

The IN.DA.CO. project: a new representation of a cross-border conservation

Progetto IN.DA.CO.: una nuova rappresentazione di conservazione transnazionale

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The present contribution focuses on investigations and project work managed during the last year, in order to develop a future master degree on conservation of euro-mediterranean cultural heritage. By supporting various forms of democratic engagement through an innovative and participating idea of conservation and valorisation of heritage, the project aimed to foster many kinds of democratic engagement and promote critical approaches to art education, active citizenship, and the growth of cross-cultural understanding.

Different meetings with a list of eleven international partners provided us with a new perspective of cultural heritage in the euromed area, which is difficult to explain since when we talk about heritage, we always think of diverse typology of artworks, but also different representations of identity and artifacts that remind us of different past. This led to an intense discussion about the historical identity of Mediterranean culture, its significance for the future, methods of preservation, and how to use its products and artifacts to improve people's lives.

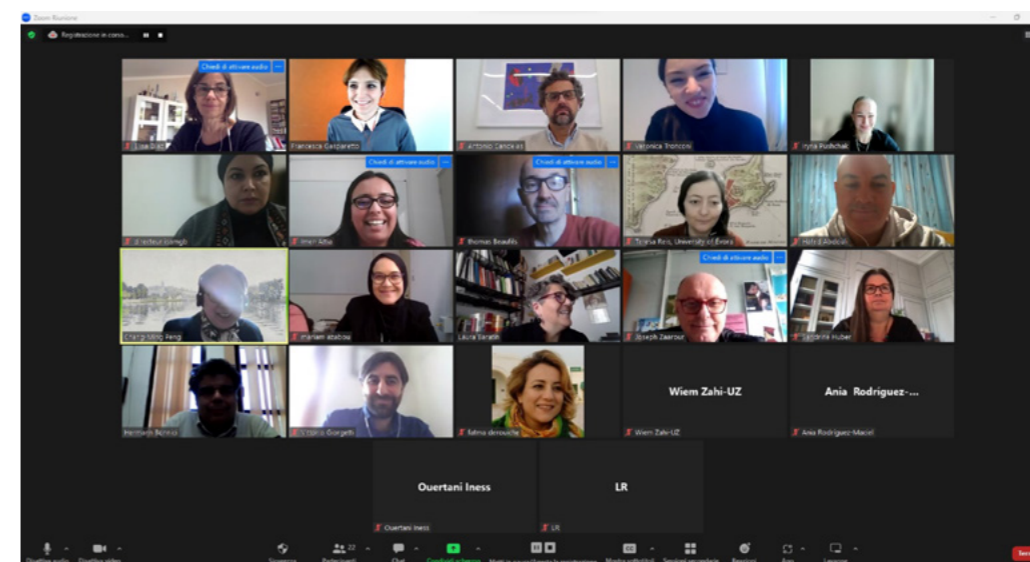
Also in light of the recent war affecting the Palestinian territory, it is crucial to operate in the Mediterranean region in order to raise significant awareness of cross-border history.

Il presente contributo si concentra sul lavoro di progetto sviluppato nell'ultimo anno, al fine di avviare un master sulla conservazione del patrimonio culturale euromediterraneo. Sostenendo varie forme di impegno democratico attraverso un'idea innovativa e partecipata di conservazione e valorizzazione del patrimonio, il progetto mira a favorire diverse tipologie di coinvolgimento e a promuovere approcci critici all'educazione artistica, alla cittadinanza attiva e alla crescita della comprensione interculturale.

Diversi incontri con una lista di undici partner internazionali ci hanno fornito una nuova prospettiva del patrimonio culturale nell'area euromediterranea, concetto generalmente difficile da spiegare poiché quando si fa riferimento al patrimonio si guarda a diverse tipologie di opere d'arte, ma anche a diverse rappresentazioni dell'identità e a manufatti che ci ricordano un passato diverso.

Questo ha portato a un'intensa discussione sull'identità storica della cultura mediterranea, sul suo significato per il futuro, sui metodi di conservazione e su come utilizzare i suoi prodotti e manufatti per migliorare la vita delle persone.

Anche alla luce della recente guerra che ha colpito il territorio palestinese, è fondamentale operare nella regione del Mediterraneo per sensibilizzare in modo significativo sulla storia transfrontaliera.



01.

Kick-off meeting of the project on March 2023.

INTRODUCTION

The IN.DA.CO project is a part of Erasmus Mundus Design Measures (EMDM), a special EU financing initiative that was started in 2001 with the goal of supporting the planning and preliminary research for high-level and master-level programmes. In particular, in this case it has encouraged the group of partners to develop a new and innovative proposal of a future master's degree on conservation, restoration and valorisation of Euro-mediterranean cultural heritage. The initiative was designed in 2022 with clear objectives in consideration, in order to allow

students from all over the world to enhance their employability, global competencies, and career prospects in the field of cultural heritage conservation and restoration. That might be made possible by intensive cross-cultural learning and a deeper understanding of the best technologies available in this field. Further, building on earlier experiences that were always funded by previous EU projects, one of the various goals was to strengthen the strategic partnership between non-European universities of Mediterranean area and research centres operating in the same operational field while also enhancing the educational skills of these institutions.

