

BETWEEN MIGRATION AND ICT: SOCIAL PROJECTS FOR A MEDITERRANEAN URBAN HOPE¹

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Abstract

This essay explores how migration and ICT are reshaping Mediterranean urban life, offering opportunities for integration and shared cultural growth, and creating experiences of embodied Hope deeply rooted in contemporary society. The use of low-cost, open-access digital tools fosters social cohesion, especially in culturally diverse and historically rich Mediterranean cities. Key concepts such as legacy, community, and city are redefined as dynamic, relational, and open to innovation. Grounded, local projects – often EU-funded – demonstrate how digital technologies can support intercultural dialogue and inclusive heritage practices. Migration is portrayed both as a challenge and a cultural resource, enriching urban identities through collective memory and care. Researchers play a crucial role in rewriting fragmented histories by including marginalized voices through oral histories and community engagement. Digital tools – ranging from podcasts to VR and AI – can serve as bridges across cultural divides. Ultimately, the text describes some successful projects envisioning an urban future rooted in hope, inclusion, and shared humanity.

Keywords: Migration, Religious Studies, Heritage valorization, Low cost ICT, Social cohesion

Europe is currently facing two major challenges: on the one hand, migratory phenomena that affect the entire continent in various forms, and on the other, the social and cultural changes induced by the use of artificial intelligence. Can these transformations create the conditions for the emer-

¹ Roberta Rodelli and Arianna Battiato collaborated with the data collection.

gence of an embodied hope? Can ICTs be employed to foster integration and social cohesion?

Can the active and informed use of ICTs in complex cultural contexts reveal new positive potentials and foster the development of innovative applications?

An affirmative answer may be offered if we refer to certain key definitions that have guided scholarly, historiographical, and social debates over the past decades:

- the concept of Legacy, intended as a living heritage enriched by the experience and care of those who inherit and cultivate it²;
- the notion of Community as a “warm place”, encompassing a plurality of interpretations closely linked to the relational dimension and to the reconfiguration of shared spaces in the context of global modernity³;
- and the City as a living space, a site of “memory work”, a symbolic domain in which signs, buildings, materials, and architectural forms acquire meaning within a specific cultural code⁴.

² Key works stressing the definition of Heritage and Legacy: D. LOWENTHAL, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985; L. SMITH, *Uses of Heritage*, Routledge, London 2006; M. AUGÉ, *Non lieux*, Edition du seuil, Paris 1992. For a more recent overview, see also K. FABBRICATTI, L. BOISSENIN, M. CITONI, M., *Heritage Community Resilience: towards new approaches for urban resilience and sustainability*, in «City Territ Archit 7», 17 (2020) <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40410-020-00126-7> accessed 23 January 2025; P. GIRARDELLI, *A living legacy: heritage across borders*, in «Disegnarecon», L'Aquila 2020 <https://doi.org/10.20365/DISEGNARECON.25.2020.ED2> accessed 23 January 2025.

³ Several different conceptions of community, including urban communities, political communities, and virtual communities are described in G. DELANTY, *Community*, Routledge, New York 2010.

See also: D. HARDCASTLE, P.R. POWERS, S. WENOCUR, *The Concept of Community in Social Work Practice, Community Practice Theories and Skills for Social Workers*, online edition, Oxford Academic, Oxford 31 October 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195141610.003.0004>, accessed 28 May 2025; MOHR CARNEY, M., ADAMS, D., MENDENHALL, A., OHMER, M., *The lens of community*, in «Journal of Community Practices», 30(2), 2022, pp. 105–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2022.2077598>, accessed 21 November 2024. Although the word ‘community’ is commonly used and generally has positive connotations, the term itself is problematic. It is used in many ways. See Z. BAUMAN, *Community: Seeking safety in an insecure world*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2001; S. KENNY, *Developing communities for the future*, Thomson, Melbourne 2006.

