

ARACNE MID-TERM MEETING IN SLOVENIA


From 19 to 21 February, the international consortium of the ARACNE project celebrated its first year of activity with a three-day meeting organised by the University of Maribor in Slovenia in collaboration with the Sericulture Laboratory of Padua, Research Centre of Agriculture and Environment (CREA).

The event took place in two different locations. On the first and third days, the partners gathered on the premises of the Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences, an amazing 19th century building, a former residence of the Hapsburgian Emperor, recently restored; on the second day, the meeting was hosted at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, where the main hall is a significant example of the elegance of modern contemporary architecture. This splendid juxtaposition of new and old architectural structures was an evocative setting to assess the current progress of activities and to discuss strategies for the next two years of the ARACNE project, which aims to create a broad and well-connected Silk Innovation Ecosystem.

The objective was to compare and organise the data collected by each partner country regarding cultural and landscape heritage. Creating a cooperative atmosphere can facilitate the revival of past relationships and establishment of new ones, aiding in the development of a virtual map for the New European Silk Route. After the first introduction by the vice-Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Prof. Dr. Miran Lakota, the welcome speeches by Dr. Andreja Urbanek Krajnc and by the coordinator of the project, Dr. Silvia Cappelozza, discussion focused on the identification of ancient mulberry varieties found in various germplasm collections and landscapes, as well as the analysis of silkworm strains from local collections to expand our understanding of phylogenetic relationships.

The aim of revitalising European silk production is to serve as a foundation for recovering local traditions that are at risk of being lost. It also aims to develop innovative applications in scientific, technological, and cultural creative industries to amplify and protect cultural heritage, with an eye to the future of 'made in Europe'.

An exhibition was set up in the Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences to mark the occasion. The Slovenian Consul in Italy and his wife, Boris and Jožica Antolič, also attended the exhibition. The exhibit featured photos of collections from the Laboratory of Sericulture of Padua and the adjacent Esapolis museum, innovative materials produced by Sericyne, images of Les Chemins de la Soie from the Cévennes to the Alpujarras, silk fabric patterns developed by the students of Maribor High School of Design and Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and some results of the work of the mulberry research group of the University of Maribor. The



exhibition displayed artifacts made with re-used silk and naturally dyed waste cocoons from the Art of Silk Museum in Soufli and The Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation (PIOP).

Visitors could also admire clothes created by the Social Cooperative E.V.A., based in Santa Maria Capua Vetere, Italy, which works to support women victims of abuse. Additionally, hand-embroidered pieces by local women were showcased. A demonstration of traditional lace craftsmanship also took place in the faculty hall, making the exhibition even more vivid.

The Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences hosted Italian contemporary artist Martina Fontana as a special guest. Fontana exhibited her work, which was created with the help of silkworms, in the hall. Later, she met with students to explain the philosophy and thought behind her installations.

The meeting included cultural experiences such as a visit to the restoration laboratory in the ancient Roman city of Ptuj. The laboratory is responsible for the meticulous recovery work of large silk and wool tapestries for the Regional Museum Ptuj Ormož. Additionally, there was a visit to the ethnographic exhibition of traditional carnival masks called Kurent. These masks represent ancient pagan figures that have become a symbol for the entire nation.

This carnival period is a time of rebirth and transition between winter and summer, passing through the beginning of spring. Symbolically, the ARACNE project aims to be a bridge between the past and the future, through a present of sericulture rebirth.