After approval, the project was started in 2023 with ten university partners from different countries of the Mediterranean (Spain, Portugal, France, Malta, Tunisia, Cyprus and Lebanon) and the School of Conservation and Restoration of the University of Urbino in Italy as partner coordinator. Each partner was a key part of the project, for creating relationships and cross-cultural interactions. Although each had a distinct identity, they all competed to achieve the same strategic goal: analysing the context in order to define new educational tools for protecting contemporary cultural heritage (Fig. 01.).

THE PROJECT STRUCTURE: METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT ANALYSIS

The project was designed as an analytical procedure that may produce a suitable recommendation for innovative approaches to teaching that address the protection and enhancement of cultural assets.

The following stages constitute the organisation of the research:

- Phase 1. A statistical overview of the main training choices offered in the Euro-Mediterranean region was given. Important data was obtained to characterise the features of current projects in the Euro-Mediterranean region that deal with the issue of interest through the use of targeted surveys. Additionally, we focused on the benefits and primary problems of the present course options. The second element of the poll focused on the curricula that the IN.DA.CO. project partners presently use to teach students about cultural heritage.
- Phase 2. Looked into the origins of the different courses, how much they cost, and how they affected things like entrepreneurship growth and employability.
- Phase 3. Looked at possible cultural heritage sector policy strategies. It might be challenging to identify possible policy reforms to be implemented in the cultural heritage sector, particularly in the intricate and expansive Euro-Mediterranean setting. Therefore, we concentrated on developing a shared understanding of cultural heritage that could have significance for the relevant geographic area in order to decide on a policy strategy for the core group of partners.
- Phase 4. The fourth and final phase projected a strategy for updating university teaching practices, with a focus on the idea of a new type of memory that would involve the entire Mediterranean region.

In particular in the first step, we focused on assessing the background to see how successfully the educational courses - that IN.DA.CO. Master's proposal could be placed within - were constructed. From this initial data collection, we observed that the majority of the courses had been offered for at least five years. The departments of affiliation are diverse, humanistic and technically oriented, but without any strong attention to digital technologies applied to cultural heritage. With this information in hand, we proceeded to inquire about the partners' use of technology for the study of cultural heritage. A list of the equipment and tools utilised in the classes was given, and it was apparent that many of them had applications in chemical and diagnostic labs.

We also held a workshop during the work year, which marked an important milestone for the



02.

The Euro-Mediterranean countries' representation, with IN.DA.CO project participants.

master's programme. In the course of the debate, the parties involved in the project came to an agreement on the broad definition of Mediterranean heritage, which is founded on culture and closely related to the concepts of openness, integration, and no borders—all of which are critical in the modern, globally interconnected world.

Indeed, discussion over the identity of Europe and the Mediterranean have always been at the center of discussions of a historical, anthropological, and political nature. An historical point that is relevant in order to comprehend the significance of this argument is that the first relevant conference between the first 15 members of the European Union and the 12 nations from the southern and eastern areas of the Mediterranean Sea can be said to have introduced the first definition of Euromediterranean. In this cultural and active context of discussion, the Barcelona Process was the first meeting in which they officially launched - with a significant joint declaration - the definition of euromediterranean that aimed to stabilise a "multilateral platform of lasting relations based on a spirit of partnership, with special attention to the particular values of each of the participants." (Fig. 02.).

