Conclusions of Project-Based Issue

Cultural issues and heritage conservation for the enhancement of local identity and as a catalyst for sustainable development

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In this issue, the articles and contributions focus mainly in 'Project-Based" aspects.
The first part here is concentrated on infrastructure and facilities.

Lisa MENSI – from Ferrara University deals with ways of "intervening in Pustec, via the development of a matrix for the evaluation of intervention models" aiming at promoting sustainable cross-border tourism in the Prespa Lake area in general. Author underlines that by intervening in protected areas, such as Prespa Lake habitat, is very delicate due to the sensitive nature of the environment. The area is protected by UNESCO and national legislations in three countries (not mentioning EU), which strive to defend the local context from extreme human interventions that could devastate the ecosystem. However, considering its significant distance from the nearest cities, it faces ever-increasing abandonment, lacking essential services and job opportunities.To avert this scenario and recognize the value of the natural environment, her research aims to explore opportunities for intervention to encourage nature-based tourism. One of the challenges lies in the unique aspects of the area, which necessitate a thorough analysis of the context and the potential impact on the natural and rural environment, aiming at relating Pustec to adjacent states. Due to these rare conditions, any intervention lacking a strategy to safeguard the environment could lead to undesirable consequences and harm the area. Author proposes a new methodological framework, based on the connection and classification of each category of actions. Specifically, each proposed service or activity is classified, considering the type of mobility that will be generated in the area, ensuring that the suggested services do not result in mass tourism. This leads to the definition of sustainable strategies as a preliminary guideline tool. These guidelines is hopefully valuable for professionals in choosing and evaluating future activities, always considering the landscape's involvement once work commences in the area.

Gregor ANDONI – from Polis University, deals with "Micromobility Solutions in Underdeveloped Areas" by bridging transportation gaps via inclusive developments. Author states that by adopting micromobility solutions, it offers a possible way to address mobility issues and promote inclusive development in developing regions where traditional transportation infrastructure is frequently insufficient. The author examines the particular dynamics involved by putting micromobility initiatives into practice in developing countries, looking at the socioeconomic effects, cultural factors, and technology adjustments necessary for a smooth integration. He looks into how micromobility can help to provide accessible and reasonably priced transportation options, especially for underserved communities that have little access to traditional transit systems. The research examines how shared bicycles, electric scooters, and other micro-transport options help people in developing countries feel more connected, have better livelihoods, and travel less distance, and illustrates it by specific case studies and empirical data. Furthermore, the author explores the difficulties in designing and implementing micromobility solutions in locations with limited resources. It goes over how crucial it is to support these cutting-edge transportation systems with sustainable economic models, local empowerment, and community engagement to ensure their long-term viability and acceptance. In addition, the research looks at how micromobility might help local economic development by promoting ventures like last-mile delivery services and micro entrepreneurship. Through an analysis of the relationship between micromobility and social fairness, author clarifies the ways in which these solutions might enhance community empowerment and general well-being. As a conclusion: by demonstrating the revolutionary potential of micromobility, this research adds to the conversation on sustainable development in developing nations. This means that policymakers and stakeholders may design interventions that harness micromobility to establish resilient, inclusive, and people-centric transportation networks in undeveloped countries by having a thorough grasp of the context-specific obstacles and opportunities.

The second part here is concentrated on environmental systems .

