

PRESERVING THE PAST, SHAPING THE FUTURE: A CASE STUDY OF RESEARCH AND DIDACTICS IN GEORGIAN AND ITALIAN ACADEMIC COLLABORATION WITHIN ERASMUS+ PROGRAMS

E. Bersani¹, M. Koyava-Kipiani², I. Kupatadze³

¹*Politecnico di Milano (ITALY)*

²*Tbilisi State Academy of Art (GEORGIA)*

³*Iliia State University (GEORGIA)*

Abstract

Iliia State University of Tbilisi and Tbilisi State Academy of Art are the two Georgian universities with which Politecnico di Milano has leveraged the opportunities offered by the European programs Erasmus+ KA107-2019 and Erasmus+ KA171-HED-2023.

The three universities' collaboration started in 2014 and consolidated during the two European mobility programs. The aim was to systematize knowledge and skills in restoration and conservation, territorial regeneration, history and art theory, and enhancing cultural heritage, particularly in fragile territories.

This paper aims to present the results of the work carried out, both in terms of didactic and research, and outlines the possible lines of development, both in continuity with the mobility experiences and in the direction of forming more complex projects.

Regarding the didactic approach, we contributed to constructing the academic curricula of Master's students from Georgian universities and PhD students from the Politecnico di Milano. During the fifth year of collaboration, we aim to understand the impact on curricula in the medium term, particularly in relation to students' experience of mobility. Interviews with the students involved in the various academic years and overall evaluations of their educational and professional experiences were organized according to shared indicators between the three universities. The findings confirm or introduce corrective in the second year of the second Erasmus+ KA171 program.

During the research, teachers involved in the mobility have committed to sharing, among themselves and with students, Master graduates, and PhD students, even those not involved in the Erasmus+ mobility, knowledge and skills in the direction of perfecting methodologies and knowledge within the general theme of the conservation and enhancement of cultural heritage, on a dual global and local level. The work carried out by the international teams was structured by comparing multidisciplinary points of view to understand the role of local cultural identities in the ongoing pressing dynamics of territorial transformation. In the 2019 Erasmus+ program, the Georgian valley of Svaneti landscape was chosen as an exemplary place for applying the research theme, in continuity with master's degree theses discussed at Politecnico di Milano and with studies merged into a paper. In the subsequent Erasmus+ program, the three universities chose to apply their collaborative activity to theoretical studies and design proposals on the historic centre of Tbilisi. Specifically, on its possibilities of welcoming contemporaneity into a past of great value according to intervention strategies that respect the identity of places and cultural values of which these places can continue to be active testimony.

With a focus on these aspects, the work team is now specifying the lines of possible future developments of its international cooperation, beyond, but also thanks to further mobility experiences offered by the Erasmus+ programmes. There are several possible scientific issues that, at the moment, seem suitable, on the one hand, to be integrated into institutional course programs and Master's degree and PhD theses in the three universities and, on the other hand, to become the heart of experimental projects to be applied to international calls. The paper reveals possible outcomes of this specific line of collaboration.

Keywords: preserving cultural heritage, cultural identities, dynamics of territorial transformation, impact of mobility, curriculum outcomes, international collaboration.

1 INTRODUCTION

Iliia State University of Tbilisi (ISU) and Tbilisi State Academy of Art (TSAA) are the two Georgian universities with which Politecnico di Milano (POLIMI) has leveraged the opportunities offered by the European programs Erasmus+ KA107-2019 and Erasmus+ KA171-HED-2023.

The two Erasmus+ programs involved the mobility of a total number of 16 students from ILIA and TSAA welcomed by POLIMI, two PhD students from ILIA and TSAA welcomed by POLIMI, and two PhD students from POLIMI welcomed by ILIA and TSAA, eight teachers from ILIA and TSAA welcomed by POLIMI and four POLIMI teachers welcomed by ILIA and TSAA. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, during the first program, there was no mobility of PhD students, while in the first year of the second program, TSAA welcomed a PhD student from POLIMI; students and teachers instead thoroughly enjoyed the planned mobility.

