

Müge Akkar Ercan
Kerim Aydın
Editors

Valorising Underground Built Heritage in Cappadocia



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Foreword

Giuseppe Pace

When we started reflecting on a proposal for studying underground sites with outstanding cultural landscapes, our minds immediately journeyed to two remarkable settlements.

First on our mental map was the captivating "Sassi" in Matera, Italy. This troglodyte village stands as one of Italy's earliest human settlements, an architectural testament that earned the prestigious UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) designation in 1993. Its historic significance played an instrumental role in Matera clinching the esteemed title of European Capital of Culture in 2019.

In a different corner of the world lies Göreme in Cappadocia, a fascinating moon-like landscape sculpted over a million years through the artistry of rock erosion. Nature's handiwork has given rise to astonishing natural cones and columns, endearingly dubbed 'fairy chimneys'. Over centuries, skilled hands meticulously carved these formations into cave-dwellings, stables, and sacred sanctuaries. The valley of Göreme and its surroundings cradle around 300 cave churches and monastic Byzantine settlements, a living tapestry that echoes tales from the 9th to 13th centuries. This Turkish farming village, once known as *Maccan*, emerged atop the ruins of an ancient Byzantine settlement.

Göreme's allure, drawing millions of visitors annually, led to the establishment of the Göreme National Park in 1985, securing its distinguished status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site being a "... landscape of harmony combining human interaction and settlement with dramatic natural landforms" [1]. This enchanting milieu unfolded as the quintessential canvas to conceive a proposal amplifying the valorisation of the underground built heritage within a broader landscape narrative. What better place than Göreme could demonstrate why studying these landscapes, created by the long-standing interaction between groups of people and the nature, which transcend mere monuments or structures and give wealth and sense of belonging to the nearby communities?

However, places like Göreme are also ideal for reflecting of the emergent challenges precipitated by the ascendancy of heritage preservation and tourism. This ascendancy has fundamentally changed the dynamics between the local community and the sites in question. Protection policies, in a sense, have marginalised the inhabitants, dispossessing them of their spaces, and with them of their traditional activities, rituals, and cultural practices. Consequently, in numerous instances, these communities have yielded ground to the burgeoning tourist infrastructure.

Over time, the configurations of Göreme have undergone progressive changes, intricately woven into the fabric of its ecosystem. This transformation is a consequence of the gradual and daily interactions among the members of the local community within their anthropogenic and natural surroundings. These interactions, manifesting as a “complex set of interacting variables” [2], have given rise to considerable temporal diversity and a distinctive landscape. This distinctive character bestows upon Göreme an eminent heritage status, warranting vigilant preservation and valorisation.

Viewed from a broader perspective, contemporary shifts can be taken as indicators of a dynamic era, necessitating the adaptation of human practices and legal frameworks to an evolving world. These changes inevitably prompt alterations to the original cultural landscape and, consequently, reshape the “local community’s sense of place” [3]. It is imperative to acknowledge that these landscapes are inexorably intertwined with their anthropogenic context, a context which has played a formative role in shaping them. Specifically, this context refers to the “collectivity of members sharing common territorial areas, identities, and values, who actively and voluntarily engage in the construction of specific accomplishments within the framework of public action” [4]. To achieve that, community members must be actively involved in sequences of collaborating or competing practices [5]. These practices are influenced not solely by elements of traditional ecology such as size, proximity, diversity, quality, and culture, but also by community-centric factors encompassing “historicity, identity, mutuality, plurality, autonomy, participation, and integration” [6].

In the initial stages of our COST action titled “Underground Built Heritage as a Catalyst for Community Valorisation (Underground4value)”, our primary focus was the significant challenge of discerning the Underground Built Heritage’s potential in fostering the development of local communities. Our main objective was not focused on successful but crystallised heritage sites. Instead, we aimed to aid (local) communities in discovering abandoned or underused “underground” landscapes, often

necessitating the adoption of fresh meanings and a new repertoire of practices.

What insights could be gleaned from Göreme? Arguably, an in-depth investigation could be conducted into the intricate and frequently fragmented interconnections between the local community and the broader national and global community committed to safeguarding heritage sites of exceptional universal value. In 2019, at the inception of Underground4value, the network was in the process of delineating its theoretical and methodological objectives. Many participants at that time lacked a clear conception of the on-field work that lay ahead.

During the first management committee meeting of the Action, a resolution was reached to allocate a portion of the budget to facilitate the establishment of living labs in four selected case-studies. A living lab framework serves as an innovative, collaborative environment for experimentation and real-world application of research and development. Significantly, due to the proposition made by Müge Akkar Ercan, a contributing editor of this publication, the Göreme region became a focal point for investigation as one of the chosen case-studies.

After that moment, two living lab meetings were scheduled on-site. A short-term scientific mission, conducted by Daniela De Gregorio, significantly enhanced the comprehension of the case. Additionally, a training school paved the path for the emergence of two compelling research proposals.

This book serves as an archival repository, encompassing the diligent endeavours undertaken by the promoters of this living lab, encapsulating, and synthesising the resulting research works pertaining to the subject matter. By portraying the Göreme living lab, Müge Akkar Ercan and Kerim Aydiner delve into the multifaceted world of UBH and its profound impact on communities and landscapes. Certainly, rooted in the recognition of the imperative to amalgamate diverse perspectives and research endeavours, the editors embarked on a journey to unify an array of distinct chapters, each a specialised lens offering unique insights into various aspects of this exemplary case-study. Their steadfast dedication and intellectual rigor were pivotal in ensuring a coherent and comprehensive narrative that binds these chapters together, weaving a comprehensive vision of the case study at hand – the Göreme region.

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