

Cultural Heritage at a Crossroads

Sustainable Development and Digital Transformation



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Fostering Outreach
within European Regions,
Transnational Higher Education
and Mobility

Cultural Heritage at a Crossroads

Sustainable Development and Digital
Transformation

Mar Gaitán & Arabella León
(coords.)



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Introduction

Mar Gaitán, Arabella León: Universitat de València

It is our pleasure to introduce this volume, which emerges from the Blended Intensive Programme *Challenges in Cultural Heritage: Sustainable Development and Digital Transformation*. This collaborative initiative was developed within the framework of the FORTHM Alliance, a European University consortium dedicated to fostering international cooperation, and brought together students, scholars, and professionals from across Europe and beyond. They were united by a shared purpose: to understand how cultural heritage—one of humanity’s most valuable and vulnerable assets—can be responsibly managed in the midst of rapid technological change and increasing global pressures.

The idea for this book grew organically from the programme’s interdisciplinary and international nature, a direct reflection of the FORTHM spirit. Conceived and delivered through a vibrant partnership between the University of Palermo (Italy), the University of Burgundy (France), the University of Valencia (Spain), and Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (Romania), the programme created a unique microcosm of European academic exchange. Over several days of lectures, discussions, workshops, and collaborative activities, participants encountered a rich array of ideas that reflect the evolving landscape of cultural heritage management. This exploration was hosted in the exceptional setting of Valencia, a city where centuries of cultural tradition coexist with contemporary innovation. Whether participants joined us in person in its historic streets or connected virtually from abroad, all became part of an enriching academic community shaped by diversity and curiosity. Valencia served as a living case study, reminding us that the past is not static but constantly reinterpreted through the lens of present needs and future aspirations.

The chapters and materials compiled here reflect the central themes of the programme, examining the intertwined relationships between cultural heritage, sustainable development, and digital transformation. Through theoretical frameworks, case studies, and practical demonstrations, contributors address pressing questions: How can we safeguard cultural assets while fostering resilience? How do digital tools—from imaging technologies to interactive platforms—reshape the ways we document, analyse, and communicate heritage? Some chapters examine the vulnerabilities of heritage and the policies required to protect it, while others highlight the potential of digital tools to expand access and deepen understanding. Together, they demonstrate that heritage work must be situated at the crossroads of tradition and innovation.

We are particularly proud of the collaborative spirit that underpins this publication, a testament to the core mission of the FORTHEM Alliance. Participants from different academic backgrounds, cultural contexts, and professional trajectories enriched discussions and encouraged new ways of thinking. This intercultural dialogue is reflected in the diverse voices found in these pages, confirming that the future of cultural heritage depends not only on technological advancement but also on shared learning and a commitment to cooperation.

As editors and educators, our aim has been to curate a volume that is not only informative but also inspiring. We hope that the insights gathered here will serve as a valuable resource for students, researchers, heritage professionals, and all those interested in the evolving challenges of the 21st century. More than a record of a successful educational initiative, this volume aims to contribute to a broader conversation—one that recognises heritage as a dynamic, living element of society.

It is our wish that readers find in these pages not only knowledge but also inspiration: to question, to innovate, and to participate in shaping a future where cultural heritage continues to enrich communities across the world. We invite you now to explore the pages that follow—pages shaped by curiosity, collaboration, and shared commitment of the FORTHEM alliance and its partners to understanding and sustaining the cultural heritage that enriches our world.

Mar Gaitán
Arabella León

This volume, *Cultural Heritage at a Crossroads: Sustainable Development and Digital Transformation*, emerges directly from the collaborative spirit of the European FORTHEM Alliance. It captures the rich academic dialogue of a Blended Intensive Programme that brought together the expertise of scholars and students from the University of Palermo, the University of Burgundy, the University of Valencia, and Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. Together, they confront a central question of our time: How can we responsibly steward our most valuable and vulnerable cultural assets towards a sustainable future?

Through theoretical frameworks and practical case studies, the contributors explore how digital tools are revolutionizing preservation and access, while also addressing the policies needed to build resilience. This volume is an essential guide for students, professionals, and anyone invested in shaping a future where our shared past is not only protected but actively enriches contemporary society.



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