The collaboration between the three universities started in 2014. It consolidated during the two European mobility programs through the sharing of disciplinary principles and knowledge, in the belief that the best results in advancing scientific knowledge can be achieved through intercultural dialogue and the mobility of ideas and people. This collaboration is structured in such a way that the mobility of students, PhD students, and teachers can have significant medium-long-term repercussions not only in the construction of the CVs of the individual subjects involved but also in the growth and dissemination of collective knowledge around issues on which the international scientific community nowadays debates and with which the educational, cultural and social responsibility of the University must deal with.

This intent has stimulated the establishment of a research team composed, on a permanent basis, of the promoting professors of each of the three universities and, for relatively long periods, of PhD students and Master's students and/or undergraduates, even those not on mobility, sensitized and involved in lectures, workshops, and thematic work tables, also conducted separately by the promoting teachers.

We therefore worked essentially pursuing three general objectives, with impacts both in each of the three universities and in their bi-lateral (ISU-POLIMI, TSAA-POLIMI, ISU-TSAA) and tri-lateral (ISU-TSAA-POLIMI) collaboration: 1) consolidation and improvement of institutional strategies and tools to support the international mobility of students and teachers and the research activity of inter-university teams; 2) consolidation and improvement of the didactics offer to Georgian students on mobility at POLIMI, facilitating on their part: a) acquisition of field-specific knowledge together with foreign language knowledge, b) enhancement of social and intercultural competencies, c) development of interpersonal skills, and d) improving the skills needed on the labour market in Georgia and in Europe as well; 3) in terms of scientific research: a) systematization of knowledge and skills in restoration and conservation, territorial regeneration, history and art theory, and in enhancing cultural heritage, particularly in fragile territories, b) sharing by teachers involved, among themselves and with students, Master graduates and PhD students, even those not involved in the Erasmus+ mobility, of knowledge and skills in the direction of perfecting methodologies and knowledge within the general theme of the conservation and enhancement of Cultural Heritage, on a dual global and local level.

In the paragraphs of the following chapters, for the fluidity of exposition, the distinction between these three areas will be maintained: 1) institutions, 2) didactics, and 3) research.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Institutions

The three universities addressed the consolidation and the improvement of institutional tools to support the mobility of students and teachers and the research activity of inter-university teams in coherence with their respective strategies relating to teaching, lifelong learning, internationalization, and innovation.

Specifically, POLIMI, by resolution of the Academic Senate, has activated an internationalization strategy since 2012 aimed at building a university with deep roots in Italian culture that is truly international and not solely due to the presence of international students. Two of the most significant actions planned to achieve this objective are the internationalization of the teaching staff and the exclusive offering of degree courses in English. Other actions have been identified to make POLIMI a cultural centre of excellence that is attractive to foreign teachers and students due to the quality and innovation of content and methodologies of specific sectors of scientific knowledge in the fields of engineering and architecture. Efforts have been made to promote the mobility of internal teachers and students towards foreign universities of international prestige, including those in the geographical area where Georgia belongs, with specific exchange and cooperation coordinated by a Rector's Delegate have been promoted and supported.

Like POLIMI, the two Georgian universities have also determinedly adopted their internationalization strategy. Since 2014, ISU has placed the internationalization process among its priorities as a tool for

developing the qualitative level of teaching, research, and the University's social mission. The main strategic objectives are the promotion of new study programs in English, the increase, in terms of the number and quality of experiences, of the exchange of students, lecturers, and administrative staff, and active participation in international scientific projects and research with the establishment of partnerships. The strategic internationalization plan for 2018-2024 has defined the actions to support the exchange programs of students, researchers, and teachers, providing for their mobility at all levels (BA, MA, PhD) and supporting the mobility of administrative staff to improve institutional management practices. Over the years, ISU has gained significant experience in the implementation of exchange programs: it currently collaborates with around 70 universities in more than 20 European countries; since 2015, it has activated over 650 mobilities, both incoming and outgoing; since 2012, it has been involved in Erasmus Mundus Action 2, BASERCAN, TEMPUS projects.

