

## THE EUROPEAN PROJECT “VERSUS+ / HERITAGE FOR PEOPLE”. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

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### ABSTRACT:

The project “VerSus+ / Heritage for PEOPLE”, founded by the European Commission as part of the Creative Europe Culture Programme (Ref. 607593-CREA-1-2019-1-ES-CULT-COOP1) during the period 2019-2023, focuses on the transmission of knowledge to all branches of society and the general public. Its aim is to raise awareness on what constitutes the basis for the conservation of the tangible and intangible heritage as well as for a more sustainable contemporary architecture. This in-depth transmission of the lessons from vernacular heritage to future society is to be carried out in specific defined contexts, such as islands and archipelagos (geographically limited territories that are accessible to collaborators and administrative, technical and social agents), where vernacular heritage is under pressure, subjected to the transformations of contemporary life, particularly mass tourism. These pilot experiences should serve as a real testing ground for the implementation of actions for social participation, dissemination, education, communication, and promotion in different contexts and through different media. This project aims to reach out to society in order to showcase the sustainable qualities of the examples identified, through the establishment of an operative approach that can be adjusted to different contexts. The experiences on each island are expected to have repercussions throughout the region and, in turn, throughout the country in question, improving the perspectives and opportunities starting from best practices, and promoting the development of local skills. In addition, promotion and support from partners and associate partners will allow these experiences to be applied in other similar European and international contexts.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The project builds on the outcomes and successes of the earlier European Commission funded projects: “VerSus - Lessons from Vernacular Heritage in Sustainable Architecture” ([www.esg.pt/versus/](http://www.esg.pt/versus/)), “Terra Incognita 1” and “Terra Incognita 2” (<http://culture-terra-incognita.org/>), funded by the EU’s Culture Programmes. All were aimed at gaining knowledge from the fundamental lessons and principles of vernacular heritage and at exploring new ways of integrating those principles into an eco-friendlier contemporary architecture (Correia et al., 2014). The project “VerSus - Lessons from Vernacular Heritage in Sustainable Architecture” in particular, with an approach which is currently relevant to the scientific and technical communities as well as the general public, had widespread impact (with over 10,000 downloads of the documents from the webpage) and international recognition (it received the European Award for Architectural Heritage Intervention 2017 in the Dissemination Category). It was also recognized by the European Union, which selected it as a “Success Story” for its impact, contribution to the drafting of policies, innovative results, and creative approach which can serve as inspiration for other projects ([www.esg.pt/versus/](http://www.esg.pt/versus/)). The proposal for this new project, “VerSus+ | Heritage for PEOPLE” is based on these experiences. The earlier projects facilitated critical reflection on the communal responsibility to contribute more actively towards the sustainable development of our society.

Vernacular heritage represents a great resource with considerable potential to define principles for sustainable design and contemporary construction. According to the ICOMOS Charter on the built vernacular heritage (1999):

Vernacular building is the traditional and natural way by which communities house themselves. It is a continuing process including necessary changes and continuous adaptation, as a response to social and environmental constraints. (...) The built vernacular heritage is important; it is the fundamental expression of the culture of a community, of its relationship with its territory and, at the same time, the expression of the world’s cultural diversity.

Vernacular heritage is composed of traditional buildings, which represent a morphological response to the environmental and climate constraints. Additionally, the materials and architectural components used are climate responsive, tailored to specific locations, and adapted to seismic, geographic and climatic features, as well as to social behaviour and cultural traditions. It is also a cost-effective architecture with low environmental impact.

All the know-how, the intangible heritage of knowledge and skills that vernacular heritage encloses, has to be presented in order to foster education and creative training as new forms of vernacular heritage protection based on the knowledge and awareness of the heritage in its dynamic dimensions.

