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WATER CULTURE AND HERITAGE: PROPOSALS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN ON THE WAVE OF THE *LIQUID FUTURE**

«Il y a un dépôt millénaire d'eau fraîche dans mon âme»
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Introduction and setting. – New perspectives for economic and sustainable development can arise from a combination of historical knowledge and heritage valorisation, tourism and digitisation, tourists and communities in the Mediterranean. Networking to share the best existing national and international tourism experiences in the protection of liquid heritage is undoubtedly a key aspect.

The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) and the European Union Blue Med initiative and its Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) highlights the importance of sustainable tourism and cultural heritage in the Mediterranean; in the same way, the European Convention on the Role of Cultural Heritage for Society of 2005 and the Euromed Rome Charter of 2007 stated that maritime heritage is an integral part of cultural heritage and it proposed a roadmap and priority areas as well as capacity building, including training, education, ocean literacy. Maritime heritage consists of all heritage that has a relationship with water, both underwater and on land (Gómez Carreño, Lloret, 2021).

The ancient cultural and maritime heritage existing on the Mediterranean shores reflect important events in the history of humanity, representing numerous important cultures, religions and traditions (Galili, Rosen,

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2010). Several collaborative projects have been established aimed at mapping cultural resources and defining shared plans for the protection and enhancement of the Mediterranean marine and coastal cultural heritage. They highlight the need to find convergences and points of contact between the various disciplines to make water heritage a true driver for sustainable development of the Mediterranean Sea, as a place of creation of a *koinè*, a Mediterranean cultural community that support the circulation of cultural heritage, intercultural dialogue and rooting tourism. Despite a lot of projects that have been developed and carried out in the last decades, nowadays scientists are involved in reaching the sustainable development goals and constitute the way for the UN 2030 Agenda implementation (Bizzarri, Grandi, Cerutti, 2023), also currently focusing on tourism (Pollice, 2018, Cerutti, 2023).

Within this framework, the paper intends to propose a brief discussion on maritime heritage and its relation to tourism and tourist sustainable offer, with specific reference to what happens along the Mediterranean. Using a qualitative methodological approach, three case studies will be presented and analysed with the aim of bringing out this binomial intertwining of liquid heritage and tourism. From the results and insights found, an idea of a digital museum created by the territories linked to the sea could be outlined. As with the other project initiatives illustrated, it could represent a kind of anchorage, a deep connection with which the Mediterranean communities involved try to find answers to recognise and face the challenges of the "liquid future". A participatory geography to contribute to giving the Mediterranean a renewed strength of identity, combining heritage and tourism in a perspective of connection and enhancement.

Water and maritime heritages towards sustainable tourism. – As stated at different levels, both institutional and academic, water is our common future and it is necessary to act together to share it equitably and manage it sustainably. As well as the implicit and material uses associated with water, many socio-cultural values attributed to water take on an intangible nature that regularly eludes any attempt at quantification, but can certainly be considered among the highest values. For any values, it is extremely important to understand the cultural background under which they arise and how culture influences how they are used. The values of water to human

well-being extend well beyond its role in supporting life-sustaining functions, and include mental health, spiritual well-being, emotional balance and happiness (UNESCO, 2021).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) describes water heritage as the cultural significance of water and the importance of water management (Goralnik et al., 2022). Khanna (2022) define «our common water as everyone's heritage; water-related knowledge and practices are vital to safeguarding the future of local communities and global water management» (Khanna et al., 2022, p. 2). The framing of water heritage allows to «recognise and build on traditional knowledge and skills, while imagining how these efforts will help us develop sustainable futures for cities, landscapes and water bodies» (Hein, 2020, p. 1). The foundation of the word heritage is inheritance, or the transmission of something between generations. In this perspective, what is being passed on is not the resource itself, but the lineage of relationships, culture and meaning connected to it and how this appreciation and connection inspires care, management and connection in the future.

Various forms of water heritage have been recognized and inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List: canals, landscapes associated with lakes and rivers, hydraulic techniques, and also artificial waters as part of the landscape of monumental complexes. They not only record the uses of water by human beings in history, but also witness the process of civilization and social construction that are inseparable from water resources (Wang et al., 2023). Very often, heritage sites combine outstanding cultural and natural values; beyond other values, water heritage has the potential to serve as an important tourism space (Jarratt, Davies, 2020).