TSAA, in its strategic internationalization plan for 2018-2024, has also accepted the motto of the Erasmus+ mobility program, "changing lives and opening minds," aiming at the progressive integration of its scientific and educational activities into the European cultural panorama. It has particularly valued collaboration with international cultural institutions that also have an office in Georgia, such as the British Council Georgia, the Goethe Institute Georgia, the Institut Français de Géorgie, and others; it has strengthened the network of international partnerships aimed at participation in projects promoted by the European Union and has implemented the international component in educational and teaching programs, encouraging the sharing of methodologies and knowledge among both teachers and students, both foreign and Georgian. The mobility of students at all levels (BA, MA, PhD), lecturers, and administrative staff has proven to be a significant tool for TSAA in the improvement of various specific skills and for the development of international collaborations, including long-term ones. TSAA currently collaborates with 34 universities (within Erasmus+ and bilateral agreements) in ten European countries. Recently, the programs in English, painting (MA), textile design(MA), ceramics (MA), and media art (BA, MA, Ph.D.) received accreditation. Together with its partners, TSAA is the regional line of defense in the Global Financial Safety Net. This possibility opens up a new generation of Gen Z Intercultural communication with other countries, such as Italy.

The institutional framework of the collaboration between ISU, TSAA, and POLIMI was formalized in 2018 with the stipulation of a Framework Agreement between POLIMI and each of the two Georgian universities, confirming the mutual interest in giving continuity to the sharing of knowledge that had place over the years in an episodic but significant way. From the local level of the application of global skills, ISU, TSAA, and POLIMI have then committed themselves to training students who, with competence and awareness, are able to work also in international contexts on the contemporary challenges posed at a global level by the valorization of Cultural Heritage in territories undergoing a remarkable transformation. The opportunity to participate in the European programs Erasmus+ KA107-2019 and Erasmus+ KA171-HED-2023 was fundamental to making this common intent effectively sustainable.

At ISU, mobility projects are managed by the Foreign Relations Office (FRO) in collaboration with the study program coordinators and, when necessary, by specific selection committees, similar to what happens at TSAA through the Department of International Relations (DIR). At POLIMI, the International Exchange Office (IEO) manages the selection process in collaboration with the teachers responsible for the mobility project. FRO, DIR, and IEO officially nominate the participants selected for the mobility, and this nomination is the prerequisite for being accepted into the host institution. These offices provide participants with all the necessary information regarding visas, insurance, and the possibility of affiliated accommodation; they keep each other updated and interact in various phases with the promoting teachers, facilitating the relationships and planned activities. POLIMI's IEO is responsible for the financial management of the project and provides financial contributions to in and out participants.

During the mobility experience, FRO, DIR, and IEO monitored individual experiences, opening dialogue windows with the students, undergraduates/PhD students, and teachers in mobility, with the local teachers who follow the degree/doctoral theses and the project coordinators. Upon returning from the mobility experience, the same offices assist in obtaining the accrued credits, which are recognized based on the Learning Agreement signed before departure and in accordance with the Transcript of Records, reported for the three universities to the same system of ECTS credits.

ISU, TSAA, and POLIMI can count on the efficiency of their respective offices for international relations and exchanges and for disseminating the activities envisaged by the mobility programs, and the results gradually achieved. This occurred at each location through the organization of information seminars and meetings dedicated to recounting the experiences and through the publication of information on the official websites of the three institutions, on the official academic networks, and social networks. Other institutional channels also helped to spread interest around the themes on which the mobility

experiences were structured, such as the POLIMI Film Festival and the World@POLIMI (<https://www.eventi.polimi.it/?s=georgia>).

2.2 Didactics

Intending to contribute to the construction of the academic CVs of the subjects involved in mobility, the two Erasmus+ programs provide the integration of the educational experiences of the ISU and TSAA students in the institutional teaching activities of POLIMI (both in the Milan Campus and at the regional Campuses), articulated into theoretical courses, laboratories, intensive workshops. Regarding the involvement of degree/doctoral theses in the ordinary procedures, the role of professors promoting mobility has not necessarily been envisaged as supervisor and/or co-supervisor, but certainly as facilitator of studies, research, and on-site surveys, in addition to that of the reference person in the arrangement and validation of the Learning Agreement, as happens in the case of incoming students. The disciplinary sectors primarily involved were the History of Architecture and Art, Landscape Architecture, Archaeology, Art Theory and Practice and Cultural Management, and Intangible Heritage.

