

AquaViva: Water as Living Heritage – From Traditional Knowledge to Community Action for Climate Resilience and Wellbeing

AquaViva is a four-year international research and innovation project that has received funding from the European Union under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Staff Exchanges programme (Grant Agreement No. 101298900). This flagship programme supports international research collaboration through staff mobility, training and knowledge exchange between academic and non-academic organisations.

The project brings together universities, cultural organisations and civil society partners to address pressing challenges related to climate change, water insecurity and social inequality by approaching water not only as a resource, but as living heritage embedded in cultural practices, memories and everyday life. It will begin in January 2027 and is led by the University of Bath. The consortium includes Delft University of Technology (Delft), University of Oxford (Oxford), University of Barcelona (Barcelona), Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest), Özyeğin University (Istanbul), University of the West Indies (Mona, Jamaica) and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (Mexico City), working alongside civil society and cultural partners European Alternatives (Paris), Fondazione Studio Rizoma (Palermo), Tele Radio City (Padua/Veneto) and Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės Institutas (Kaunas), with Budapest Spas (Budapest) participating as an associate partner.

AquaViva responds to the limitations of dominant, technocratic approaches to water management and climate adaptation, which often overlook cultural meanings, historical infrastructures and the knowledge held by communities most exposed to water-related risks. By framing water as living heritage, the project foregrounds its social, cultural and symbolic dimensions, from bathing traditions and river cultures to everyday practices of access, care and stewardship. This perspective enables new forms of inclusive dialogue and democratic participation, linking climate resilience to social justice, wellbeing and heritage preservation.

The research programme combines interdisciplinary scholarship with staff mobility, training and co-creation. Through 200 international secondments, researchers, artists, activists and practitioners will exchange expertise across institutions and sectors. The project integrates four complementary methodological strands: a Value Case Approach that embeds social, cultural and historical values in water decision-making; arts-based co-creation methods that support collaborative knowledge production; structured participatory deliberation formats such as world cafés; and the recovery of Indigenous and Traditional Ecological Knowledge through ethnography, oral history and mapping. These approaches will be applied and tested through comparative case studies addressing climate-induced water challenges, inequalities in access and the preservation and reinterpretation of water-related heritage.

AquaViva will generate academic, societal and policy-oriented outcomes, including open-access scholarly publications and a transferable methodological toolkit. Communication of

results to non-academic audiences will include a policy workshop, a policy brief, an exhibition, a series of short oral storytelling videos, a film, a serious game, and a number of urban walking tours in partner cities. Together, these outputs aim to strengthen water literacy, amplify community voices and support more inclusive and culturally grounded approaches to water governance. By fostering long-term international and intersectoral collaboration, the project will also enhance institutional capacity to respond to interconnected challenges of climate change, heritage loss and social inequality. AquaViva demonstrates how collaborative research across disciplines, sectors and regions can contribute to more equitable, participatory and resilient water futures, grounded in both scientific knowledge and lived experience.