the ARCHAEODIGIT project, promoted comparative learning between test areas, and strengthened the exchange of best practices while respecting contextual diversity. On-site engagement enabled mentors to directly observe the physical infrastructure, management practices, and stakeholder coordination at each location, thereby enhancing the applicability and relevance of the mentoring process.

3.3.2. Thematic Focus and Site-Specific Implementation

The mentoring sessions focused on two principal thematic areas:

- Planning and Management of Archaeological Parks and Sites
- Storytelling and Digital Technologies in the Valorisation of Archaeological Heritage

These themes were adapted to the real conditions, developmental stage, and strategic priorities of each thematic area:

- Archaeological Park of Sepino
- Underwater Archaeological Site Trstenik–Kaštel Sućurac
- Archaeological Site of Fulfinum–Mirine, Omišalj
- Archaeological Area of Helvia Ricina, Macerata



Site-specific tailoring ensured that discussions addressed operational realities. For example, terrestrial parks involved analyses of visitor flow, conservation strategies, and governance structures, whereas underwater sites required focus on accessibility, digital interpretation, and local stakeholder coordination. Storytelling and digital technologies were evaluated according to each site existing interpretative framework and digital maturity, with an emphasis on strategic alignment between innovation and heritage valorisation objectives.

The post-work phase functioned as the applied continuation of the online training rather than a simple repetition. Participants were required to:

- apply governance and heritage valorisation frameworks to their own sites
- critically assess digital tools in use or under consideration
- reflect on planning, management, and monitoring strategies
- develop actionable, context-sensitive recommendations.

Through this approach, mentoring facilitated the transformation of conceptual understanding into practical interventions, consolidating both mentoring competencies and site-specific professional capacity. The 96-hour post-work component thus ensured the creation of sustainable, contextually embedded, and transferable mentoring practices across the archaeological tourism sector.



4. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The ARCHAEODIGIT “Train the Mentors” programme was developed on a methodological foundation, integrating contemporary pedagogical theory, professional learning principles, and mentoring best practices. Its design was guided by the specific challenges and opportunities of archaeological tourism, including the need for context-sensitive capacity-building, sustainable knowledge transfer, and the incorporation of digital technologies in heritage valorisation.

4.1. Experiential Approaches in Mentoring

Experiential learning theory provided the conceptual basis for the programme. Unlike conventional pedagogical approaches, this approach recognises that professional participants are self-directed, bring prior experience to the learning process, and are motivated when training directly addresses real-world challenges. Within the “Train the Mentors” programme, this translated into an emphasis on learner autonomy, experience-based reflection, problem-centred learning, and the practical application of knowledge.

Experiential learning was embedded through a cyclical process in which participants encountered professional challenges at their sites, reflected critically on these experiences, conceptualised lessons in light of theoretical frameworks, and then applied insights to operational contexts. For example, participants analysing visitor flow management at their own archaeological park were guided to identify strategic improvements, test these approaches within mentoring sessions, and evaluate outcomes with their mentors. Reflective exercises were systematically incorporated to consolidate learning and enable participants to internalise strategic and operational insights.

This combined approach ensured that mentoring went beyond theoretical instruction, fostering transformative professional development. Participants were equipped to engage with complex management, interpretative, and governance challenges in a structured, reflective, and action-oriented manner.

4.2. Blended Learning and Mentoring Models

The programme adopted a blended learning approach, combining online theoretical instruction with intensive on-site mentoring. The online component provided foundational knowledge over three four-hour sessions (12 hours total), covering themes such as governance, heritage valorisation,



monitoring frameworks, mentoring principles, and digital tools. These sessions were highly interactive, integrating case studies, good practice examples, and structured discussions that prompted participants to consider applications within their own sites.

The post-work mentoring component (96 hours) operationalised these principles through on-site, one-to-one interactions between mentors and participants. This ensured that theory was applied directly to contextual realities, bridging the gap between conceptual understanding and practical execution. The one-to-one format allowed for in-depth discussion, personalised guidance, and confidential reflection, which are essential for effective mentoring and professional growth.