At the ISU FRO and the TSAA DIR, outgoing students participate in various structured preparatory meetings, ranging from mini-trainings on intercultural dialogue to sessions of practical suggestions for dealing with daily life in Italy. POLIMI's IEO informs selected incoming students about welcome events, enrolment procedures, study plan presentation, academic calendar, courses and exams, and valuable information on residence permits, health insurance, and accommodation opportunities. Furthermore, POLIMI organizes extensive Italian courses (40 hours) for international students, and incoming students can access these courses in both semesters of entry. At the same time, ISU and TSAA guarantee linguistic support to their outgoing students by offering English language courses.

During the fifth year of collaboration, we decided to understand the impact on curricula in the med term, particularly in relation to students' experience of mobility. The findings help confirm or introduce corrective measures in the second year of the second Erasmus+ KA171 program. The survey aims to understand the success of the collaboration between ISU, TSAA, and POLIMI, particularly with regard to teaching methods different from those of Georgian institutions, students' academic experiences, and future professional development opportunities. Semi-structured in-person interviews were conducted with 14 Master's Level students across the 3rd and 4th semesters of the academic year who participated in the Erasmus+ Exchange one-semester mobility program at POLIMI. This group included nine from ISU and five from TSAA. The interviews were carried out according to common criteria established by the three universities to assess their educational and professional experiences. The interviewer asked each student to reflect on their experiences before, during, and after their visit and on the following questions: What were their expectations before the program? How did the program influence their professional development? How was the teaching method different from their home institutions? Was impact coherent with their goals? Did it contribute to valuable outcomes in their master's thesis? Additionally, students were invited to describe how the mobility experience shaped their perspective on job opportunities. Administrative topics were strictly excluded from the discussions.

The critical reading of the survey is presented in the following paragraph 3.2.

2.3 Research

The inter-university team's research activities were carried out in synergy with the co-supervision of degree theses and Ph.D. and with the involvement of professors and experts from the three universities in lectures, conferences, workshops, and working groups coordinated by the mobility promoters in the respective institutions. These activities aimed at refining multidisciplinary knowledge.

After having shared the choice to place a disciplinary issue of considerable scientific relevance as the focus of the collaboration between ISU, TSAA, and POLIMI and to strongly connote the mobility experiences of both teachers and students in the same direction, already in 2018, it was decided, also at exhortation of the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia of Tbilisi, to give continuity to the research already started in the previous decade, despite the absence of institutional formalizations, by some professors of the three universities, on the topics of conservation and valorization of cultural and environmental resources of Georgia.

As a first step, the territory of Georgia was recognized as an exemplary place to which to apply theoretical explorations; Georgia is one of the countries of the Silk Road, the ancient route from Asia to Europe, a crossroads of different civilizations, a place of rich traditions and lively multicultural intersections. Today, it is in strong development, alternating sometimes contradictory political scenarios and, significantly since 2014, with significant territory transformations. Sometimes, these

transformations appear respectful of the local identity of these places and the culture of those who live there; other times, however, they irrevocably erase every evidence.

Hence, in the 2019 Erasmus+ program, the landscape of the Georgian Valley of Svanetia was chosen, in continuity with master's degree theses discussed at POLIMI by POLIMI undergraduates who resided for a few months in Georgia, and with studies merged into a paper (M. Giambruno, E. Bersani, S. Pistidda "Svanezia (Georgia): Paesaggi di pietà. Criticità e prospettive per la conservazione delle torri svane" in *Ananke* n.88, September 2019, pp. 141-146, ISSN: 1129-8219). This valley is one of the most emblematic cases of Georgia's Cultural Heritage, with over two hundred towers, frescoed churches, and settlements still present. Although a UNESCO heritage site, it is threatened by a progressive cancellation process. The three universities have investigated this process, trying to strengthen knowledge of the places and individual artifacts, to contribute to the construction of widespread awareness of the risks that the possible loss of this heritage may entail for the community, and to explore its potential in contemporary scenarios.

