



NARRATE

Needs for Digital Recording and Documentation of Ecclesiastical Cultural Treasures in Monasteries and Temples



Project Information

Project Title:	Needs for Digital Recording and Documentation of Ecclesiastical Cultural Treasures in Monasteries and Temples
Programme/Action Type/Call:	ERASMUS+ / KA220-HED - Cooperation partnerships in higher education / 2022
Contract Number:	2022-1-EL01-KA220-HED-000089867
Start date:	29/12/2022
Duration in months:	24
Project Coordinator:	ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI

The purpose of NARRATE project is to codify the actual recording and documentation needs for the ecclesiastical cultural treasures, through a systematic study of the users' needs.

Consortium partners



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Contract no: 2022-1-EL01-KA220-HED-000089867

Document Information

Title	R2.3. Identification and analysis of best practices with regard to needs analysis through user-centered surveys
Deliverable No.	R2.3
Version	v.1
Type	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrator <input type="checkbox"/> ORDP <input type="checkbox"/> Ethics <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Work Package	WP2 Needs Analysis, Best Practice Collection and Conceptual Design of the NARRATE Framework
Work Package Leader	SOFIA UNIVERSITY ST KLIMENT OHRIDSKI
Issued by	SOFIA UNIVERSITY ST KLIMENT OHRIDSKI
Issued date	27.07.2023
Due date	29.07.2023
Dissemination Level	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Confidential

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Abbreviations

Assoc. Prof.	Associate Professor
CH	Church heritage
ChT	Church Treasures
EU	European Union
Eccl.	Ecclesiastical
Hist.	Historical
ICOM	International Council of Museums
ICOMOS	International Council of Monuments and Sites
TEI	The Text Encoding Initiative
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
PCDK	Promotion of Cultural Diversity
AAT	Art and Architecture Thesaurus
TGN	the Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names



Executive Summary

The EU Erasmus+ “NARRATE: Needs for Digital Recording and Documentation of Ecclesiastical Cultural Treasures in Monasteries and Temples” (2022-1-EL01-KA220-HED-000089867) aims at identifying and promoting the needs and priorities concerning ecclesiastical Cultural Heritage (CH) documentation.

This study aims to systematically assess the current requirements for recording and documenting ecclesiastical cultural treasures by conducting an in-depth analysis of user needs. NARRATE prioritizes the documentation of ecclesiastical CH artifacts in a way that allows stakeholders to ‘narrate’ their interconnected histories, functions, and enduring spiritual significance.

This report, *R2.3: Identification and Analysis of Best Practices in Needs Assessment through User-Centered Surveys*, presents the implemented methodology for conducting user-centered research, and provides a comprehensive review in literature of best practices. It represents the third key outcome of Work Package No. 2 – Needs Analysis, Best Practice Collection, and Conceptual Design of the NARRATE Framework.



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1. Identification of Methodology

The aim of the NARRATE project is to systematize the actual recording and documentation needs for the ecclesiastical cultural treasures, through a systematic study of the users' needs.

The initial phase of the NARRATE project focuses on identifying a suitable implementation methodology. This methodology aims to establish a comprehensive and unified framework for extracting information, facilitating access, and actively engaging the custodians of ecclesiastical treasures, such as clerics, church officials, and museum workers. Each of these stakeholders holds varying degrees of responsibility for different types of ecclesiastical artifacts. However, it is crucial to consider significant features in the three countries involved in the project. In both the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Turkey, a substantial portion of ecclesiastical treasures is under the purview of various State Institutions, primarily Museums and archives. In the Republic of Greece, these treasures are under the control of each church that owns them.

Building upon the principal objective of the NARRATE project-to actively engage stakeholders in the process of narrating, showcasing, and displaying ecclesiastical treasures within their institutions-the implemented methodology follows a structured, four-stage approach. This methodology ensures a systematic and inclusive process that accommodates the diverse institutional and legal contexts across the three participating countries. Furthermore, it lays the foundation for the development of a digital repository that serves as a valuable tool for documentation, preservation, and accessibility.