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The project “VerSus+ | Heritage for PEOPLE” aims to enhance new perspectives and opportunities, starting from best practices, and to promote the development of local skills toward the “living heritage community” mentioned by the Council of Europe Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (2005), the Charter of Venice (1964), and UNESCO Conventions for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005). The present project aims to reach out to society to showcase the sustainable qualities of the examples identified, by establishing an operative approach that can be adjusted to different contexts and embraced by local communities. The lessons derived from vernacular heritage can be applied to conservation and rehabilitation and to the conceptual design of sustainable contemporary architecture that will become the heritage of tomorrow

In this approach, three dimensions of sustainability have been defined in “VerSus - Lessons from Vernacular Heritage in Sustainable Architecture” (Guillaud et al., 2014), as follows:

- Socio-cultural: the sense of belonging, of identity, of personal and community development. This scope tries to gather all social and cultural positive impacts observed in vernacular heritage. It concerns the protection of cultural landscapes, the transmission of construction cultures, the capacity to stimulate creativity, the recognition of cultural values - tangible and intangible heritage - and the reinforcement of social cohesion.
- Environmental: this scope addresses the human capacity of intervention, aiming to decrease and even prevent negative impacts on the environment, which is very sensitive to changes. Human intervention is able to integrate nature and bioclimatic features, to control the production of pollution and waste, to preserve health and to mitigate the impact of natural hazards.
- Socio-economic: the capacity of reducing the efforts invested during the construction process, the enhancement of building performance, the maintenance of buildings and of all the impacts that contribute to an improvement of living conditions. Here, the concept of effort and work replaces the idea of cost, especially in contexts where no capital-intensive systems were implemented. Vernacular solutions encourage autonomy and local activity, optimise construction efforts, extend the lifetime of the building, and save resources.

Currently, the transmission of these lessons to society is a challenge for the further spreading awareness of the importance of heritage conservation and its integration into contemporary life as an element of cultural identity. It is also a source of quality of life which makes use of the possibilities and options on offer by traditional knowledge to support innovation and creativity in the modern world (Mileto et al., 2014).

## 2. AIMS OF THE PROJECT

In the framework of the priorities set by the call for Creative Europe Culture (EACEA, 2018), the project “VerSus+ | Heritage for PEOPLE” regards the people and society of the future (hence, VerSus+PEOPLE) while also falling within the scope of support for European cooperation.

### 2.1 General aims

In this context, the three general aims of the VerSus+PEOPLE project are as follows:

- To promote, strengthen and expand international and transcultural relations taking advantage of the network established in the course of the project “VerSus: Lessons from Vernacular Heritage in Sustainable Architecture” through dynamic, innovative and creative actions. It also aims to promote international cooperation between experts and institutions of different nationalities working in the fields of sustainable and vernacular heritage, in order to encourage an EU-wide intercultural dialogue and a more generalized acknowledgement of their international studies, careers, and activities
- To apply knowledge from the fundamental lessons and principles of vernacular heritage to improve the recognition of vernacular habitats through the awareness of their values and qualities, focusing on both the heritage aspect, and on what they offer in terms of sustainability and know-how for the development of future society and a more sustainable architecture
- To disseminate the principles, techniques, and solutions of vernacular heritage in European society, so that they can be adapted to respond to the real needs of European societies in terms of culture, identity, quality of life and environment. The VerSus+PEOPLE project aims to reach a wide and varied audience in order to have a real impact on society and the general public. It pays special attention to the society of the future (children and young people) as well as to local, regional, and national authorities in charge of heritage management including specialists and experts in the field of architecture (architects, engineers, cultural managers, historians, ethnographers, university students, etc.) together with craftsmen and companies in the construction and tourism sectors. It also considers migrants and refugees to be an important target group, since providing them with in-depth knowledge of the constructive tradition of their foster country is a good way to promote their integration.

### 2.2 Specific aims

Based on these three general objectives **four specific aims** are established for the VerSus+PEOPLE project:

- To create a multidisciplinary study methodology which permits the analysis of the state and potential of vernacular heritage in a limited geographical setting. This methodology takes into account tangible and intangible aspects; cultural and social expectations; administration and management problems; the relevance of its principles and lessons in the field of architecture and in local society; and the extraction of conclusions and guidelines to draw up strategies for education, awareness, and for the application of the principles and lessons from vernacular heritage
- To develop didactic creative activities which allow the transmission of principles and lessons from vernacular heritage to a wide heterogeneous audience (general public, children and young people, migrants and refugees, administrators and managers, craftsmen and companies, etc.) using different strategies (active, participative, creative, etc.) and tools (traditional, digital, visual, interactive, etc.).