Francesco AXEL PIO ROMIO – from Ferrara University deals with "Valorizing Earth's Ancient Landscapes" theme. He focuses on the illustrative cases of "Lanzarote" and "Lake Prespa". According him both Lanzarote and Lake Prespa, despite their geographical isolation, share intriguing similarities rooted in their geological formations and tourism potentials. Author says: Lanzarote, born from volcanic eruptions around 20 million years ago within the Canary Islands, boasts a dynamic landscape resembling extraterrestrial terrains, captivating the scientific community's curiosity due to its resemblance to the Moon and Mars. Despite experiencing a surge in tourism, Lanzarote still retains its authentic character, safeguarding its heritage and landscapes. Renowned artist César Manrique dedicated his life to celebrating the island's essence, fostering tourism keen on discovering its natural beauty and cultural heritage. In contrast, Lake Prespa, nestled within the larger Ohrid & Great/Small Prespa lakes system, stands as one of the world's most ancient and expansive tectonic lakes which retains scientific significance for its ecosystems and biodiversity richness, which are currently endangered by the pollution caused by anthropic activities. In fact, despite being shared across three countries: Albania, North Macedonia, and Greece, only portions of the Albanian and Greek territories are protected. The region's cross-border fragmentation, coupled with remoteness and limited infrastructural investments, has led to an overall underdevelopment, abandonment, and population decline of the towns and villages in the area. Addressing these challenges, a proposed parallel between Lanzarote and Lake Prespa seeks to advocate cross-border initiatives aimed at valorizing their unique landscapes, local heritage, and traditions. By analyzing Lanzarote and learning from its preservation strategies and the integration of art and nature, this approach advocates for scientific and eco-tourism promotion, leveraging the distinctiveness of these areas to revive their allure by suggesting possible interventions ... that could potentially revitalize Lake Prespa's appeal and help to mitigate issues related to pollution, underdevelopment, and depopulation. To do so, the author considers the municipality of Pustec, on the Albanian side of the lake, as a case study for the application of the aforementioned strategies. To the author, by connecting and improving main existing road in three countries, and removing border control points, can be a simple investment that can unify all ecosystem in one entity, and from there connect and revitalize existing traditional villages with better hiking/biking access to natural and historical assets, is the starting point that planners, architects and environmentalist can start work together with authorities and communities. Environmental education of kids, youth, communities and authorities is another necessary long term challenge, if success is expected to come soon and in the future.

Andrea STERPIN - from Ferrara University deals with "Revitalizing rural cross-border areas, via 3D technologies for landscape, urban, and cultural planning in Pustec municipality" and further on in the region. The author underlines the fact that the imminent potential accession of Albania to the European Union marks a pivotal moment for the country and its smaller municipalities, such as Pustec, located near Prespa Lake. Serving as a crossroads and border among Albania, Greece, and North Macedonia, the region is stepping towards integration into the European community, heralding a new era for the Albanian region of Korca, and the specific minority community of Pustec. However, the strategic development of these predominantly rural areas - says the author - faces the challenge of scarce digitized data concerning local architectural and building heritage, resulting in unclear visions of the municipalities' current state with regard urban fabric and historic buildings. His research aims to explore how 3D technologies can act as a catalyst for multi-scale architectural and planning design. In particular, it examines the potential of three-dimensional models derived from GIS and aerial photogrammetry through a comparative analysis. According the author, such analysis aims to highlight the possibilities that an integrated approach can offer in terms of territorial comprehension and planning. GIS 3D models, despite their limitations due to the lack of digitized building data in areas like Pustec, can provide a digital representation at a landscape scale, enabling visualization and comprehension of the entire transnational area around Prespa Lake. On the other hand, aerial photogrammetric surveying, known for its effectiveness at an urban scale, can be a crucial tool for mapping and understanding the architectural and building heritage of the various municipalities in the region. The combined use of such technologies can thus be an effective tool for creating a solid knowledge base, necessary to support the development of strategies at both the landscape and urban levels, and in a transnational dimension. So this emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive vision to address the common challenges of regions eager to embrace new challenges while also valuing their historical and cultural heritage. The author calls for better coordination in terms of data and resources share to reach faster such objective and fairer decision making for all.

The third part here is concentrated on landscape and heritage systems .

Kejsi VESELAGU - from Polis University deals with "Navigating the Intersection of Geology and Architecture" via the conceptualization of stereotomy as a formative process within the geological intricacies, illustrating it with the case of Cave Churches in Pustec. According author Prespa region's varied rock formations and historical processes combine to produce a unique cultural heritage where architecture is closely intertwined with its geological formation. Her resercah examines the complex interactions between architecture and geology while concentrating on the distinctive cave churches of the Maligrad Island in the municipality of Pustec, which are hidden away within the geographic tapestry of the Prespa Region. An overview of the traditional applications is provided in brief and is framed within the notion of stereotomic principles as a formative architectural process comprised of operations of eroding and cutting through matter, based on the conception of Gottfried Semper, as opposed to a tectonic architecture. The inquiry focuses on a thorough analysis of the Maligrad Island's cave church as a case study, demonstrating how stereotomy serves as a link between the region's intricate geology and the architectural wonder that is formed by the caverns. The emphasis of author also includes the subtle dynamics of material selection and stereotomy application, which are both impacted by unique geological elements. This leads to a more profound comprehension of

the interplay between cultural expression, human craftsmanship and the natural environment. The combination of these components illuminates how stereotomy is adapted to geological formations and how cultural and temporal narratives are expressed in this particular area. With its nuanced analysis, this work adds to the growing body of knowledge on the symbiotic relationship between geology and architecture. Author helps us to better understand stereotomy as a dynamic process that is deeply intertwined into the geological fabric that it shapes, and how this can be used on project that follow with the strong identity of the surrounding landscape, heritage and nature.