The United Nations acknowledges the importance of coherently implementing water-related goals and achieving targets outlined in the UN 2030 Agenda too. The Dushanbe Declaration (2022) emphasizes the need to accelerate efforts and strengthen political and technical dialogue on water at the highest level. The International Symposium on Water and Cultural Heritage in Tokyo in 2020 is one important point of departure.

Within the wide spectrum of water heritage, the field of analysis is here specifically related to maritime heritage. The different types of heritage that make up the entire maritime heritage were made explicit (Claesson, 2011; Alegret, Carbonell, 2015; Scott-Ireton, McKinnon, 2015; Hettema, Egberts, 2019): monumental and architectural maritime heritage, historical

maritime heritage, floating maritime heritage, submerged maritime heritage, maritime heritage oral and written maritime traditions, musical maritime heritage, maritime gastronomic heritage, maritime archaeological heritage, religious heritage interlinked to maritime and marine cultures and, of course, cultural immaterial heritage.

Human actions on the coast and on the sea can be combined and thus constitute maritime cultural heritage, since human involvement with the sea does not begin and end at the coastline. It emerges a maritime cultural landscape approach that links land and sea to embrace the totality of the potential space affected by human maritime action (O'Sullivan, 2003). This maritime space can be both physical and conceptual, as it should include any hermeneutic type of human relationship with the sea (Westerdahl, 2013). As such, the maritime or marine cultural landscape that is so defined includes tangible remains such as shipwrecks, submerged settlements, coastal settlements, ports and harbours, maritime ecologies and geology, as well as equally vital intangible components such as cultural practices, artistic and linguistic expressions, local skills, traditional and historical knowledge. The scope is equally broad and includes its relationship to economic de-development, environmental management, social justice, education and identity (Henderson, 2019).

Where there is a deficiency of public awareness created by a lack of public engagement there is a decline in public interest not only in maritime heritage but in general in water heritage and culture. An opportunity to resolve the related impacts - i.e. abandonment of heritage and its unrecognizability - can be identify by increasing awareness through a tourist medium that uses publicly accessible heritage; tapping into the intrinsic interest in maritime heritage, while providing economic benefits to local communities and the resources and perceived importance needed to preserve the heritage (Secci, 2011).

Within the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the UN 2030 Agenda, the inclusion of the maritime/marine heritage and landscape in approaches related to SDG14 is considered indispensable in order to achieve its sub-goals: management of marine and coastal ecosystems (SDG 14.2 and 14.5); development of sustainable fishing strategies (SDG 14.4; 14.B), especially in binding and including existing traditional knowledge and past human exploitation strategies; sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of tourism

(SDG 14.7); push to increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology (SDG 14.A); strategies to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law (SDG 14.C), particularly through the ratification and implementation of the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage. The utility of maritime/marine heritage has a broader, cross-goal applicability. As Nilsson and others (2016) convincingly argued, the key to the overall success of the Agenda 2030 - to create a smarter, broader and more sustainable future - is the interactions between the SDGs. For example, considering ocean health in SDG 14 approaches is part of the broader goal of protecting the world's cultural and natural heritage and involving the local communities in territorial and tourism initiatives (SDG 11.4). Similarly, ocean health is clearly linked to the health of terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15) and positive action on climate change (SDG 13). Identifying its economic potential can contribute to poverty reduction (SDG 1), while access to cultural heritage promotes overall human well-being (SDG 3). The sustainable use of the maritime/marine heritage resources and knowledge can also contribute to decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) through employment in "blue economy" sectors such as fishing and coastal tourism. This heritage is a unique and highly engaging medium to engage the public in historical narratives (Firth, 2015). Providing access to the marine heritage, and the research created around it, can contribute to the promotion of free and lifelong access to educational resources (SDG 4). Through this democratisation process conducted through grassroots work with community groups, individuals, associations, it can be reached the promotion of gender equality (SDG 5) in education. More generally, it can make a significant contribution to the promotion of ethical development through the recognition of its role in foreign aid-funded marine infrastructure and offshore industry projects (SDGs 16 and 17) (Henderson, 2019).