Mentoring models were carefully selected to align with the programme objectives. Developmental mentoring encouraged mentees to identify and address challenges independently, while situational mentoring enabled mentors to adapt strategies to the unique characteristics of each archaeological site. Peer mentoring elements were also present, particularly in group reflection exercises during the online sessions, fostering collaborative learning and the exchange of cross-territorial knowledge.

4.3. Site-Specific Application and Thematic Integration

A core principle of the programme was contextual relevance. Mentoring sessions were tailored to the specific operational, interpretative, and strategic conditions of each site:

- Archaeological Park of Sepino
- Underwater Archaeological Site Trstenik–Kaštel Sućurac
- Archaeological Site of Fulfinum–Mirine, Omišalj
- Archaeological Area of Helvia Ricina, Macerata

The thematic focus included Planning and Management of Archaeological Parks and Sites and Storytelling and Digital Technologies in the Valorisation of Archaeological Heritage. These themes were adapted according to site maturity, governance structures, existing interpretative frameworks, and digital capacities. For instance, planning discussions addressed strategic site management, conservation, and visitor experience optimisation, while storytelling and digital technologies were explored with an emphasis on engaging audiences effectively and authentically.

Integrating theory and practice in this manner allowed participants to develop actionable recommendations, critically evaluate the suitability of digital tools, and design site-specific interventions. This approach reinforced reflective learning, problem-solving, and strategic thinking, all of which are central to sustainable professional development in archaeological tourism.



4.4. Communities of Practice, Cross-Border Learning, and Knowledge Transfer

The methodological framework intentionally incorporated the formation of communities of practice, recognising that professional learning is enhanced through collaboration and sustained engagement with peers. Online sessions established a virtual community, where participants from different test areas shared experiences, compared challenges, and co-developed solutions. On-site mentoring reinforced local communities of practice, embedding learning within the institutional and territorial context of each participant.

Cross-border engagement between Italy and Croatia further enhanced the programme impact, facilitating comparative learning and the sharing of diverse operational models. This transnational dimension promoted knowledge transfer across different cultural, administrative, and heritage management contexts, aligning with the ARCHAEODIGIT project strategic objective of fostering replicable and sustainable mentoring practices.

4.5. Digital Tools and Adaptive Management

Digital tools were integrated into both content and delivery. The programme emphasised their role in storytelling, heritage valorisation, and visitor engagement. Online platforms enabled interactive training, collaborative exercises, and reflective documentation, while site-specific mentoring allowed participants to explore practical applications of digital tools within their own operational environments.

Mentoring was guided by principles of adaptive management, allowing mentors to adjust strategies according to evolving site conditions, participant progress, and unforeseen operational challenges. This flexible, responsive approach ensured that mentoring remained relevant, practical, and closely aligned with the realities of archaeological site management.

4.6. Ethical Framework and Professional Boundaries

Mentoring relationships were structured according to clear ethical guidelines. Confidentiality was strictly maintained, ensuring a safe space for reflection and discussion. Mentors were trained to manage boundaries, avoid conflicts of interest, and provide feedback constructively. These ethical



considerations created an environment of trust, openness, and professional integrity, which is essential for effective mentoring relationships.



5. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND MONITORING

The successful execution of the ARCHAEODIGIT “Train the Mentors” programme depended not only on careful design but also on systematic implementation and robust monitoring. This chapter provides a comprehensive account of the operationalisation of the programme, describing the sequence of activities, the integration of online and on-site components, and the mechanisms employed to ensure quality, relevance, and sustainability of mentoring outcomes.

5.1. Implementation Sequence and Integration of Phases

The ARCHAEODIGIT “Train the Mentors” programme was structured in two complementary phases: the online training phase and the post-work on-site mentoring phase. This sequencing was carefully designed to create a coherent progression from conceptual grounding to applied professional practice, ensuring that participants could translate theoretical knowledge into practical interventions tailored to their sites.

