

## Foundations for a heritage science research infrastructure

***EU-funded researchers are taking the first steps towards establishing an integrated heritage science infrastructure. This will make archives more accessible, facilitate collaboration across disciplines and raise the profile of this economically and socially important field of research.***



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The European Research Infrastructure for Heritage Science (E-RIHS) will support cross-disciplinary research on heritage interpretation, preservation, documentation and management. As a first step towards achieving this ambitious goal, the E-RIHS PP (European Research Infrastructure for Heritage Science Preparatory Phase) project is putting in place the legal and administrative foundations for the infrastructure, along with its strategic planning for scientific development, academic and professional training, sustainability and overall operational mode.

“While Europe’s expertise in heritage science is unquestioned, global investment in this field elsewhere in the world is growing apace,” says E-RIHS project coordinator Luca Pezzati from the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche in Italy. “We need to find a way of preserving and increasing the visibility of Europe’s cultural heritage. Our aim is that this infrastructure will establish the EU as a global reference point for culture, encouraging foreign students to enrol in European universities and creating opportunities for closer collaboration.”

Heritage science is about the analysis, conservation and preservation of cultural heritage and works of art, from the Mona Lisa to prehistoric cave-wall paintings and the Roman Colosseum. It involves researchers and institutions active across a wide range of disciplines, including chemistry, physics, art history, computer sciences, architecture, archaeology and digital humanities.

### Preparing the ground

The preparatory phase will run until 2020, after which time integrated research services will gradually become accessible under the E-RIHS brand. A total of 23 countries are involved in developing the infrastructure’s legal structure and delivering access to archives, training and expertise.

“Researchers will benefit from easier access to state-of-the-art technologies, such as mobile intervention units that can carry out non-destructive analyses at museums, remote monasteries or archaeological sites,” Pezzati explains. “Reuse of scientific datasets produced by the infrastructure and digitisation of scientific archives will also open doors to immense sources of knowledge currently stored in dedicated archives across Europe and encourage new platforms for data sharing and exchange.”

The E-RIHS network will make it easier to carry out coordinated cross-border training activities and to study abroad in participating institutions and laboratories. “E-RIHS is a long-term vision for how European heritage science research can remain at the cutting edge,” says Pezzati. “It will help foster increased understanding of the social and economic value of cultural heritage to European life.”

#### **Institutional cooperation**

Establishing E-RIHS requires the full participation of relevant academic, research and cultural heritage institutions across Europe as well as commitment from policymakers. In this preparatory phase, the focus is on establishing the legal status of the infrastructure as well as the managerial structure and location (Florence in Italy has been tentatively identified).

“We are advancing at a rapid pace towards achieving these preliminary goals,” says Pezzati. “More than 100 institutions worldwide have expressed an interest in joining or collaborating with E-RIHS.”

Among the four planned major platforms (mobile lab, large-scale facilities, archives and digital platform for data sharing), the mobile lab is already operational, access to large-scale facilities has been enabled and the digital platform is at full-speed development, along with the provision of access to physical archives. Next steps include the launch of DIGILAB, a digital platform for sharing and investigating scientific data sets in heritage. Interest in joining E-RIHS and accessing facilities, training activities and research expertise across borders continues to grow as the project progresses.

#### **Project details**

- Project acronym: **E-RIHS PP**
- Participants: Italy (Coordinator), Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, UK, Portugal
- Project N°: 739503
- Total costs: € 3 999 449
- EU contribution: € 3 999 449
- Duration: February 2017 to January 2020

#### **See also**

**Project website:** <http://www.e-rihs.eu/>

**Project details:**  
[https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/209507\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/209507_en.html)

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