Instead, in the subsequent Erasmus+ program, ISU, TSAA, and POLIMI have chosen to apply their collaborative activity to theoretical insights and design experiments to other Georgian contexts, which are also undergoing a transformation in their physical, economic, and social structure. In particular, we focused on the historic center of Tbilisi and, specifically, on its possibilities of welcoming contemporaneity within a past of great value. Significant parts of its urban fabric, with public and private buildings and a jagged system of collective open spaces, are not only inadequately valorised but are in overall conditions of decay in the absence of intervention strategies that respect the identity of the places and of the cultural values of which these places can be active testimony.

During the first year of the second Erasmus+ program, also to optimize the disciplinary specificities of each university involved, among the various scientific issues, particular attention was paid to the study of the relationship between art and architecture in the design and construction of the historic city and how art has been and still can be, a possible tool for respectfully improving the quality of buildings and open spaces. The research activities carried out in this direction currently constitute the backbone of the future developments of the collaboration between the three universities (see also the following paragraph 3.3 and chapter 4).

3 RESULTS

On an institutional and educational level, already at the end of the first year of the second Erasmus+ program, it is possible to present actual results, even if partial, of the activities that have been carried out, above all because they have been structured in line with what ISU, TSAA, and POLIMI have long and continuously proposed in terms of internationalization, innovation, teaching, and lifelong learning. The complete coherence of the two Erasmus+ programs with the customary methods and tools adopted at the three universities has, on the one hand, reduced the originality of the experiences carried out. Still, on the other, it has also reduced their possible critical issues, with repercussions, for example, in terms of quality and timing. On the research level, however, the work of the inter-university team is finally only now in its full production phase, after a long but very positive structuring and start-up phase. The scientific results of the research have yet to be formalized, but stimulating steps forward are already appreciable. The following paragraphs contain some details.

3.1 Institutions

From an institutional point of view, the most interesting results concern the contribution that the two Erasmus+ programs have given to the general upgrade of the three universities' ability to cooperate at an international level. The administrative staff has learned: 1) to coordinate more and more effectively the technical and bureaucratic aspects connected to the diversity of the internal systems of the partner institutions, 2) to develop more streamlined and effective procedures connected to economic and logistical management of the mobility activities of in-coming and out-going teachers and of the inclusion of students in institutional study courses. On the part of the teachers responsible for mobility, thanks to the opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ programs, the effort was intensified: 1) to openly discuss, on a disciplinary level, different methods and knowledge applied to the same thematic areas, in particular, that of conservation and the valorization of Cultural Heritage, 2) to also share with subjects external to the three universities the path that they are jointly undertaking in the Erasmus+ programs, to intercept and try to respond to requests expressed outside the university (see also the paragraph 3.3).

3.2 Didactics

The critical reading of the survey in paragraph 2.2 shows that the first Erasmus+ Program helped Georgian students develop academically and professionally. The program offered them the opportunity to study abroad for half a year and be exposed to new cultures, teaching methods, and academic environments. As a result, students enhanced their global perspective, independence, and deep understanding of different academic and cultural practices. Various approaches and group collaborations allowed students to become confident in their work, share knowledge among others, look out of the box at different approaches/ideas, and appreciate and value the historic preservation cases. They learned to gently work on design projects. Despite some difficulties, students believe it is one of the most important experiences they have had in their professional development.

