

## Underground built heritage and sustainable local development approaches

Some 60 participants gathered at the Polytechnic Institute of Ancona, Italy, on 6-7 June 2019, for the first meeting of the Underground4value project devoted to the sustainable development of underground built heritage sites. Katalin Kolosy attended on behalf of AEIDL.



### ***Katalin Kolosy, AEIDL***

The potential of underground space in urban and rural areas often represents complex challenges for sustainable local development. It combines many specific areas of expertise – from cultural heritage conservation and land-use management to urban planning and landscape promotion. Underground built heritage can generate positive outcomes (cultural recognition, historical value, economic growth), but it has also been shown to have negative consequences such as gentrification, ‘hard’ branding, mass tourism and underground degradation.

[Underground4value](#) (COST Action CA18110) is a four-year project (2019-2023) establishing an expert network from more than 20 countries, with the objective of promoting balanced and sustainable approaches for the conservation and promotion of underground heritage. The coordinator of this network is the Institute of Mediterranean Studies of the Italian National Research Council (ISMed-CNR).

Every year, four underground sites are investigated. In the first year (April 2019 - March 2020), the sites of Naples (Italy), La Unión (Murcia, Spain), Postojna (Ljubljana, Slovenia) and Göreme (Cappadocia, Turkey) were selected.

The originality of the approach is that it is geared towards assisting local communities’ decision-making with cultural, scientific and technical knowledge of the underground built heritage, from many different perspectives: archaeology, geo-technics, history, urban planning, cultural anthropology, economics, architecture, cultural tourism and ecology.

The Living Lab methodology is used to organise fieldwork, spending time on each site with a mix of participants (scientists and local practitioners). The idea is to identify and explore social innovations models that empower local communities. Collected information will form the basis for developing new research and training that will remain open and accessible. Knowledge transfer is secured by several dedicated tasks, including the creation of a ‘training school’ – a first pilot has been scheduled for February 2020 in Naples.

AEIDL takes part to the Underground4value expert network through a set of specific contributions related to its expertise in place-based methodology to promote sustainable

and local development, such as tools for mapping stakeholders and interests, how to use the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals for assessing good practice in case study areas, and the design of the knowledge base (local development glossary and typologies).

### The four sites investigated between April 2019 and March 2020



**Naples (Italy):** Modern Age tuff quarries under one of the most populated urban areas in Europe, with about 800 caves, 3,000 water cisterns, 180 km of aqueduct tunnels, catacombs, cemeteries, tombs and air-raid shelters that are partially used as a touristic attraction and partially reconvered into transport infrastructure.



**Postojna (Slovenia):** Three underground natural caves located on the classical Karst, which represent a significant historical case study of regeneration and valorisation given that the visitor information centre and tours date back to 17th Century. It is also one of the first examples of underground best practice in architecture, hosting a post office and a multiservice space for visitors.



**La Unión (Spain):** Mining caves dating from the time of Romanised-Iberian settlements have been transformed into a successful touristic destination. An exemplary site of abandoned caves and their valorisation as significant sites of local rural cultural heritage. The introduction of flamenco dance performances and music concerts represent innovative approaches to re-functionalisation.



**Göreme (Turkey):** Located on the central Anatolia plateau, the region is set in a moonlike landscape of giant rock cones, housing historic cave-dwellings and Byzantine churches. Added to the World Heritage List by UNESCO in 1985, it offers a sustainable balance between heritage conservation, cultural tourism development and local community empowerment, thanks to many successful regeneration interventions.

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