The online training component consisted of 12 hours delivered over three consecutive days, with four-hour sessions each day. Conducted in English, these sessions combined interactive lectures, case studies, practical exercises, and reflective discussions. Participants were encouraged to engage with scenario-based learning, critically analysing the applicability of concepts to their own institutional and territorial contexts. The thematic content was organised around three central areas:

- **Mentoring and Management of Archaeological Parks** – focusing on the principles of effective mentoring, including mentor-mentee relationships, communication strategies, reflective practice, and ethical considerations. This theme was complemented by practical insights into site management, resource planning, and leadership within heritage institutions
- **Governance and Valorisation of Cultural Heritage** – covering frameworks for sustainable heritage management, strategic planning, institutional governance, and the integration of valorisation objectives into operational practice. Emphasis was placed on stakeholder engagement and alignment with broader policy frameworks in archaeological tourism
- **Monitoring, Digital Tools, and Adaptive Management** – introducing practical applications of digital tools for interpretation, visitor engagement, and operational monitoring, alongside adaptive management principles to support flexible, evidence-based decision-making in complex, site-specific contexts.

The online training provided a shared conceptual framework, preparing participants to engage confidently and strategically in the subsequent on-site mentoring phase.



The post-work mentoring component encompassed 96 hours of in-person engagement, delivered during the first week of February 2026 across all four test areas. Each participant completed 12 hours of one-to-one mentoring with university-affiliated experts. Sessions were carefully tailored to the operational and strategic realities of each site and focused on Planning and Management of Archaeological Parks and Sites and Storytelling and Digital Technologies in the Valorisation of Archaeological Heritage, applied to:

- Archaeological Park of Sepino
- Underwater Archaeological Site Trstenik–Kaštel Sućurac
- Archaeological Site of Fulfinum–Mirine, Omišalj
- Archaeological Area of Helvia Ricina, Macerata

Cross-border delivery between Italy and Croatia reinforced methodological consistency while promoting comparative learning and the exchange of best practices. Mentors guided participants in applying governance frameworks, evaluating digital tools, reflecting on management and monitoring strategies, and developing actionable, site-specific recommendations.

By integrating the online and on-site components, the programme ensured that learning was contextually embedded, reflective, and directly applicable. Participants progressed from conceptual understanding to practical problem-solving, with the post-work mentoring providing a space for personalised guidance, strategic reflection, and operational planning. This holistic approach established a strong foundation for sustained mentoring capacity and professional development within each test area, bridging theory and practice in a coherent and impactful manner.

5.2. Monitoring, Participant Progress, and Lessons Learned

Monitoring in the programme was designed to be practical, integrated, and non-bureaucratic, focusing on participants learning and professional development rather than extensive administrative reporting. Progress was primarily assessed through observation of engagement in mentoring sessions, participant reflections, and documentation of applied actions, which collectively provided insight into the extent to which concepts were internalized and operationalized.

The programme implementation revealed significant development in several domains. Participants enhanced their mentoring competence, learning to structure relationships with mentees, communicate effectively, and navigate ethical and practical challenges. They strengthened strategic and operational thinking, including governance, planning, and adaptive management, allowing them to evaluate existing practices critically and propose actionable interventions tailored to their specific



institutional and territorial contexts. Additionally, participants developed practical skills in digital integration, leveraging tools for storytelling, monitoring, and audience engagement to enrich visitor experiences and enhance operational efficiency.

The programme also provided broader lessons relevant for mentoring and professional development in archaeological tourism. First, blended learning proved highly effective, combining the accessibility of online theoretical modules with the contextual richness of on-site mentoring. Second, individualised mentoring enabled deep reflection, personalised guidance, and problem-solving at a level that group workshops alone could not achieve. Third, cross-border learning encouraged comparative analysis and innovation, exposing participants to alternative governance and operational approaches in Italy and Croatia. Finally, structured reflective practice allowed participants to consolidate learning, critically evaluate their actions, and plan future strategies.