Regarding their expectations before the program, all the students had high expectations for their studies. As Erasmus exchange students, they aimed to expand their knowledge, broaden their worldview, and collaborate with international students and faculty members. Each respondent believed the knowledge and experience gained during the mobility would prepare them for other significant challenges and achievements. In their opinion, the experience would help them to conduct their master's thesis in an interesting way, relatively easily find a job in the future, and deepen their self-confidence. While choosing POLIMI, which is among the leading universities in the world, several factors influenced respondents' decisions - a rigorous academic environment, highly professional faculty, strong international focus, and interesting curriculum. Several interviewees mentioned concerns before visiting POLIMI, such as fear of communication challenges with international students and professors due to language differences, perceived insufficiencies in their knowledge or skills, and feelings of inequality compared to other international students. However, Georgian students observed that their peers faced similar problems and challenges. They realized that their knowledge was comparable to their peers, which helped them overcome their doubts. As a result, this experience contributed to their increased confidence today. Despite knowing that certain courses (ECT credit) would not be credited in their home country, the students were still willing to study abroad. Gaining experience, enhancing their professional knowledge, and interacting with people with different worldviews were important factors for their future development.

Regarding teaching methods, every student could take a studio course along with several theoretical or practical courses. Most of the students chose three to four courses in total. Interviewees mentioned the specificity of didactics at POLIMI. The majority of assignments were handled in groups. Thus, the experience gained from working with students from different international backgrounds was challenging and enriching. In almost every meeting, the group had to present their work to the class, professors, and one of the invited professionals. In every seminar, the group had to show the progress to the professor or student assistant. The feedback had to be precisely added and incorporated into the design work for the next seminar. Thus, the structured, intense, and demanding seminar/studio flow kept every student engaged in the study process.

In parallel, students underlined the context of the assignments. Each studio assignment was based on the existing site and, in several cases, a designated client with specific needs. The importance of meeting guest lecturers/invited professionals almost every week helped students learn how to structure their work, prepare the presentations, and present them to a "client." Each group of students had to prepare preliminary research, visit the site, and prepare the design solutions. 'In-depth research before the designing phase helped me understand how important it is to learn from existing projects'- mentions Nino, for whom this particular part was interesting and challenging, but something that she now continues to do in a preliminary stage of project design. 'The historical context is very much discussed and appreciated'-mentioned Mariam, who, after returning, worked on a reconstruction project for one of the historic iconic buildings in Tbilisi. She has received the best Master's project price at Ilia State University.

The interviewees' slight negative point was the limited ability to choose courses. Even though some interesting courses (for example, Architectural Photography) were taught in English, Erasmus mobility students were unable to select them. Thus, their choices in the proposed curriculum course list were limited. Several respondents expressed a desire to study with a particular architect in a studio course. Although choosing the course was challenging, many succeeded in securing their preferred option. Some said that they were not able to manage that, but in the end, it was much better since the professor they chose was much more available during the seminars/studios, able to work with each group individually and answer emails promptly. In contrast, well-known professors had limited availability for student interaction.

Regarding how the mobility experience shaped perspective on job opportunities, one of the respondents from TSAA says: 'Erasmus mobility in POLIMI will be an essential element in my CV.' For students, attending half a year at POLIMI provided an opportunity for international experience, demonstrating adaptability and a willingness to embrace new challenges—highly valuable qualities to employers. 'The knowledge and skills I acquired, along with the prestigious reputation of the university, have made me even more competitive in the job market.' Today, every interviewed student is employed and satisfied with their job. Some of them changed their workplace, and some of them even decided to open their own studio. Only one student mentioned that after arrival, she decided to fully concentrate on her studies, finish the Master's Program, and later search for a job. Today she works in a big company.

In the period of writing this paper, ISU, TSAA, and POLIMI are integrating the results of these interviews with the results of other monitoring activities applied to the mobility of teachers and POLIMI PhD students hosted at TSAA and to the research carried out by the inter-university team. This should introduce appropriate corrective measures during the second and final year of the second Erasmus+ program. Priority is given to managing critical issues, but the commitment will also aim to further enhance the possible strengths of the proposed experiences.