As well as at the international level, the maritime heritage, its history and legacy are very strong in Europe, as the starting points of most sea journeys in world exploration and trading. European coastal regions by all seas surrounding the continent (Baltic, North, Med, Adriatic, Black) have very significant and attractive maritime heritage assets that are of high interest for sustainable cultural heritage tourism. In order to preserve and promote maritime heritage and apply it to the development, valorisation

and regeneration of sustainable cultural tourism (Jelinčić, Senkić, 2017; Lees et al., 2023), several activities have been developed drawing on European funds and broad partnerships: maritime heritage preservation to contribute to the development of sustainable cultural tourism; related pilot actions, particularly with regard to smart tourism actions; market research and product development, including digital Aps, VR/AR; thematic workshops and webinars, study visits; staff/peer exchanges; joint promotion and exhibitions; and policy development and change for the regeneration of smart and sustainable (post-pandemic) cultural tourism. As in the case of Europe, many stakeholders were engaged in the Mediterranean regions, such as regional and local authorities, maritime museums, maritime interpretation centres, tourist boards and associations, and destination management organisations (DMOs). Moving from culture and heritage – that are both driver and enabler of sustainable development. - the horizon of sustainable tourism is indeed centred in the participative governance approach: involving local communities and other stakeholders in the decision-making processes is key to ensuring results benefit both water cultural heritage and the local population.

The Mediterranean's scenario: cases stemming from projects on water and maritime heritage. – The Mediterranean is a key macro-region that, after a period of perceived marginalisation, is assuming a new centrality in many respects. The so-called *core Mediterranean* includes 23 countries of the European Union, the Balkan Area, the Middle East and North Africa, all sharing an outlet on the Mediterranean Sea; the *enlarged Mediterranean* includes 45 countries and extends from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf[1].

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[1] This includes territories which, for different themes and in their own strategies (e.g. energy corridors, trade, tourism, etc.), need to structure relations, synergies and complementarities of socio-economic development with Europe. Although covering only 1% of the world's seas, the Mediterranean Sea accounts for 20% of the world's shipping, 30% of oil and 27% of container transport services. It is also the meeting point of four major geo-economic areas: the *African Continental Free Trade Area* (AfCTA), the European Union, the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) and the *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership* (RCEP). The member countries account for 9.7% of world GDP and have a population of 550.2 million. Looking at the enlarged Mediterranean, its member countries accommodate 16.3% of the global population and weigh in at 13.4% of global GDP (The European House-Ambrosetti, 2023).

Over the centuries, as pointed out by Braudel (2010) flows and ebbs as multiple signs of continuous, "magmatic movement" have generated an articulated and complex map of relations and connections in the "Mare Internum". The Mediterranean is an ancient crossroads (Horden, Purcell, 2000) where for millennia everything has converged, enriching its history, as witnessed by a unique and enormous water/cultural heritage resulting from the sedimentation of «a series of overlapping civilisations» (Braudel, 2010, pp. 7-8). A liquid continent, consisting of many seas "in the middle of lands", which has been able to gather and mingle multiple religions, languages, traditions, knowledge, rites, material and immaterial cultures (Monterosso, 2022). Harpster tells about a "maritime turn" of the social sciences that «over the past three decades has prompted a variety of new investigations of the construction and inhabitation of Mediterranean maritime space, overturning perceptions of the sea as a tabula rasa embossed with terrestrial constructs such as *Greek* or *Roman*» (Harpster, 2015, p. 455). Geography has also taken an increasing interest in Mediterranean heritage issues, certainly from a geo-political and economic perspective, but also from a cultural and touristic one. Academics and researchers are involved in studies that have led to the realization of ideas and initiatives bringing together different stakeholders and scales. Some innovative projects have involved, or in turn created, crucial cultural, educational and social focal points along the Mediterranean. They can represent a kind of "device for intercultural contact and understanding" (Guarrasi, 2014), "markers of identity" (Settis, 2002) and fundamental connection between water heritage, communities and sustainable tourism. Mediated and resemantised by the viewpoint of the sea, the cultural dynamics constitute the core of the so-called "wet ontologies" (Steinberg, Peters, 2015), which have also established themselves in the geographical sphere. It is an insight that allows the opportunity to imagine and practise with the sea a world of flows, movements and continuous becoming; in this sense, the projects are the result of regenerative processes in a space, the Mediterranean indeed, that is alive, made of stories, narratives, relations in, with and through it (Palermo, 2023). The water heritage of the Mediterranean, both material and immaterial, prompts us to look at the dynamics of the past with a current and future drive, given by the gaze that elects it as a metaphor for the different faces of modernity: from its roots to the interweaving of Africa, Asia and Europe in its waters, emerging in today's migration

crisis, it configures a sort of fluid and multiform archive (Cariello, Chambers, 2020). In this frame, traces, documents and archives allow us to draw also on seemingly dissimilar elements and improbable connections, generating new possibilities and perspectives (Mentz, 2023).