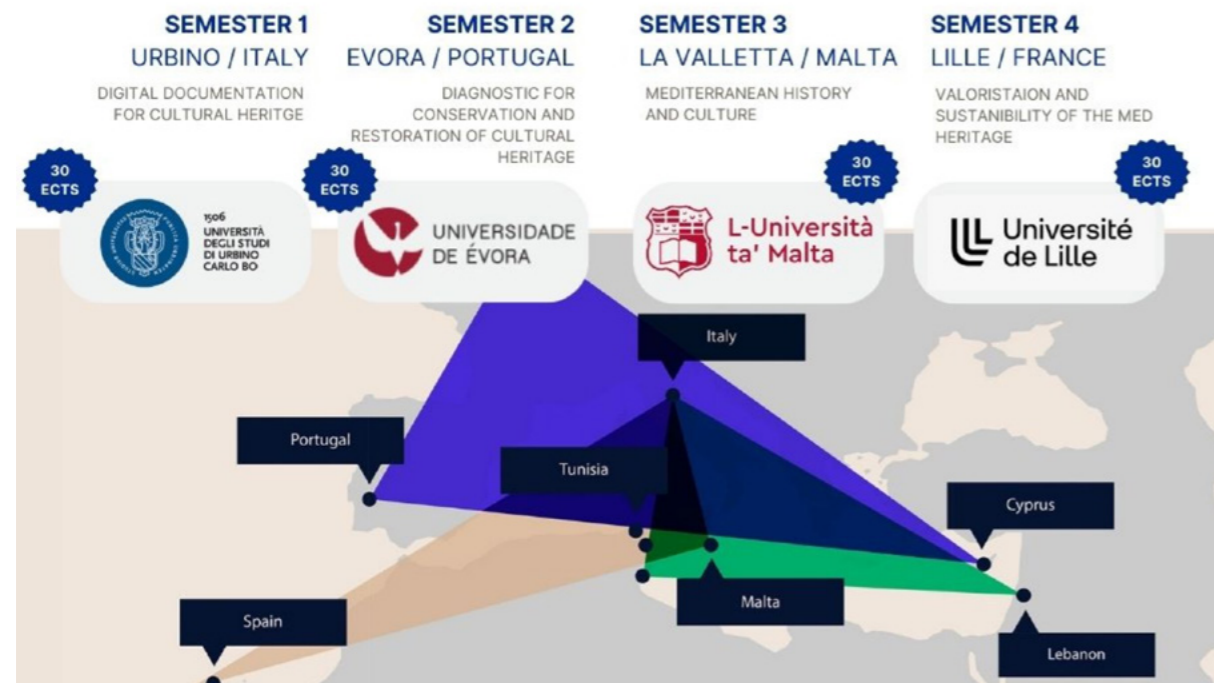
We first systematised these outcomes, which gave us a little knowledge into how to approach the idea of innovation.

A FOCUS ON DIGITAL CULTURAL HERITAGE: THE FUTURE INNOVATION

The purpose of the IN.DA.CO. course is to educate students who, in keeping with the goals of the ERASMUS+ program for an interconnected system of European and non-European universities, will become conservators of mediterranean cultural heritage. This purpose has been realised in the form of a degree programme in order to offer students an attractive master's degree in Cultural Heritage Conservation - INnovation DAns la COnservation (IN.DA.CO). Several experiences that have already been completed in the European environment were taken into consideration during the study process for the design of this new path. Specifically, the two-year-long DYCLAM+ project, that intended to teach managers in the areas of historic and cultural landscape conservation, sustainable exploitation, valuation, and numerical mediation (Fumo et al, 2021).

IN.DA.CO JOINT MASTER DEGREE

120 ECTS, 4 EDITIONS



03. The proposal of master degree.

The research team created a training model that included several steps between laboratory practice and diagnostic activities. Based on the feedback from the surveys, we were aware that the university pathways in conservation required a change in both technical and cultural aspects, as well as a transformation of crucial operations. For this reason, the project proposal suggests a full semester allocated to teaching students on how to use digital technology to document historical objects. Indeed, since that the subject of digitization always comes up when we talk about innovation and cultural heritage, especially when preserving the past is the primary objective (Tucci et al., 2023; Diaz Mendoza et al., 2023), the search for an innovative approach to modern conservators training involved a careful examination of what might be a suitable training programme that also included digitisation and heritage analysis using digital tools (Ioannides & Patias, 2023). Based on the most moderate findings of the sector research, we better analysed current 3D digitization activities, documentation processes, and workflow schemes, which differ significantly in terms of application scenarios, retrieval technology, and parameters of heritage objects. Based on these findings, we designed an educational path that involves two key aspects: documentation (data acquisition, such as image or range data, and registration) and 3D modelling (computing into a 3D model, including point cloud generation, structuring and modelling, and texture mapping) (Munster, et al., 2024). Following the submitted proposal, on the basis of the European Joint Master Degree model, every semester, as part of the Master's curriculum, students will study in a new place and focus on various subjects (Fig. 03.). In particular, the third semester is the most innovative because it focuses on digital conservation technology. The student will get the opportunity to document, describe, and keep up the history using a variety of digital tools.

RESULTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Developing a training programme for the preservation of the Euro-Mediterranean legacy requires addressing a number of political issues that lead to a more creative and open future. We worked throughout the year to better understand our definition of heritage in order to properly frame this issue. We presented our concept of Euro-Mediterranean legacy through a call for papers that was open to all researchers from partner universities. The workshop intended to investigate the extended concept of artistic and cultural heritage of the Euro-Mediterranean region through the research experiences presented by the partners involved in the INDACO project (Fig. 04.).

Starting from these results, we organised a meeting intended as a space for reflection on the concept of heritage as a form of identity and a tool for cultural integration, with the aim of exploring the state of the art in the Mediterranean area in terms of heritage conservation and enhancement. Each presentation should have been able to answer some general questions: What do we consider cultural heritage? How do we take care of our national heritage? What institutional or business network are we collaborating with to achieve our goals? Our goal in developing this project is to successfully establish a shared vision for the future of Euro-Mediterranean heritage and expand participation to other Mediterranean nations.

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04. The final meeting of the project, with some of partners involved.