3.3 Research

The activity of the inter-university research team, as anticipated in the introduction of Chapter 3, is only now at total productivity, and the scientific results will flow into reports, papers, and publications in the coming months. The choice, illustrated in Chapter 1, to place the same common interest around scientific topics of great importance (specifically the protection and valorization of Cultural Heritage in fragile contexts) as the focus of the mobility of students, PhD students, and teachers has rapidly pushed this direction the didactic experiences and this required greater commitment than expected from the teachers responsible for the mobility. On the other hand, the effort to coordinate and bring the construction of academic CVs, both of students and PhD students and of teachers, towards a common objective has stimulated the opening of research fronts and the multiplication of places to apply verification and experimentation. A certain slowdown was suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic, but, in any case, perhaps precisely due to its "inter"-university, -national, -disciplinary nature, the team needed an extension of the times for its effective productivity.

However, at the end of the second year of the second Erasmus+ program, it will be possible to evaluate the results overall through 1) verifying the number, and its increase over time, of participants (even those not selected for mobility) at the working tables (in person or on a digital platform) and workshops, 2) verification of the number, complexity, and effectiveness of research reports and public presentations, 3) feedback on innovative research methods in the field and their implications also for teaching, 4) verification of the number and quality of degree/doctoral theses coherent with the work of the inter-university team.

At the moment, among the intangible results of the research activity, both for students and teachers, the following emerge 1) the refinement of knowledge and skills around the complex and variously structured theme of Cultural Heritage, 2) the acquisition of experience in field activities in difficult and exemplary places, 3) the intense practice of intercultural dialogue to exercise communication and understanding, not only linguistic.

As the focus of the research team's work, the conservation strategies and the valorization of Cultural Heritage are significantly affected by the dynamics of territorial transformation and local cultural, political, and economic scenarios. Applying the theoretical contents to the concrete cases of Svanetia and the historic centre of Tbilisi (see paragraph 2.3) also represented a testing ground for this type of question, scientific, but not only. Some phases of the activities have been shared with administrations, local authorities, and Third Sector organizations (we mention, among others, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia and the Embassy of Italy in Tbilisi) and may flow into proposals to be submitted to the request for funding for their implementation. Also, for this reason, they represent, for the mobility participants, a further opportunity for cultural and professional growth and, for the universities involved, an opportunity for discussion with civil society.

Finally, already at the end of the first year, at the same time as this paper was drafted, the ISU, TSAA, and POLIMI research team planned to apply to other non-Georgian contexts in the immediate future. We mention, for example, the research project focused on Art Nouveau courtyards in Milan (Italy) and Tbilisi (Georgia) and the participation of the inter-university team in the third edition of the Workshop, promoted by POLIMI, "Memory. The Enchanted City" which will take place in Agrigento (Italy) in 2025

with the involvement of public institutions and Third Sector organizations and with experimental solid implications.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Focusing on all these aspects, the work team is now specifying the lines of possible future developments of its international cooperation, beyond, but also thanks to further mobility experiences offered by the Erasmus+ programs, in the direction of forming more complex projects in Georgia and Italy.

Several possible specific scientific issues seem suitable at the moment, on the one hand, to be integrated into institutional course programs and Master's degree and PhD theses in the three universities and, on the other hand, to become the heart of experimental projects to be applied to international calls.

One tool that ISU, TSAA, and POLIMI will perfect is the format of the intensive international workshop, which could take place in an integrated and/or synergistic way with the experiences supported by the European international mobility programs Erasmus+. This format can consolidate the strong interaction between research and institutional teaching activities at the three universities. It can further stimulate forms of permanent sharing, refining modules already present in the didactic offer and encouraging the experimentation of innovative teaching experiences.

The reference model is the one proposed for a few years at POLIMI by the School of Architecture, Urban Planning, Construction Engineering (<https://www.auic.polimi.it/en/education/internships-and-workshops/workshop>). These workshops will be open to students, undergraduates, and doctoral students of the three universities involved in the Erasmus+ programs or who intend to join the initiative freely. They will include theoretical modules (in presence and/or in connection with web conference systems) and application modules in the field in Italy and Georgia.

Once again, thanks to the mobility of students and teachers, it will be possible to promote a fruitful comparison between different teaching methods applied to similar scientific content, push towards the experimentation of intensive forms of teaching, and encourage international debate on the topic of cultural heritage in fragile territories and historical city centres of contemporary cities.

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