⁴ About the lesson of Henri Lefebvre and the contemporary debate: M. E. LEARY-OWHIN, J.P. MCCARTHY, *The Routledge Handbook of Henri Lefebvre, the City and Urban Society*, Routledge, London 2019; S. KIPFER, P. SABERI, T. WIEDITZ, *Henri Lefebvre: Debates and controversies*, in «Progress in Human Geography», 37(1), 2012, pp. 115–34; Z.P. NEAL, *The connected city: How networks are shaping the modern metropolis*, Routledge, New York 2013.

A general definition of low-cost, open-access ICT instruments can also be framed within this same perspective⁵.

However, more than theoretical reflection alone, a more nuanced and promising response emerges from ongoing experiences in areas most directly impacted by these transformations – namely, the major urban centers bordering the Mediterranean basin.

A range of dotted projects, often grounded in the initiative of local groups and supported by European financial instruments, are beginning to shape models for the co-construction of shared cultural forms: ways of living together, exchanges of information among diverse identity and religious groups, and systems for engaging with public spaces that give rise to common interpretations of everyday cultural heritage.

In such contexts, the stratifications of a millennia-old history are interwoven with the everyday use of ICTs by local populations.

The Mediterranean Sea has been a vital trade route since ancient times. Civilizations such as the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, and later the Byzantines, Latin coastal cities and Ottomans used the sea for commerce, connecting distant lands and facilitating the exchange of goods, technologies, and knowledge. Conquests, colonization, trade, and migration brought together different cultures, fostering mutual influence, and cooperation.

As the birthplace of major world religious traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the region experienced a rich interweaving of ideas and practices of the Sacred, which led to interactions, debates, and conflicts. In addition, it has been a cradle of intellectual activity and new ideas, with major contributions to science, philosophy, medicine, and the arts. Waves of migration over the centuries have brought new peoples and ideas to the Mediterranean shores, contributing to the dynamic and ever evolving nature of Mediterranean societies.

During the 20th century, these place experienced significant changes and transformations, both territorial and cultural, which shaped their per-

⁵ For a cultural definition: M. CASTELL, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2010; J. VAN DIJK, *The Network Society: Social Aspects of New Media*, Sage, London 2012; P.M. KRAFFT, M. YOUNG, M. KATELL, K. HUANG, G. BUGINGO, *Defining AI in Policy versus Practice*, in «arXiv:1912.11095v1 [cs.CY]», <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1912.11095> accessed 23 May 2025.

ception in the eyes of the world⁶. Several Mediterranean cities underwent rapid modernization and urbanization, fuelled by industrialization, population growth, and migration from rural areas, which produced urban sprawl, pollution, social inequality, and inadequate infrastructure. Other cities were under colonial rule or influenced by colonial powers.

Here, various experiences of migration in different Mediterranean areas have been superimposed, causing a complex impact⁷.

Because of its dual nature of giving rise to conflicts and tensions and being an opportunity for dialogue and integration, migration has always played a complex role in shaping urban life and societal development.

Mediterranean cities as places where contemporary migration flows, with their traditions, languages, and customs, intersect with the rich historical legacy of these cities, fertilising them through various cultural elements such as music, dance, craftsmanship, and storytelling.

At the same time, Mediterranean cities define themselves as places of migrants' care, through the collection of stories on caring for the whole individual dimension, including existential and identity-cultural aspects.

Such a process often intertwines with the legacy of colonialism, contributing to fight discrimination and racism, and creating models of intervention, planning, and management replicable in the Mediterranean area (and the whole Europe).

The most significant projects carried out (or in progress) are based on a number of general findings.

Many Mediterranean cities struggle with urban sprawl, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient planning for the needs of diverse communities⁸. Statistical projections indicate that by 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will reside in urban settlements. This proportion was already attained in the Mediterranean in 2014, and it is projected that by 2030, countries bordering the Sea will reach a concentration of three-quarters of

⁶ G. PACE, *Ways of Thinking and Looking at the Mediterranean City*, in «MPRA», Paper No. 10511, May 2002; J. E. RUIZ-DOMÈNEC, *Past and future of Mediterranean Cities*, in «Quaderns de la Mediterrània», 20-21, 2014, 103-109 <https://www.iemed.org/publication/past-and-future-of-mediterranean-cities/>.

