Educational impact with MOOC production: behind the scenes of COST Action IS-LE

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By being open and accessible, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are great tools to disseminate knowledge and inform widely on a certain topic. Acknowledging this potential, COST Action CA18129 'Islamic Legacy: Narratives East, West, South, North of the Mediterranean' (IS-LE) has recently undertaken the production of an extensive MOOC to help achieve social impact, one of the network's main goals.

At times where science communication and open platforms are crucial, IS-LE members share their process and behind-the-scenes stories on their MOOC production that will capture knowledge from Europe's most outstanding museums and historical collections.

COST Action IS-LE

The intention of IS-LE is to mitigate the academic distortion currently characterising the study of relations between Christianity and Islam in late medieval and early modern Europe and the Mediterranean. The different geographical areas defined in this field, namely the Iberian Peninsula, Italy, Central Europe and the Balkans, and Greece and the different islands of the Mediterranean, have been analysed in isolation so far.

The establishment of this COST Action in 2018, allowed the creation of a common space for scientific exchange and reflection around past relations between Christianity and Islam in the European context through the addressing of three main research problems: otherness, migration and borders.

> *"One of the main goals of our COST Action is to have a social impact and we think that it should have long-term educational consequences. Beyond the strictly academic realm, IS-LE aims to revive diversity and Euro-Mediterranean relations in education, at a moment when Europe is at a cultural and political crossroads."*
>
> Dr Antonio Urquizar-Herrera, Chair of IS-LE

The network involves institutions from 26 different European and Mediterranean countries as well as 59 senior and junior researchers coming from different disciplines (history, history of art, philology, anthropology, social sciences, history of the science, politics, etc.).

Producing a MOOC to promote lifelong learning

IS-LE wants to promote a greater awareness of the long history, the complexity and richness of the relations between Christianity and Islam in Europe and the Mediterranean. As it aligns with the UN sustainable Development Goals n°4 "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning", the MOOC presented a the perfect format and means for this COST Action to achieve their objectives.

IS-LE will produce one MOOC, entitled **"Material culture in the construction of Islam in Europe. Narratives around the Premodern Mediterranean (1350-1750)**" encapsulating the main axes of research of the Action broken down into 6 sections: one introductory, and five focusing on "faith and conversion", "festivities and alterity", "commerce and exchange: spaces of collaboration and

confrontation", "Islamic Heritage and identity construction" and "memory, oblivion and heritage".

> *"Throughout the six weeks of the MOOC, students will have a better understanding of the role of Islamic heritage in Europe in the process of construction of figures of alterity and the perception of otherness. They will also learn how the material culture has been perceived or not as part of the European common heritage and how it has been an integral part of complex constructions of otherness and identity."*
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Pre-production and recording

The Action picked Vienna, one of Europe's most historically rich cities, to produce its content.



Collection in the Kunsthistorisches Museum

"Whether in historical or in modern times, people have dealt with the remains of a transcultural past. The origins of different artifacts were erased, or sometimes reframed in terms of collaboration or conflict, used for different purposes (legitimation, display of power or sovereignty, creation of political or religious identities...). The collections held in Vienna, in the Schatzkammer, the Kunsthistorisches Museum, and the Museum of the Cathedral were amazing examples of those processes."

With a good, advanced planning, the Action obtained all authorisations from these museums and was allowed to enter and film special collections outside visiting hours.

In May 2022, the COST Action team together with the film production team accessed the three museums and filmed some of the most exceptional collections.





"All those institutions kindly allowed the recording of their collections, and we could also interview different scholars that worked in different aspects of the Habsburgs and Ottoman relationship during the Early Modern period.", explained the Chair of the Action.

Overcoming production challenges

Producing filmed content on such topic can be quite challenging. While each section of the MOOC requires to access different historical collections in several cities, one needs to adapt to the technical constrains of the different locations. "*Flickering, or insufficient lighting are common when filming in museums.*" explained members of the Action.

Additionally, packaging this content and making it accessible for the wider public is also quite challenging. IS-LE is making this a priority and now works to compress and adapt the content without flattening it and keeping the rich nuances as much as possible.



Display cabinet in the Kunsthistorisches Museum

Broadcasting and outreach strategy

COST Action IS-LE intends to make the MOOC accessible to a wide audience, harnessing the potential offered by its large network including scholars throughout Europe and the Mediterranean.

"Museums already expressed their interest in using at least certain sessions of the MOOC for their educational purposes. Also, we are planning on sharing short sequences of the videos on our social media to bring attention to the MOOC outside of our network." adds the Chair.

Short videos and a long documentary will also be produced with the purpose of explaining one specific case study through the expertise of different researchers involved in the Action. Complementing the MOOC, this material will be broadcast on Spanish public TV and then hosted on YouTube.

The purpose of all this material is to show how mobility of people, knowledge, artifacts and visual elements between Islamic and Christian Europe throughout four centuries (1350-1750) can constitute specific elements to explain our present political history and the consequences (cultural, artistic, scientific, etc.) for the host countries.

The MOOC will be hosted on UNED Abierta and will be released in early 2023. Keep an eye out on IS-LE's Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook to find out when.

Additional information

View the Action webpage

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