These activities, specifically designed for the project, will create a corpus applicable beyond the project itself which can be extrapolated to different contexts.

- To strengthen the role of local artists, craftsmen, and companies by awarding them control of traditional constructive materials and techniques in contemporary society. This would make them key agents in the processes for the revitalization and innovation of local architecture through promotion, appreciation, intercultural exchange, stimulation of the innovative use of traditional materials and techniques, etc.
- To promote the study methodology, action strategies, activities developed and project results not only locally, regionally and nationally but also in Europe and worldwide through different media (presentations, talks, social networks, publications, etc.), so that the work carried out can be an example to be applied in other similar contexts in Europe and worldwide.

These objectives lead to the definition of **four work axes**:

1. **Vernacular heritage contribution to sustainable architecture:** actions aimed to create and increase knowledge about lessons from vernacular heritage and new ways of integrating those lessons into contemporary sustainable architecture (field missions, collecting data, participative actions involving citizens and local and regional administration, workshops).
2. **Materials and art:** actions aiming to develop awareness in the audience through communicative and expressive forms relating to the art world, using sculpture, painting, music, and the creation of art objects through the manipulation of local materials and local knowledge (participative actions involving citizens, workshops, creative and didactic exhibition). These activities will incorporate not only local, but also international artists as a way to include a new point of view on local tradition, as well as a means for promoting the internationalization of the know-how and the project itself.
3. **Local craftsmen and traditional construction knowledge:** actions aiming to develop awareness in the public through activities which provide an understanding of the role of craftsmen and traditional materials and techniques in local development. They also aim to promote their current applicability for a more sustainable architecture and society (participative actions involving citizens, festivals, showrooms, workshops, mobile app, didactic booklet).
4. **Innovative communication and dissemination strategies for improving audiences:** activities for the dissemination of the project content and results, employing different strategies to reach new audiences. These activities include the website, videos, booklets, participatory actions involving citizens in urban and open spaces, festivals, showrooms, social networks, didactic booklets, books, and e-books. The collaboration between local craftsmen and artists from different places leads to a variety of different artistic expressions contributing to the dissemination of the ideas of the project. In addition, the mobile app is designed to connect with young people, a target audience that is hard to reach when it comes to the transmission of tradition. The contents of the app will be designed to generate lasting knowledge and interest in vernacular heritage.

These four axes are coordinated and the activities are interlinked to offer a rich overview of topics and to reach all audiences.

### 3. METHODOLOGY AND ACTIVITIES

#### 3.1 Methodology and case studies

The methodology of the VerSus+PEOPLE project is based on case studies employing a multidisciplinary approach (architectural, historical, geographical, territorial, administrative and management, technical and constructive, artistic and creative, social, didactic, etc.). This makes it possible to outline strategies to transfer the principles and lessons from vernacular heritage to society through the design of specific activities for citizen participation, education, promotion and dissemination, and their actual implementation in collaboration with the local administrations and social agents involved.

The case studies are to be carried out in geographically delimited settings, such as small inhabited islands with major tangible and intangible vernacular heritage, currently adapting and updating in response to the demands of contemporary society, where the pressure of tourism leads to major risk situations. All these factors contribute to the transformation and gradual disappearance of local vernacular heritage, ways of life and constructive traditions. These small islands also offer the chance to work in a territory where local administrations, educational institutions, associations, etc. can be easily accessed in order to study the current situation and to design action strategies and implementation of the project activities. The islands selected are to be used as a pilot project, and will be considered a centre where specific activities such as festivals, showrooms or workshops can be held, although attempts will be made to involve inhabitants from the entire region in these activities, open also to the participation of an international public. The case selection will focus on the Mediterranean area, an easily accessible territory with islands rich in vernacular heritage, and so a great starting point for the project, which aims to achieve wider coverage in the future.