⁷ Migration and Migrants: Regional Dimensions and Developments. <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/what-we-do/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-3/europe>

⁸ A. PARANT, *Demographic Trends and Outlook in the Mediterranean*, in «Plan Bleu, Notes» #38, 2020. https://planbleu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Note38_-English-version.pdf.

their population in cities⁹.

These urban contexts have also received (and continue to receive) directly a large part of the migratory waves from Africa and the Near East.

1. *Researchers in action*

In light of the aforementioned dynamics, there persists a significant lack of comprehensive and inclusive historical documentation concerning the contributions of successive migratory waves to the cultural and societal evolution of the Mediterranean region. Existing historical narratives are frequently fragmented and disproportionately centered on dominant cultures, thereby neglecting the perspectives, experiences, and cultural contributions of marginalized migrant and nomadic populations.

Addressing this historiographical gap requires the implementation of a multi-dimensional research strategy, encompassing: a systematic review of academic literature and primary historical sources, consultations with historians and cultural scholars, and empirical surveys aimed at integrating underrepresented narratives. These initiatives are essential for responding to the lacunae previously identified by regional historical societies and documented in the findings of EU-funded research programmes.

Within this framework, researchers assume a proactive and engaged role. Specifically, historians, local historians, and scholars of religion embedded in the social fabric of Mediterranean urban contexts are tasked with producing rigorous and inclusive historical analyses. Such analyses should prioritize the representation of marginalized groups through the use of oral history methodologies, archival research, and collaborative engagement with local communities.

In this perspective, researchers – together with stakeholders and community actors – are conceptualized as agents of social and cultural trans-

⁹ A. P. GARCÍA-NIETO, I.R. GEIJZENDORFFER, F. BARÓ, P.K. ROCHE, A. BONDEAU, W. CRAMER, *Impacts of urbanization around Mediterranean cities: Changes in ecosystem service supply* in «Ecological Indicators», 91 (2018), 589-606.

Consider also findings from projects like “Intercultural Cities” by the Council of Europe [https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities#:~:text=The%20Intercultural%20Cities%20Programme%20\(ICC,advantage%20\(more...\)\)](https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities#:~:text=The%20Intercultural%20Cities%20Programme%20(ICC,advantage%20(more...))) accessed 17 March 2025.

formation¹⁰. Their work contributes to the reconfiguration of historical memory and supports the development of more inclusive and responsive socio-cultural systems, attuned to the plural and evolving needs of contemporary societies.

These projects are aligned with the principles and objectives outlined in the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan (2020–2025), whose goals they actively support¹¹. They are also inspired by key international frameworks such as the Council of Europe's Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society and UNESCO's Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape¹². Furthermore, they are consistent with policy recommendations put forward by international organizations, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Importantly, these initiatives are rooted in the use of low-cost ICT tools, aimed at expanding access to services and digital resources for citizens, particularly in underserved or marginalized communities.

In general, they highlight the role of urban spaces as places of care, integration, and shared heritage, emphasizing how these environments facilitate social cohesion and community resilience through both spontaneous and organized forms of social integration¹³.

Digital technologies have also been employed in innovative ways, including data storage systems and databases, messaging applications, content creation tools, social networks with integrated applications, podcasts, interactive maps, interactive video documentaries and virtual exhibitions, reusable 3D models of cultural heritage, tools for the co-creation of theatrical performances, virtual reality environments, digital ecosystems incorporating artificial intelligence, and online games.

Their use has been directed toward fostering mutual understanding among the groups involved, recognizing community ties and shared expe-

¹⁰ N. BORTOLETTO, *Participatory action research in local development: an opportunity for social work*, in «*European Journal of Social Work*», 20(4), 2016, pp. 484-496 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2016.1188770> accessed 10 October 2024.

¹¹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-anti-racism-action-plan-2020-2025_en

¹² <https://whc.unesco.org/en/hul/#resources> accessed 11 April 2025.