Taken together, these insights demonstrate that mentoring can be a powerful tool for creating sustainable professional growth, particularly when training is contextually adapted, integrated, and reflective.

5.3. Sustainability and Long-Term Impact

The Train the Mentors programme established capacities that are expected to deliver long-term benefits for participants and their respective archaeological parks, both within five years and over longer horizons. These impacts include:

- **Expansion and Continuity of Mentoring Practices:** Mentors are now equipped to guide colleagues and new staff, creating a cascading effect of capacity building. This ensures ongoing professional development, strengthens institutional memory, and fosters collaborative learning environments.
- **Strategic and Operational Integration:** Participants can implement improved governance frameworks, adaptive management strategies, and operational procedures derived from the programme. This includes enhanced planning, visitor management, site interpretation, and resource allocation, all tailored to the unique needs of each site.
- **Digital Transformation and Innovation:** Acquired skills in digital storytelling, monitoring, and audience engagement allow parks to introduce innovative practices in heritage interpretation, engage broader audiences, and improve operational decision-making.
- **Institutional Resilience and Knowledge Retention:** By embedding mentoring practices and applied frameworks into everyday operations, parks can mitigate the impact of staff turnover, maintain continuity in decision-making, and preserve institutional knowledge.



- **Sustainable Communities of Practice:** The networks and professional relationships established through the programme can evolve into ongoing communities of practice. This encourages cross-site collaboration, exchange of experiences, shared problem-solving, and the development of sectoral standards for mentoring in archaeological tourism.
- **Enhanced Visitor Experience and Heritage Valorisation:** By applying mentoring-acquired skills in planning, digital interpretation, and operational management, parks can deliver richer visitor experiences, improve educational and engagement outcomes, and contribute to the sustainable development of archaeological tourism.

Over a five-year horizon, these capacities are expected to translate into measurable improvements in park management, innovation adoption, professional growth, and audience engagement. Beyond this period, the foundational skills, institutional practices, and professional networks created by the programme can continue to support sustainable development, knowledge transfer, and sector-wide innovation, ensuring a lasting impact well beyond the immediate project timeframe.



6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Mentoring programme successfully demonstrated that structured mentoring can serve as a powerful tool for professional development, capacity building, and sustainable innovation in the archaeological tourism sector. By integrating online conceptual training with intensive on-site mentoring, the programme established a coherent pathway from theoretical understanding to applied practice, enabling participants to address complex operational and strategic challenges within their institutions.

A key conclusion of the programme is that mentorship, when tailored to local contexts and integrated with applied exercises, creates lasting professional and institutional benefits. Participants developed advanced skills in governance, adaptive management, digital tools for heritage interpretation, and reflective practice, while simultaneously cultivating the ability to guide and support colleagues. The programme also demonstrated the value of cross-border exchange, enabling comparative learning and fostering innovation by exposing participants to diverse management approaches and site-specific solutions.

The lessons learned during implementation suggest several strategic recommendations for future mentoring initiatives in archaeological tourism:

- **Adopt Blended Learning Models:** Combining online theoretical modules with in-person mentoring creates an effective bridge between conceptual knowledge and practical application. Programmes should structure learning to progress from general frameworks to site-specific application, ensuring relevance and impact.
- **Emphasise Contextualisation:** Mentoring activities should be adapted to the specific operational realities, challenges, and needs of individual sites. Tailoring the content ensures that participants can implement actionable strategies that reflect local circumstances, resources, and visitor profiles.
- **Invest in One-to-One Mentoring:** Individualised mentoring enables in-depth reflection, problem-solving, and personal development that cannot be fully achieved through group workshops alone. Encouraging personalised guidance strengthens participant confidence and professional competence.
- **Integrate Digital and Adaptive Tools Strategically:** Digital tools for storytelling, interpretation, monitoring, and adaptive management should be introduced in practical, site-specific scenarios. This ensures that technological innovation is applied meaningfully and sustainably.
- **Foster Networks and Communities of Practice:** Encouraging cross-site collaboration and communication between participants creates sustainable networks for knowledge exchange,



innovation, and shared problem-solving. These networks enhance long-term sector resilience and institutional learning.

