ICOM international council of museums Italia

Mediterranean heritage: communities, alliances, common horizons
Perspectives in the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region
Bari, 17-19 Aprile 2026

THE MEDITERRANEAN TONNARE AS CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURES FOR TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTION

IRENE BARBAGALLO
PhD Student - University of Catania
barbagallo0202@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean Tuna Fisheries (*Tonnare*) represent an extraordinary example of symbolic representation capable of redefining the perception of maritime space as a means of connection between different places, linking tangible and intangible memories.
Through this narrative device, the Mediterranean Sea is transformed from a fault line of conflict into a **place of exchange**, celebrating the *tonnare* as symbols of a historical diplomacy that fostered encounters between diverse peoples and cultures.



RESEARCH

The scientific legitimacy of this project is grounded in the analysis of the **Atlantic Bluefin Tuna** (*Thunnus thynnus*) migration path, along which a "geography of knowledge" has emerged, mirroring the movement of the fish across various basins. The tuna's journey ideally links the coasts of **Andalusia and the Maghreb** to the shores of Libya and Greece, traveling up the Italian peninsula—where sites such as **Favignana and Gallipoli** stand out as nodes of excellence—until reaching the coasts of **Albania and Croatia**.
Within this landscape, every community has embraced a maritime *koinè* that transcends modern political borders, despite the diversity of local rituals and techniques.





Moving from the ethnographic investigation conducted in Favignana, the research extends beyond regional boundaries to outline a **transnational vision** that mends the historical fabric between the Mediterranean, Ionian, and Adriatic basins. The positive example of museum enhancement and conservative restoration carried out in Favignana serves as a model that can be replicated in other areas

PROJECT

In this scenario, the project introduces an innovative **digital museology** strategy based on the creation of an **open-access interactive map** of the Mediterranean Tuna Fisheries. This tool is not a mere inventory, but the heart of a proposed **transnational tourist itinerary** capable of connecting heterogeneous sites: from existing museum sites like Favignana, to museum hubs yet to be established—such as Gallipoli—to structures repurposed into eco-sustainable hospitality centers, and ruins in need of protection.



The map, enriched with site-specific historical, technical, and cultural insights, allows for the preservation and enhancement of the rich tangible and intangible heritage—from work songs like the *cialoma* to the **exchange of knowledge** among crews—transforming the mapping process into a living digital platform for intercultural cooperation. The transnational collaboration initiated by this program encompasses social, historical-cultural, and environmental aspects.



CONCLUSION

The Mediterranean Tuna Fisheries thus become a unified **demo-ethno-anthropological heritage**, capable of restoring value and equal dignity to each individual local entity. The legacy of the Mediterranean Sea belongs to all its shores, and the *Tonnare* represent a universal symbol of **integration, peace, and mutual cultural recognition.**