¹³ An overview is in M. GARCÍA-HERNÁNDEZ, M. GRAVARI-BARBAS (edd.), *Cultural Heritage on the Urban Peripheries Towards New Research Paradigms*, Routledge, London 2025. See also: C. DEPLANO, *Antropologia urbana. Società complesse e democrazia partecipativa*, EdicomEdizioni, Milano 2009; L. LAZZARETTI, *The resurgence of the societal function of cultural heritage. An introduction*, in «*City, Culture and Society*», 3, 4 (2012), pp. 229-233.

periences within urban spaces, enhancing social cohesion, and reshaping the perception of the “other” within a dynamic framework of proximity.

2. *A mosaic of projects*

The *CultureLabs*¹⁴ and *Pluggy*¹⁵ network-based projects can be regarded as precursors to several subsequent project initiatives. Both launched in 2016 within different contexts, they successfully gathered and networked a range of local pilot interventions, laying the groundwork for more complex and participatory models of cultural engagement.

The first project aimed to preserve cultural heritage by promoting social innovation, focusing particularly on members of local communities who were less engaged in heritage activities, including migrants, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, as well as institutional actors such as museums, archives, galleries, libraries, and volunteer and charitable organizations. Acknowledging the shared goal of building a common future, the main obstacles identified were: the lack of specific skills and adequate infrastructure within museums and cultural sites; the limited engagement of adult migrants with the proposed initiatives; and language barriers.

One of the micro-projects included, *More in Common*, implemented in Manchester, UK, created a space for collecting thoughts, proposals, and visions of a shared future under the evocative title Wall of Hope.

Another micro-project, *Bridging Culture Through Arts* (carried out in Ancona, Italy), targeted the integration of refugees and asylum seekers through highly participatory initiatives aimed at helping them understand the culture of the host country, starting from the Omero Museum and the Teatro Educativo Pirata¹⁶. The project revealed the emergence of a sense of belonging that made the group cohesive and open to further initiatives.

Pluggy – the Pluggable Social Platform for Heritage Awareness and Participation – is the first European social platform enabling citizens to actively engage in heritage-related activities and to act as caretakers, creators,

¹⁴ Official website <https://culture-labs.eu> CultureLabs is detailed on Cordis <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/770158> accessed 23 October 2024.

¹⁵ Official website <https://pluggy.eu> Pluggy is described on Cordis <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/726765> accessed 10 November 2024.

¹⁶ In the website of CultureLabs <https://culture-labs.eu/pilotitaly-ancona/>, accessed 23 March 2025.

key influencers, and ambassadors of their country's culture and history. Although designed for all European citizens, it specifically includes measures to facilitate the participation of groups and age brackets traditionally less involved.

Through a smartphone platform equipped with augmented reality, geo-location, 3D sonic technology, and gaming features, users can share their own content and craft narratives about cultural heritage, publishing them directly on social media and making them part of a kind of virtual exhibition¹⁷. The everyday landscape is understood as the product of ongoing transformation resulting from the interactions between individuals, communities, and places; thus, it also contributes to the cohesion of European societies.

The **MEMEX** project, conducted in selected metropolitan areas across Portugal, Spain, and France, centered on urban heritage—both tangible and intangible—as a foundational element for the digital narration of experiences, personal stories, and travel memories¹⁸.

Events and initiatives within the project provided opportunities for individuals, particularly socially vulnerable populations who typically lack access to various cultural opportunities, to share their own stories with the community and engage with those of others.

A smartphone application was developed, incorporating essential tools for the visualization and creation of digital stories, alongside Knowledge Graph, an open-source tool for story creation, some of which were adapted into augmented reality experiences.

Within the project, pilot activities carried out in Lisbon were embedded in the relational and cultural dynamics of diverse migrant groups who had relocated to the city as a consequence of decolonization processes¹⁹. First- and second-generation migrants from former Portuguese colonies were engaged and organized into small groups to foster the recognition of specific identities and to promote the production of intercultural narratives, including the mapping of tangible and intangible heritage.

¹⁷ The virtual exhibition collected by Pluggy is composed of Blog stories, tours, games, soundscapes, witnesses <https://pluggy.eu/exhibitions?type=media>

¹⁸ Official website <https://memexproject.eu/en/> Page of the project on Cordis <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870743> accessed 03 November 2024.