Thus, the selection criteria for these islands are as follows: small or medium islands within EU territory; Mediterranean islands; islands that are inhabited year round; presence of residential and preindustrial vernacular buildings; presence of tourism. Based on these criteria, the initial cases chosen are Formentera and archipelago of the Balearic Islands, Spain (surface: 83.24 km<sup>2</sup>; population: 12,124 in 2016) and Sant'Antioco and rest of the islands of the archipelago of Sulcis, Italia (surface: 87 km<sup>2</sup>; population: 11.811).

#### 3.2 Target audience

The main aim of this project is to transmit knowledge to different audiences, reaching a wide and diverse public and with an effect on future society and more sustainable local development. Therefore, the aim is to reach:

- a. **the general public:** made up of citizens of all ages living in the location under study implementing activities. It should also involve national and international tourists who are in this location while the activities are being carried out or who can be reached with the final materials.
- b. **children and young people:** the project focuses especially on this audience, part of the society of the future (children and young people), through creative and leisure education activities. These should encourage awareness of vernacular

tangible and intangible heritage and its potential for the world of the future migrants and refugees: as new members of the local society whose integration is fundamental for a seamless coexistence. In this sense, the project intends to include them as recipients of the constructive tradition and local know-how as a way of approaching their host country. In addition, the acquisition of practical knowledge can improve their employability

**c. local, regional and national administrations:** these administrations are in charge of heritage management and need to be involved and interested in meeting the project objectives. The participation of administrations is essential in ensuring that good use is made of knowledge acquired and the human resources of craftsmen, artists and trained specialists

**d. specialists and experts in the field of architecture:** these are specialists (architects, engineers, cultural manager, historians, ethnographers, anthropologists, geographers, university students, etc.) from different disciplines who currently and in the short- and mid-term take part in management and action in heritage, in the construction of buildings, in urban design and planning, in resource management, strategy design, etc.

**e. craftsmen and companies from the construction and tourism sectors:** there are still craftsmen who use traditional materials and techniques, but it is essential to preserve this knowledge transmitting it to craftsmen and companies which are currently in operation. Also, artists will be involved as a way to make the knowledge intended for transmission more attractive.

### 3.3 Activities

The VerSus+PEOPLE project is based on the execution of a wide range of activities aimed at different audiences according to education, interest and age. The project will pay special attention to the equal representation of men and women in all the actions, both in the organization and in the outcome of the activities. Moreover, it will involve and specifically address the elderly through concrete strategies. The attention given to them acknowledges them as the depositaries of the traditional know-how that is progressively disappearing today.

The researchers are in charge of all the main activities of the project, such as data collection (designing and selecting the case studies, compiling existing information, site missions, drafting information and outlining action strategies). They also organize seminars and scientific and didactic workshops, design of didactic activities, execution of participatory activities (festivals), the dissemination and promotion of the project (organization of an international conference, production of the materials for the booklets, the final book and video, etc.).

The activities can be grouped by objectives as follows:

- a. **Scientific activities:** meetings, seminars and international conference
- b. **Fieldwork:** data collection, studies and surveys, interviews, videos, etc.
- c. **Social participation activities:** meetings with different agents involved in the administration, management, maintenance and enjoyment of vernacular cultural heritage (cultural and social associations, local and

regional administrators and managers, professional colleges, craftsmen associations and companies). The participation of both local and international parties is by calling for an international contest for craftsmen and artists to present their work at the festivals. For the organization of these activities, the project will look for the sponsorship of companies and local bodies that have previously collaborated with the partners such as the Ceramic Chair at UPV or the Porcelanosa group.

**d. Educational and awareness activities:** technical-creative workshops run by craftsmen and local artists for primary and secondary school students and the general public; didactic workshops for children, young people and the general public on the principles and lessons from vernacular heritage and their application in the conservation and future architecture, talks and conferences delivered during the local festivals.

**e. Promotion activities:** showrooms for craftsmen and traditional constructive materials and techniques; showrooms for innovation companies and construction with traditional materials and techniques

**f. Dissemination activities:** website; social networks; YouTube channel; final results book, didactic booklet; mobile app, didactic exhibition. The presence of the corporate image of the EU in all communication and dissemination materials will make general public feel its proximity. People will then associate the positive results and repercussions with the desire of the EU to engage with the promotion and dissemination of the values related to vernacular heritage.