- **Embed Reflective Practice:** Structured reflection, documentation, and action planning are critical for consolidating learning and ensuring that skills acquired during mentoring are translated into lasting operational improvements.

In addition to these strategic recommendations, the programme highlights the importance of long-term sustainability. Participants and their institutions are positioned to apply learned skills over the next five years and beyond, enhancing operational efficiency, visitor engagement, governance, and professional development within the sector. Mentors trained under the programme can extend their role to new staff and colleagues, creating cascading effects that support knowledge transfer, institutional memory, and sector-wide capacity building.



7. CONCLUSION

The ARCHAEO DIGIT Train the Mentors programme has demonstrated that structured and context-sensitive mentoring can be a highly effective tool for professional development, capacity building, and sustainable innovation in the field of archaeological tourism. By integrating online theoretical training with intensive, site-specific post-work mentoring, the programme successfully bridged conceptual knowledge and practical application, enabling participants to address real operational and strategic challenges within their institutions. The careful sequencing of online modules and in-person mentoring allowed participants not only to acquire theoretical frameworks related to governance, heritage valorisation, and the use of digital tools but also to apply these frameworks directly to the unique realities of their own sites.

Throughout the programme, participants developed advanced mentoring competencies, learning how to establish effective mentor-mentee relationships, communicate with clarity and ethical sensitivity, and facilitate reflective learning. These skills were complemented by strengthened operational and strategic capacities, including the planning and management of archaeological parks, the integration of storytelling and digital technologies, and the implementation of adaptive management practices. By engaging directly with site-specific challenges, participants were able to translate theoretical insights into actionable strategies, thereby enhancing the governance, interpretative quality, and visitor engagement potential of their respective institutions.

The cross-border implementation of the programme, spanning test areas in Italy and Croatia, fostered a comparative and innovative approach, allowing participants to observe diverse operational models and exchange best practices. This exposure promoted professional reflection, encouraged critical evaluation of existing processes, and facilitated the adoption of adaptable solutions tailored to local conditions. Reflective practice, embedded throughout both the online and on-site phases, was instrumental in consolidating learning, enabling participants to critically assess their own approaches, refine strategies, and plan future interventions with a higher degree of confidence and precision.

Importantly, the programme established a foundation for sustained institutional and sectoral impact. The trained mentors are positioned to extend their expertise to colleagues and new staff, creating cascading effects that support continuous professional development, knowledge transfer, and institutional memory. The methodological frameworks, practical tools, and experiential insights gained through the programme provide a durable reference for implementing mentoring initiatives, integrating digital and adaptive management practices, and enhancing operational efficiency within archaeological sites. Over the coming years, these capacities are expected to contribute to stronger governance, more innovative and engaging visitor experiences, and resilient institutional practices capable of adapting to evolving sectoral and societal demands.



In essence, the Train the Mentors programme offers a replicable and scalable model for mentorship in archaeological tourism. Its combination of theoretical grounding, applied practice, and reflective engagement creates a robust framework for sustainable professional growth and sectoral innovation. By linking knowledge to action, fostering cross-site collaboration, and integrating reflective learning, the programme not only strengthened the immediate capabilities of participants but also laid the groundwork for long-term professionalisation, institutional resilience, and the enduring enhancement of heritage tourism practices. Through these outcomes, the ARCHAEODIGIT initiative makes a significant contribution to the development of a skilled, adaptable, and forward-looking workforce capable of supporting sustainable cultural tourism across Europe.