¹⁹ Web page of website MEMEX dedicated to the Lisbon pilot <https://memexproject.eu/en/pilots-en/lisbon-pilot> accessed 28 May 2025.

In Barcelona, migrant women were the primary protagonists of the project's initiatives. The project collaborated with laBonne, a cultural center dedicated to women located in Ciutat Vella. According to data from the Catalan Institute of Statistics, foreigners constitute 48.26% of the total population in this district, with women representing 48.4% of this demographic, primarily originating from Pakistan, Italy, the Philippines, Morocco, and France.

Using a benchmarking tool, the target group was invited to analyze their level of participation in the city's cultural life and subsequently received training in digital storytelling tools during workshops, which surfaced highly original stories and perspectives.

Traction is the name of a platform that integrates theatrical initiatives with digital tools aimed at actively engaging members of the most disadvantaged communities, enabling them – together with experts – to create performances that narrate their histories and highlight their unique identities²⁰. Within the project, digital tools for the co-creation of theatrical works were developed, including the use of virtual reality. Among these tools, *Co-Creation Space* is a web-based platform that facilitates content sharing, communication, and collaboration among participants around multimedia objects. It functions as a private social media environment that allows individuals to discuss and collaborate on a production throughout the creative process.

In contrast, *Co-Creation Stage* is a web-based tool designed to enable distributed performances by connecting multiple stages and participants²¹. Through this tool, artists can design a model for their performance, pre-defining the number of scenes, stages, screens, or other devices on each stage, along with audiovisual assets.

One of the pilot experiences took place in Barcelona, Spain, in the Raval neighborhood—one of the city's most complex, multiethnic, and stigmatized areas. Over 350 participants contributed, sharing their connections to urban space and its diverse communities from perspectives that had previously been marginalized and scarcely considered²².

²⁰ Official website <https://www.traction-project.eu/> Description of the project on Cordis <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870610> accessed 10 October 2024.

²¹ Web page dedicated to ITC used in the project <https://www.traction-project.eu/technology/> accessed 12 December 2024. See also <https://www.traction-project.eu/resources/>

²² Web page of opera La Gata Perduda, <https://www.traction-project.eu/trials/liceu/>, accessed 12 December 2024.

ReRoot – Arrival Infrastructures as Sites of Integration for Recent Newcomers analyzes migration processes in Europe through nine case studies aimed at promoting new practices among actors involved in migrant integration²³. The project primarily targets recent immigrants and refugees. It highlights the cultural impact of arrivals in ports and migration hubs, capturing perceptions of these groups by urban societies, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the incorporation processes of newcomers and integrating these insights into broader policy frameworks. The investigation also entails a critical reflection on the concept of integration and the notion of cultural sustainability within society²⁴.

In connection with the “Balkan Route,” the project examined the situation of migrants in old railway carriages in Thessaloniki, the port city that experienced a significant influx of refugees in the 2010s, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and North Africa. A portion of these migrants was stopped at the border with Macedonia in 2016 and subsequently relocated to fourteen camps located in the urban periphery. The study spanned eleven months, from August 2021 to July 2022, collecting participants’ observations, research notes, maps, and archival material including newspaper articles and websites, as well as conducting interviews with migrants, representatives and volunteers of humanitarian organizations, and local residents²⁵.

YouCount is a broader project that demonstrates how knowledge and improvements gained through immigrant integration activities can be effectively extended to diverse groups within European societies, which are often internally divided and burdened by social issues primarily affecting youth²⁶.

Subtitled “Empowering Youth and Co-Creating Social Innovations and Policymaking through Youth-Focused Citizen Social Science,” YouCount is a compendium of cases implementing practices aimed at combating youth social exclusion through Citizen Science, thus fostering more inclu-

²³ Official website <https://rerootproject.eu/>.

²⁴ These topics are discussed in the blog <https://rerootproject.eu/page45279441.html> accessed 28 May 2025.

²⁵ A synthesis on the case study of Thessaloníki <https://rerootproject.eu/publications/tpost/jye6epjmn1-migrants-in-old-train-wagons-inthessalo> accessed 06 November 2024.