As Versus+PEOPLE is linked with the previous European project “VerSus: Lessons from Vernacular Heritage in Sustainable Architecture”, whose success and wide repercussion is internationally recognized. It received the European Award for Architectural Heritage Intervention 2017 in the Dissemination Category, and will take advantage of the already established network, guaranteeing global visibility of the project and the EU brand.

The common features of the constructive traditions and the commitment to preserve intangible knowledge and material culture are European values that will serve as example for others around the world. Indeed, achieving a visible impact of this project in the society will inspire others to follow this lead and devote more efforts to the objectives stated, choosing this European project as an example to be followed.

## 4. PARTNERSHIP

Traditional architecture has an important local component as it is based on the materials and circumstances of each territory. Although the human response to the need for shelter is very diverse across the territory, remote places can display common features. This is where the contribution of partners from different geographical areas enriches the project, providing diverse and complementary visions, essential to a pilot project in the Mediterranean area, potentially applicable to case studies not only in the EU, but worldwide. For practical reasons, the initial selection of Mediterranean partners within the project is mainly limited to the western territory. This is a first proposal to implement an approach to the principles of traditional architecture and its sustainability to society in general. It should therefore start its journey responsibly and not allow ambition to ruin or diminish

the quality of the result. A parallel can be established with the Terra Incognita I (AA.VV., 2008a, 2008b) and Terra (In)cognita II (AA.VV., 2011) projects, which established a process similar to the one proposed now. The partners working on the Versus+PEOPLE Project are: Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain (project leader); Escola Superior Gallecia, Portugal; Università degli Studi di Firenze and Università degli Studi di Cagliari, Italy; CRAterre, France. This partnership also ensures steady and substantial general support, stemming from world-famous institutions and bodies, with whom the partners usually collaborate. Other international universities, with experience of studies on vernacular heritage, also support this project and have a strong interest in collaborating with the partners during the development of the project. These institutions and bodies will contribute to the dissemination of the project, its scientific research and the diffusion of its outcomes.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this project is to strengthen public awareness as a means to improve access to tangible and intangible vernacular heritage. The chosen target audience for this is extremely varied. The development of skills relating to the creative and cultural sectors linked with the vernacular heritage will be achieved through innovative approaches designed to spread new knowledge of traditional crafts. Emphasis will be given to the use of new technologies, with the creation of a website that transmits the progress of the project and promotion in social networks, as well as the launch of a Mobile App with educational and entertainment content focusing on traditional architecture and intended for the general public but concentrating on young people.

The European scope of this project is fundamental to the promotion of common values linked to vernacular heritage. It will be possible to find broader and more controlled solutions to problems which now appear in different sites and would otherwise seem unconnected. The Versus+PEOPLE project, operating as a pilot project, will be useful for the application of the same study methodology, action strategies and activities in a broader context. Therefore, the work done can be an example to be applied for actions relating to traditional knowledge in other similar contexts in Europe and worldwide.

In the short and medium term the project will have noticeable impact. On the one hand, it will achieve an immediate revitalization of the small islands involved through social participation activities performed on site. On the other, it will prevent the loss of traditional knowledge since this will be studied and recorded in interviews with local craftsmen and artists who work with traditional materials and techniques. All this know-how will become part of common and specialist knowledge. In this way, the general public will make contact with heritage and sustainability values so that in future, more people will dare to use traditional construction techniques both in restoration and in the construction of contemporary sustainable architecture, thus combining future innovation with preservation of the past. The activities designed specifically for the project will create a corpus applicable following its completion, to be extrapolated and repeated in different contexts. At the end of the project, the institutions, associations, and organizations directly or marginally involved will continue to operate at different levels. The long-lasting positive effects, the accessibility of the material produced in digital and paper formats, and the awareness of European and intrinsic values relating to vernacular heritage will not be forgotten once the project has been completed.

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