Here follow some examples considered emblematic of these connections, related to three projects developed in Greece, Malta and Italy. The research has indeed adopted a qualitative approach, considering the Mediterranean as the geographical focus in which three case studies were identified, selected on the basis of their features, visions and the critical recommendations they could provide for the development of integrated sea heritage projects. Taking this point of view, it emerged that their "geoheritages" can play a broader role of strategic tool for cultural and environmental management, as suggested by some authors (Selmi et al., 2019), also referring to the above-mentioned "wet ontologies" watery perspective as way of thinking not only "from" the sea but "with" the sea (Peters, Steinberg, 2019). They also share the important aspect of involving local communities, called upon to be active parts both touristic proposals' offering and demanding side.

Blue economy experts in Greece are debating the relevance of aquaculture, the protection of biodiversity, its future prospects and the sustainability of the sector. The country aims at the creation of aquatic diving parks within aquaculture facilities. In the country, diving attracts tourists in search of unforgettable experiences, while the pleasure of tasting fresh local fish has immense commercial value. In Greece, 65% of fish production comes from aquaculture. In Athens too, aquaculture is gradually emerging not only as a reliable supplier of sustainable protein, capable of guaranteeing consistent production and delivery, but also as a production alternative that can pursue objectives of economic growth, social equity and responsible use of environmental resources. The great debate on Greek aquaculture, as a basic pillar for the development of the national economy, represents a perennial moment of confrontation in order to create an organized and institutionalized process but, at the same time, open to the exchange of different positions, opinions and experiences on aquaculture and tourism in Greece. Today, Greece is among the main producers of marine aquaculture in the European Union. According to data from international fisheries organizations, Greek production accounts for 60 per cent of the

total production in the EU, and the sector is increasingly interested in promoting aquaculture-related tourism. A significant example is a small village on the west coast of the island of Rhodes called Kameiros Skala (fig. 1), which has concretely and brilliantly combined aquaculture and tourism enhancement, promoting such fascinating initiatives on the web. Around 300 tonnes of sea bass, sea bream, gilthead seabream and umbels are farmed annually on the island. Local institutions and fish entrepreneurs, in cooperation with a diving centre, are offering tourists training and educational excursions that describe the processes used, the importance of aquaculture in Europe, the relationship between aquaculture and the environment, biodiversity and environmental protection, inviting them to share these experiences on social media. During excursions, visitors can go diving, spotting species such as tuna, dolphins and seals. In addition, the main attraction is the sea bream enclosure where it is possible to swim with these fish and understand their habits and health status.

Fig. 1 – *Swimming circle in Kameiros Skala*

Source: www.blutopia.gr

Underwater Malta is a project created with the support of *Heritage Malta* and *Malta Tourism Authority* to help make the underwater beauty of the Mediterranean accessible to all, a virtual museum through which to explore the Maltese seabed using the latest technology. The use of powerful

cameras and special underwater lights has enabled the underwater cultural heritage to be captured in such a way as to make it accessible to all, allowing the public to immerse themselves in history. The creation of this digital record contributes to the ongoing efforts to preserve and protect Malta's underwater cultural heritage for future generations. An online platform allows underwater cultural heritage to the surface and into the homes of the general public. Using 3D, virtual reality and other media, the aim of the website is to provide access to and share a unique underwater cultural heritage with all members of tourists and the public. The sites presented in this online museum are located on the seabed off both Malta and Gozo (fig. 2).