²⁶ Official website <https://www.youcountproject.eu> Web page on Cordis <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101005931> accessed 12 November 2024.

sive societies by collaborating with young people of different ages and disadvantaged groups.

The project originated from the recognition that a considerable number of young people are at risk of social exclusion. It emphasizes the need to develop enhanced knowledge and innovations to create more inclusive, youth-friendly societies through Citizen Science—an active and innovative approach within the social sciences. Central to the project are researchers who not only observe ongoing social changes but also actively participate in the dynamics generated by the project itself.

YouCount's objective was the development of a conceptual and methodological intervention framework, defined collaboratively with a group of experts. This methodology was subsequently refined and tested in ten local projects directly involving young people. The project's impact was assessed to maximize the transferability and effectiveness of outcomes in other initiatives.

Throughout the various phases of the project, the European Citizen Science Association (ECSA) was actively involved: young participants were invited to collect data through interviews, creative activities, surveys, and via the specially developed YouCount application. The outcomes of these local projects demonstrated that young people actively engage in society, driven by a strong sense of belonging and involvement in both their communities and the broader national context. These results were subsequently disseminated through reports, blog posts, and brief documents, alongside the production of a manual and toolkit that consolidate key insights on social inclusion and the potential of Citizen Science as a tool for achieving this goal. Moreover, the project generated socio-ecological and economic impacts, as participants acquired relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies, and the initiative fostered supportive networks aimed at enhancing youth participation opportunities.

The project principally targets the inclusion of young people across different age groups and diverse social backgrounds, including migrants, refugees, rural inhabitants, and individuals with disabilities. The involvement of peers from comparatively advantaged circumstances allowed for a comparative reflection on varying perspectives, thereby enabling the co-design of more effective strategies tailored to the needs of both current and future youth populations.

The large project conducted and analyzed ten European case studies to highlight specific social and territorial characteristics. These case studies

also elucidate distinctive features of migratory phenomena across the continent. Below is a concise overview of the microprojects:

- Participation Opportunities for Young Migrants and Refugees (Austria): The University of Vienna collaborated with refugee youth aged 18 to 29, primarily from Syria, Afghanistan, and Nigeria. Participants engaged in surveys, workshops, focus groups, and forums, discussed findings by teams, and provided feedback via the SPOTTERON app²⁷;
- Old Industrial District of Copenhagen (Denmark): This rapidly developing area was urbanistically divided into two zones with notable economic and cultural disparities. Despite social and environmental initiatives, youth aged 14 to 20 remained economically marginalized or left the area. Aalborg University recruited youth as co-researchers, empowering them to innovate sustainable and inclusive solutions while fostering self-empowerment²⁸;
- Social Inclusion of Hearing-Impaired Youth (Hungary): This group faces substantial inequalities in education, employment, and social participation. Collaborative research conducted by both hearing and hearing-impaired researchers at the University of Szeged explored the challenges young people face entering adulthood, connecting them with key urban social actors²⁹;
- Social Inclusion and Community Cohesion through Rural Social Innovations (Hungary): In Siklósbodony, a village deprived of nearly all public institutions, residents face limited access to quality education, scarce employment, costly travel, and ethnic discrimination against Roma populations. Participants are developing a sustainable, socially innovative agricultural enterprise aimed at providing employment and strengthening community cohesion³⁰;
- Cohesion between Local Citizens and Migrants in Naples (Italy):

²⁷ Official website <https://www.youcountproject.eu> Web page on Cordis <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101005931> accessed 12 November 2024.

²⁸ Web page on the pilot managed in Denmark <https://www.youcountproject.eu/aboutthe-project/case-studies/case-studies/denmark> accessed 12 November 2024.

²⁹ Web page of the first pilot in Hungary <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-the-project/case-studies/case-studies/hungarycase-a> accessed 12 November 2024.

³⁰ Web page of the second pilot in Hungary <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-the-project/case-studies/case-studies/hungarycase-b> accessed 12 November 2024.

