

Naples: The genesis of a Local Time Machine

Right now, the city of Naples sees great cultural, economic and social change. This is the right time to take care about the future of Naples' memory. It's an adventure!

Naples has got three millennia of history. The city, shaped by the sea and Mount Vesuvio, is in the midst of the Mediterranean Basin both from a historical and a geographical point of view. All the great civilisations of the Mediterranean (Greek, Latin, Spanish, Arab, Jewish) came to Naples. Each of them influenced the local population with its own unique social, spiritual and material elements, which were over the time transformed and melted into a complex culture. This rich past is still tangible in Naples' historical centre: 17 km², with 10 km² already having been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1995.

The year 2019 saw the official start of the Naples Time Machine Project. The beginnings of this endeavor were however long before that date. In 2008, the first steps into the use of digital technologies in research were taken. The project was based on a collaboration between the University of Naples Federico II (Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici – DSU/Department of Humanities) and ICARUS with support from EU funds. Focus of these early activities were written sources from the Italian Middle Ages, especially those from the region of Campania. The disciplines included were palaeography, diplomatics and the history of documentation. One of the goals of the project was to publish archival material on digital web platforms such as Monasterium.Net.

The interdisciplinarity of the group has increased over time. The DSU group, currently coordinated by Antonella Ambrosio, Professor for Palaeography and Diplomatics at the University of Naples, has started a successful collaboration with another research group from the same university: The Museum Centre of Agricultural Sciences/Department of Agriculture (MUSA Center), whose activities in this project are coordinated by Antonello Migliozi. This larger research group has already come up with further skills in studying

Humanities and natural sciences join forces

and digitising documents in order to reconstruct landscape dynamics in Campania. The digitised historical data on various landscape changes is now assembled in digital archives integrating GIS systems standardised at European level. The Campania region is of particular interest since it is one of the regions with the greatest biological and cultural diversity in Europe.

Creating a continuum of cultural and biological information

The first steps of the Naples Time Machine are to acquire, organise and spatialise the historical-archival documentation in a digital information system. At the same time, the available cadastral data is digitised in the form of a registry (not mapped) and put on geo-referenced historical maps of the relevant historical period. This cartography intends to represent some substantial dossiers and data from the Middle Ages until today, facing central themes of the history of the city and its surrounding rural landscape.

Time Machine is a great opportunity to share the complex heritage of Naples and its surroundings with everyone. Collaborations with GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) institutions, including the State Archive of Naples or other research groups, are going to be the next step. ■

In ancient mythology, **Lago d'Averno** is said to be the entrance to the underworld. Here you can see a juxtaposition of a painting from the 19th century and a contemporary photo: At the left side, the **ruins of the Apollo temple** are clearly visible.

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Antonella Ambrosio is Associated Professor at the University of Naples Federico II. She is scientifically responsible for the Naples Time Machine and the coordinator of Monasterium Italy and the ICARUS didactic group.

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Antonello Migliozi is a researcher at the University of Naples Federico II. He is a Time Machine ambassador for Southern Italy and scientifically responsible for the MUSA Cartography and Landscape Unit for the Naples Time Machine.

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