Fig. 2 – *Under Water Malta Wrecks' Map*
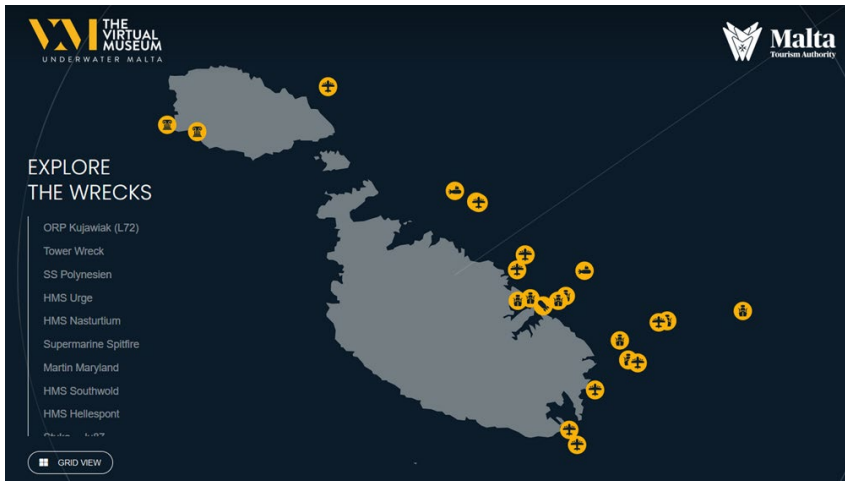
Source: www.underwatermalta.org

They reflect the various roles that the islands played throughout their history. Through the centuries the islands have borne witness to events such as the foundering of an archaic shipwreck, naval blockades, the impact of naval mines and intense aerial battles. The experiences allow to present sites that range from a 2,700-year-old Phoenician shipwreck to First World War surface craft and submarines and aircrafts from the Second World War. The sites presented here also form part of various ongoing projects, such as the continued investigation and deep-water excavation of the Phoenician shipwreck, and the recording and documentation of First and Second World War vessels and aircrafts, involving local people too. From May 2022, visitors to the virtual museum Underwater Malta

can for example explore the wreck of HMS Urge. The digitisation unit organised Dive into History 360 sessions, which allowed people to explore the wreck sites in an almost first-person experience (fig. 3).

Fig. 3 – *Virtual exploring of the HMS Urge wreck*

Source: www.underwatermalta.org

The *Water Museum of Venice* is a digital museum created by the *Centro Internazionale per la Civiltà dell'Acqua Onlus* (*International Centre for the Civilisation of Water*) (fig. 4). It is an extended museum, composed of some physical locations, which aims to offer the broader public a representative platform of the exemplary heritage of water civilisations in the Tre Venezie: from the Po delta to Lake Garda; from Trento to Venice; from Belluno to Trieste. The innovative online platform allows users to find a number of digital itineraries to facilitate the localization of, and visit to, places and sites. *Water Museum of Venice* is also the name of the portal where you can find multiple landings: virtual tours, educational projects, stories of yesterday and today, authoritative news and ongoing activities. From elegant stately homes to imposing castles which arose, not by chance, along the territory's *liquid roads*, from navigation basins to river ports and moorings, from natural oasis to parks, from water mills to museums: the heritage

connected to the use of water, both natural and cultural, tangible and intangible, are indeed the focus of the project *Water Museum of Venice*. It is addressed to citizens and authorities who believe wholeheartedly in preserving the quality of all water, whether surface or underground, as well as the cultural and natural heritage.

Fig. 4 – *Water Museum of Venice logo*

Source: www.watermuseumofvenice.com

The *Water Museum of Venice* is a founding member of UNESCO's Global Network of Water Museums (www.watermuseums.net) (fig. 4). This initiative is rooted in the recognition that water-related museums are "unique repositories of diverse water civilisations and of humanity's multifaceted water heritage, both tangible and intangible" (Intergovernmental Council of the UNESCO International Hydrological Programme, 2018, p. 1). These are places within which artefacts, techniques and traditional knowledge are displayed and interpreted in order to preserve and promote the variety of values and heritages related to water that have been transmitted over the centuries and that can still be important today to foster sustainable development linked to good management practices of this resource. In recent decades the approaches used in water management were often more focused only on "supporting economic development at all costs" (UNESCO, 2021). In fact, it is from this assumption that the need emerged for UNESCO to encourage people and institutions to implement urgent actions to develop more sustainable, interdisciplinary and holistic models of management of the resource and promote a new relationship between humans and water, in which the intrinsic values of history, memory and sense of place linked to water and its landscapes are enhanced. The Global Network of Water Museums is an association of 60 Water Museums in 28 different countries, welcoming 25.000.000 visitors per year, encouraging the participation of local communities both as co-

developers of projects and as visitors themselves. This network is also relevant for the development of sustainable tourism: as the other members, the *Water Museum of Venice* is a challenge towards building a better future.

