Mediterranean heritage: communities, alliances, common horizons.
Perspectives in the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region (Bari, April 17–19, 2026)

MILETO PArcheo_Lab

Participatory Narratives and Public–Private Partnerships for Heritage Care in the Mediterranean Region

1. MILETO ANTICA AND THE MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK

Situated near Vibo Valentia in southern Calabria, Mileto Antica is a multilayered archaeological site whose history spans from protohistoric occupation to its development as a Roman *oppidulum* and, later, as the political and religious centre of Norman power in southern Italy. Substantially reshaped in the late 11th century by Roger I of Hauteville, who established there his capital and promoted the construction of monumental complexes and administrative infrastructures, the city became **a key nodal point in the formation of the Norman kingdom**. Although largely devastated by the 1638-1659-1783 earthquakes, Mileto preserves **significant stratigraphic sequences** that reflect the long-term transformations of settlement, economy and cultural landscapes across the Mediterranean.

The Medieval Archaeological Park of Mileto Antica—the first medieval archaeological park in Calabria—offers a compelling case study for examining how participatory narrative practices and public–private partnerships can contribute to sustainable heritage governance in the Adriatic–Ionian Mediterranean. Through the **Mileto PArcheo_Lab**, a newly established physical and digital hub for research, dissemination and community co-design, the Park reconfigures archaeological knowledge production into a multilayered narrative infrastructure. This infrastructure aims to enhance cultural mediation, strengthen public engagement and foster shared interpretative frameworks across local communities, institutional stakeholders and transnational networks.

Recent debates in critical heritage studies and museum anthropology highlight the transformative role of **narratives** in shaping public understandings of the past and enabling participatory forms of heritage stewardship. In this regard, Mileto Antica represents a paradigmatic site where narrative practices intersect with sustainable management, territorial identity and long-term community involvement. Its historical depth—from Iron Age occupation to the Roman *oppidum* and the Norman capital founded by Roger I—provides an ideal terrain for examining how multi-scalar storytelling can articulate plural pasts within Mediterranean cultural landscapes



Fig. 1: Remains of the southern apse of the Abbey of the Holy Trinity, along with Roman-period spolia. Ph. Alessandra Randazzo



Fig.2 Visitor access systems for the site of the Abbey of the Holy Trinity. Ph. A. Randazzo



Fig.3 Aerial view of the Abbey site. Ph. Municipality of Mileto

2. NARRATIVE INFRASTRUCTURES AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The Mileto PArcheo_Lab's methodology is grounded in the production of **expanded and stratified knowledge**, achieved through systematic documentation (Archaeological Map; studies on *spolia*; geophysical surveys; archaeological excavations across Roman, Norman and post-medieval phases). This evidence base is mobilised through curated narrative dispositifs—including public events, academic activities, digital media and **Public History**-oriented communication strategies—designed to construct a shared **Public Landscape** and foster collective awareness of the site's cultural value. Initiatives such as the *Summer School* and the lecture cycle *Autunno di Ruggero* position Mileto within broader Mediterranean and European cultural networks, including the **Norman Network**, thus integrating local knowledge with transnational epistemologies.

3. COMMUNITY-BASED CARE AND PUBLIC–PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Mileto Antica develops an innovative ecosystem of **community-anchored heritage care** through targeted public–private partnerships, collaborations with Third Sector organisations, social cooperatives and cultural associations. These partnerships support continuous visitor access, ecological management of the cultural landscape, inclusive social policies and the development of community-driven agricultural supply chains. This model integrates circular-economy principles with heritage stewardship, embedding conservation practices in the daily life of the local population.

4. SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORKS AND IMPACT MEASUREMENT

The Park aligns its governance approach with **environmental and social accounting** methodologies (triple bottom line), adopting specific impact indicators and positioning its long-term planning within the framework of the **UN 2030 Agenda** (SDGs 11, 12, 13, 15). These tools render cultural, environmental and economic outcomes measurable and allow for continual assessment and adjustment of management practices—an increasingly essential requirement for heritage institutions operating within fragile Mediterranean ecosystems.

CONCLUSIONS: CO-CREATING MEDITERRANEAN HERITAGE FUTURES

Mileto PArcheo_Lab demonstrates how the **power of co-constructed narratives** can drive cultural regeneration, enhance territorial cohesion and establish resilient public–private governance models for heritage care. As Mediterranean regions confront demographic decline, environmental pressures and political fragmentation, Mileto offers a replicable framework for integrating conservation, participatory practice and narrative innovation. Its approach underscores that heritage is not merely preserved but continually **re-authored** through collaborative processes that anchor the past within shared visions for the future.

In this perspective, the Mileto PArcheo_Lab further highlights the **strategic relevance** of heritage labs as experimental arenas where collaborative governance, socio-environmental responsibility and narrative co-production can converge to generate scalable models for Mediterranean cultural landscapes.



Fig.4: Archaeotrekking as a moment of Public History participation. Ph. Paolo Mighetto

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