Maristella DE FABRIZIO – from Ferrara University, deals also with the case of "St. Mary's Church on Maligrad island in Lake Prespa" via a critical analysis of the actual restoration project. The author critically examines the ongoing restoration of St. Mary's Church, built since 1369. This Orthodox church is located within a natural cave on the cliff and is a historical and artistic jewel, as it is embellished with centuries-old frescoes, and characterized by its close connection with the surrounding nature and Prespa urban center. According to author the current restoration project is multifaceted, aiming to refurbish various aspects of the church, particularly its surfaces and the frescoes. A significant aspect of the existing project, includes enhancing the church's accessibility from the lake and improving its lighting, particularly to augment its night-time ambiance. Author, critically analyses the restoration project, assessing in particular its adherence to the established theoretical principles of historical restoration and understanding the methodology adopted. In the broader spectrum of the ongoing discourse concerning the synergy between restoration theory and practical application, his critique meticulously examines the design decisions made during the restoration. In particular, it is investigated how the new access routes and lighting systems are in harmony with the historical authenticity of the church and how the symbiotic relationship of the church with its natural environment is emphasized. Such interdisciplinary survey contributes significantly to the broader discourse surrounding the challenges and opportunities inherent in executing restoration projects in similar cases. By delving into the specifics of St. Mary's Church's restoration, the author tries to bridge the gap between the execution of this project and the general principles of restoration theory. The results of this analysis offer valuable insights that serve as a guideline for future conservation and restoration initiatives in the area and beyond it, particularly those that aim to safeguard unique cultural heritage sites, in order to pass them usefully to the future generations.

The fourth part here is concentrated on settlements, public spaces, and dwelling systems .

Christin ERDMANN – from Ferrara University deals with the subject of "Diversity in Public Spaces" as a transformative journey for regional revitalizations. Author states that by year 2000, the European Union adopted the motto "United in Diversity" with the objective of promoting a cohesive Europe that celebrates its diversity in art and culture. The realization of this goal was facilitated by the abolishment of borders, enabling unrestricted movement of people, culture, and capital among member countries. This development contributed to strengthening a shared identity and appreciating the diversity of European cultures. The author of this research focuses on the Pustec Region in Albania, situated along the borders of North Macedonia and Greece. Specifically, the nine small villages, arranged like an imaginary chain along Lake Prespa, and constituting the focal point of investigation on broad cross border regional perspective. According to author the villages of Albanian territory, are characterized by agriculture, breathtaking nature, and solitude. They are home to only a few hundred people, due to the massive emigration of population after the collapse of centralized economy. The emotional tranquility emanating from this region defines its uniqueness and warrants its preservation. Despite advancements in European integration, the borders of the Pustec Region with Greece and North Macedonia remain closed or partly operational, leading to continuation of fragmentation and isolation and further decline in population over the years. The challenge lies in preserving this region from extinction without compromising its meditative charm. Preserving the Pustec Region – according to author – requires innovative approaches to prevent impending extinction while safeguarding its unique cultural identity. The targeted integration of art as a tool for revitalization can play a crucial role too. The creation of creative and inspiring public spaces not only enhances aesthetic qualities but also strengthens social communities. Revitalization through local artistic and inns-hospitality initiatives establishes the region as a vibrant place, not only attracting tourists but also fostering stronger connections among locals. It must be clear that preserving and developing the cultural treasures of the Pustec Region not only honors the past, but also creates a sustainable and flourishing future for the communities there. Art functions as a lifeline, reviving the Pustec Region and serving as a living testament to cultural diversity and historical continuity. In seeking solutions, author draws few inspiration from examples where the deliberate integration of art successfully revitalized once considered extinct public spaces. This approach aims to maintain the Pustec Region as a lively cultural and hospitality space, while simultaneously enhancing the quality of life for its residents.