Final considerations. – The relationship that the human being shares with water has been deepen rooted and continues since the beginning of history: changing and redefining itself, it leaves at the same time a legacy, a water and cultural heritage, that defines human beings and their lives. If we look back in time and remember the most ancient civilizations of the sea developed along the coasts of the Mediterranean, imagining future scenarios we trust that the key to sustainability can bring together cultures, heritage and people. While on the one hand, the conception of the Mediterranean as an uneven space of localized and interregional areas (Purcell, 2005), a mosaic with varying concentrations of communities and community perceptions (McCormick, 2005), or a context of division, disparity and separation (Huber, Nouira, Paciello, 2018) is not new, on the other, different visions of the Mediterranean as a multifaceted whole of land and water emerge. This happens thanks to several projects, such those analysed by the research presented in the paper: indeed, they allow us to gain an insight into the networking and integration efforts conducted in recent years. If at the local level, the three case studies allow the identification of best practices for combining water-related cultural heritage and sustainable tourism through the use of technology, at the level of the entire Mediterranean they allow examples to be traced within a common and shared horizon.

On the same wavelength of the case studies' goals and project horizons, the research underlying this work stimulate us to imagine the design and consequent proposal of an extensive and widespread museum dedicated to the water and maritime cultural heritage of the entire Mediterranean. It could be composed of places, considered as "local antennas" and managed by the communities, integrated into a system that would allow the general public to be offered a representative platform - physical and digital - of the exemplary heritage of water civilizations and cultures in the Mediterranean. This would allow tourists to learn about the past and, at the same time, to come into contact with those institutional and entrepreneurial realities that develop water tourism with sustainable economic growth practices. It would also connect the area involved and its local educational and cultural activities with the rest of the world, enabling museum visitors to become conscious

storytellers and actors of their own "liquid future", whether they are in Europe, Africa or the Americas. Strong attention could be given to young people and women, as voices of the territory indispensable for knowing, nourishing and multiplying ideas, knowledges and heritages. Among the various characteristics of the "liquid world" are uncertainty, fluidity, the crisis of the category of duration and loneliness (Bauman, 2009), conditions that are therefore also close to visions and dimensions of the future. Like the initiatives presented, this project idea should be based on the need and yearning for local community and inhabitants: an almost instinctive desire that comes back strongly to compensate for the underlying insecurity that is the paradigm of a globalized world, under the banner of liberalization, flexibility, competitiveness and individualism (Bauman, 2003). Water and maritime tourism that is collaborative and regenerative, enables environmental and climate resilience, integrates into local economies and generates economic benefits and social inclusion of indigenous communities and populations (Ounanian et al., 2022), while simultaneously improving the traveler experience and the well-being of residents. Combining local resources within a "Mediterranean spirit" would create a solid (and oxymoronic) "liquid field" of action for a more sustainable future.

The research underpinning the diffuse museum development project could be developed in order to identify the appropriate participatory opportunity to co-design tourism-oriented strategies in line with the 2030 Agenda and other EU programmes and initiatives; this would translate into preparatory activities able to focus on the specific needs and priorities of the Mediterranean regions in terms of knowledge systems transformation, acceleration of technology transfer, training and education enablement, and promotion of the "geo-digital dialogue" between science and local communities.

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Culture e patrimoni dell'acqua nel Mediterraneo: una proposta sull'onda del "futuro liquido". – Nuove prospettive di sviluppo economico e sostenibile possono nascere da una perfetta combinazione di turismo e digitalizzazione, conoscenza storica e valorizzazione del patrimonio nel Mediterraneo. La creazione di reti per condividere le migliori esperienze turistiche nazionali e internazionali nella tutela del patrimonio liquido è senza dubbio un aspetto fondamentale. In questo quadro, emergono esperienze e musei legati al mare volte a offrire al grande pubblico piattaforme rappresentative - sia fisiche che digitali - del patrimonio esemplare delle civiltà e delle culture nel Mediterraneo. Questo consente ai turisti di entrare in contatto con realtà istituzionali e imprenditoriali che implementano, in una logica sinergica, pratiche turistiche sostenibili; connettere turisti e comunità favorisce, inoltre, un dialogo che può motivare soprattutto i giovani a diventare narratori consapevoli e attori del proprio "futuro liquido".

Keywords. – Patrimonio culturale, Water and maritime tourism, Mediterraneo, Turismo sostenibile

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