The University of Naples Federico II fosters a local social network involving associations to enhance the inclusion of a significant foreign resident population. A group of approximately ten young people, both local and migrant, were engaged as citizen scientists³¹;

- Empowering Local Youth through Employment and Social Entrepreneurship in Oslo (Norway): Gamle Oslo, characterized by considerable diversity and variable living conditions, presents both challenges and opportunities for youth. Young participants took part in dialogue forums, living labs, workshops, participant observation, field notes, walks, surveys, debriefings, recordings, and development/testing of the SPOTTERON app, utilizing the Inter-cultural Museum as the project's hub. The aim was to analyze youth challenges and opportunities³²;
- Support for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors and Young Adults in Gipuzkoa Province (Spain): Many unaccompanied minors and young adults struggle with adult life challenges due to loss of protective services. Two groups of about ten young people, alongside two local NGOs and the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, were trained to pilot strategies for social and labor market integration³³;
- Botkyrka Municipality (Sweden): Home to around 100 languages spoken and where 59% of residents are foreign-born or have foreign-born parents, young citizens aged 13 to 22 were invited to participate in local policymaking to influence social, political, and environmental decisions concerning youth. The project examines how engagement through the Botkyrka Young Council (BYC) fosters broader social inclusion in employment, education, and social life³⁴;
- Preston (United Kingdom): Historically, youth perspectives were seldom considered in public policy. The project engages 14- to 19-year-olds in artistic and participatory activities to explore place,

³¹ Web page of the pilot in Italy <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-theproject/case-studies/case-studies/italy> accessed 12 November 2024.

³² Web page of the pilot in Norway <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-theproject/case-studies/case-studies/norway> accessed 12 November 2024.

³³ Web page of the pilot in Spain <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-theproject/case-studies/case-studies/spain> accessed 12 November 2024.

³⁴ Web page of the pilot in Sweden <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-theproject/case-studies/case-studies/sweden> accessed 12 November 2024.

- connections, relationships, and social action, ultimately aiming to establish an intergenerational cooperative that amplifies youth voices³⁵;
- Panevėžys (Lithuania): This rural municipality faces limited employment prospects, driving youth emigration domestically and abroad. A local microproject identified factors contributing to economic decline and developed strategies to reverse this trend³⁶.

3. Overall provisional assessment looking forward a new framework

What insights emerge from the evaluation of these experiences? Can they be situated within a network aimed at exchanging expertise and creating an intervention model that could be replicated in different contexts? Given the diverse situations shaped by the complexity of migratory phenomena, is it possible to envisage a European perspective of cultural integration?

The projects discussed here, along with others of lesser scope, highlight a highly fragmented and partial landscape. These are mostly pilot initiatives undertaken by actors and groups who are only now beginning to frame the overall situation and to develop innovative strategies.

The goal of systematically monitoring outcomes and establishing a scientifically grounded methodology to assess the social impacts of these actions is also relatively recent and has yet to achieve broadly significant results³⁷.

This is compounded by a marked heterogeneity in situations and approaches across EU countries. Migration flows affect regions unevenly and have evolved over recent decades through overlapping waves and phases of internal movement. Moreover, individual governments, administrations,

³⁵ Web page of the pilot in United Kingdom <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-the-project/case-studies/case-studies/united-kingdom> accessed 12 November 2024.

³⁶ Web page of the pilot in Lithuania, <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-the-project/case-studies/case-studies/lithuania> accessed 12 November 2024.

³⁷ To consider the status questionis, see: J. STEPHENS, R. TIWARI, *Symbolic estates: community identity and empowerment through heritage*, in «International Journal of Heritage Studies», 21(1), 2019, pp. 99-114; V. HIGGINS, D. DOUGLAS (edd.), *Communities and Cultural Heritage: Global Issues, Local Values*, Routledge, London 2022 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003031192>; F. BANDARIN, R. VAN OERS, *The historic urban landscape: managing heritage in an urban century*, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester-London 2012; F. BANDARIN, R. VAN OERS (edd.), *Reconnecting the city: the historic urban landscape approach and the future of urban heritage*, (John Wiley & Sons) Chichester 2015.

and local communities have implemented varied policies, often based on incomplete information and data.

Mediterranean cities and coastal areas of Southern Europe stand out as distinctive reception sites where people of diverse origins, including recent immigrants, find commonalities with the histories of existing residents, who themselves maintain links to previous places of origin.

The vibrant, complex, and historically layered urban Mediterranean communities present favorable conditions for structured cultural integration initiatives. The projects reviewed here reveal their particularities and the capacity of local experiences to illuminate multiple facets of migratory dynamics and, more broadly, the transformations affecting urban environments across Europe.

They serve as a litmus test for general social and environmental issues, acting as a bridge between different worlds – environments whose understanding can positively enrich the methodological framework of EU policies within social innovation.

These locales host a plurality of de facto experiences where mobile communities reshape the urban context. Only a small fraction of these initiatives are codified and included in projects of European scope, while many remain confined to the voluntary sector, emerging as spontaneous initiatives vulnerable to numerous variables that often jeopardize their continuity and rooting over time³⁸.

For these reasons, and building on the pilot projects already conducted, there is an expressed need to develop coherent plans to improve awareness of the historical complexity of Mediterranean cities.

Amidst numerous individual initiatives, there is a clear demand for broader actions capable of engaging diverse stakeholders and society as a whole within a medium-term perspective.

It also appears imperative to provide local communities with systematic knowledge to underpin participatory valorization efforts. Hence, reflection on applicable methodologies in different contexts constitutes a significant field of study, engaging multiple scientific disciplines – from sociology and history to regional economics and linguistic and literary studies.

³⁸ A theoretical perspective is outlined in Z. WU, S. HOU, *Heritage and discourse*, in E. WATERTON, S. WATSON (edd.), *The Palgrave handbook of contemporary heritage research*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke (2015), pp. 37-51. See also N. WALTER, *From values to narrative: a new foundation for the conservation of historic Buildings*, in “International Journal of Heritage Studies”, 20 (6), 2014, pp. 634-650 doi:10.1080/13527258.2013.828649

This methodological reflection opens a space for academic research, also linked to the active role of researchers within the application contexts of outcomes and tools, fostering engaged scholarship.

Historians, historians of religions, and local historians, including those affiliated with associations and groups active in public history, assume a specific and important role.

The potential of prior experiences in this area has yet to coalesce into a fully developed methodological synthesis, which could be promoted particularly in relation to projects oriented towards social cohesion and the construction of a culturally cohesive and sustainable European society.

Furthermore, educational curricula across Mediterranean countries often fail to adequately cover the rich cultural heritage and impacts of migration. Public awareness remains limited, fostering stereotypes and xenophobia. Therefore, there is a need to promote surveys and interviews with educators, review school curricula, and collect feedback from cultural organizations such as the Anna Lindh Foundation.

Data from reports by the European Commission on Education and Training, UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report, and local educational authorities reveal a lack of comprehensive educational materials and public awareness campaigns that highlight Mediterranean history and the positive impacts of migration through media partnerships, cultural festivals, and exhibitions.

There is a clear need to equip education planners, media, and cultural decision-makers with a robust, accessible online data repository.

Equally important is the legal dimension of such initiatives, as well as their institutional frameworks.

Policy-making and legal frameworks often inadequately support the cultural integration of migrants within Europe. Many migrant communities encounter legal and bureaucratic obstacles that hinder their full societal participation.

Similarly, cultural integration and sustainability initiatives are frequently disadvantaged by their temporal instability and lack of recognition by institutional actors.

This need has been identified through policy analyses, interviews with policymakers, and reports from organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Mediterranean Observatory on Migration (IOM Migration Policy Reports, European Commission's Migration and Home Affairs data).

Engaging legislators to develop and advocate for inclusive policies and legal frameworks supporting migrant cultural integration, alongside organizing workshops and forums to discuss and draft such policies, would be beneficial.

Overall, from a unified European perspective, the aim is to offer intervention models and strategic actions grounded in scientific standards of sustainable development.

Ultimately, these efforts contribute not only to the advancement of social cohesion and cultural sustainability but also to the construction of a future grounded in hope-one where diverse communities are empowered to coexist, collaborate, and collectively shape a more inclusive and resilient Europe.