Stage 1: Identifying Documentation and Recording Needs

The first step involves a comprehensive assessment of existing documentation practices and recording methodologies used by institutions that safeguard ecclesiastical treasures. This includes reviewing pertinent projects and existing digital databases. The goal is to identify gaps in documentation, inconsistencies in recording techniques, and areas where improvements can be made.

Stage 2: User Needs Assessment for the Digital Archive

To ensure the effectiveness and usability of the digital repository, a thorough user needs assessment is conducted. This stage involves engaging key stakeholders-clerics, church officials, museum workers, archivists, and researchers-to understand their specific requirements for accessing, documenting, and narrating ecclesiastical treasures. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups are employed to gather insights on preferred digital tools, accessibility features, metadata requirements, and potential challenges in transitioning to a digital format. This step is crucial in designing a repository that is user-friendly, functional, and tailored to the needs of those who will manage and utilize it.

Stage 3: Codification of Documentation Standards

Standardizing documentation practices is essential for creating a coherent and interoperable digital archive. This stage focuses on developing a unified framework for cataloguing ecclesiastical treasures, incorporating international metadata standards (e.g., CIDOC CRM) while also adapting to the specific needs of local institutions. The codification process establishes guidelines for data entry, classification, description, and digitization formats to ensure consistency across different institutions and countries. Additionally, legal and ethical considerations regarding the ownership, intellectual property, and privacy of ecclesiastical artifacts are addressed.

Stage 4: Creation of the Digital Repository

The final stage involves the actual development and implementation of the digital repository. This includes designing the repository's architecture, integrating user-friendly interfaces, and ensuring multilingual accessibility to accommodate the diverse linguistic backgrounds of stakeholders. The repository will serve as a dynamic platform where institutions can document, narrate, and share information about ecclesiastical treasures, ultimately enhancing their visibility and accessibility for both experts and the broader public. Furthermore, training sessions and capacity-building initiatives will be conducted to equip stakeholders with the necessary skills to manage and sustain the digital archive effectively.

By following this structured methodology, the NARRATE project not only preserves the cultural and historical significance of ecclesiastical treasures but also fosters a collaborative and inclusive approach to their documentation and dissemination.

2. Implementation

2.1 Fortnightly meetings of the international project team

From January 2023 to April 2023, the meetings of the international team of the NARRATE project were primarily focused on identifying a suitable methodology and studying various practices in the EU and around the world to establish such a methodology for working with users and stakeholders of ecclesiastical treasures.

The NARRATE project aims to encourage stakeholders of ecclesiastical treasures, such as icons, holy relics, manuscripts, old printed books, etc., to “narrate” and promote these treasures, while also revealing specific local customs and religious practices associated with them. These treasures embody local religious wealth and represent specific aspects of the European way of life throughout the centuries and today. Consequently, it is crucial to consider the connection with the history of the region, the local communities, their linguistic and cultural characteristics, and specifics.

The international team emphasized the importance of considering local, linguistic, religious, and cultural characteristics for the correct and objective presentation of ecclesiastical treasures. As a result, it was agreed that several main points of action should be established when implementing the field action methodology.

All members of the NARRATE project played a particularly important role in identifying different groups of owners of ecclesiastical treasures. The insights of Professor Dr. Stella Sylaiou and Father Professor Dr. Chrysostomos Nassis were particularly valuable, and the constant assistance of Dr. Aikaterini Stamou should not go unnoticed. Everyone participating in the online meetings from the international team contributed to the development of the methodological steps. After establishing the action stages and target groups of the project, the Sofia University team, which leads the activities related to the Project’s methodology, collaborated with other partners to develop the concrete steps of the methodology and initiate the compilation of a questionnaire targeting various groups of holders of church values who would be involved in the project.



Figure 1: Regular on-line meeting with international partners

2.2 Weekly meetings of the Bulgarian project team in Sofia

As Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" leads WP2 in the NARRATE Project, the team from Sofia University held weekly meetings to coordinate the activities of WP2. After receiving feedback and advice from the international team collegium of the NARRATE project, the distribution of tasks commenced.

Chief Assistant Dr. Tatiana Ivanova and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Svetoslav Ribolov undertook the responsibility for work in the Plovdiv/ Philippopolis Metropolis. Their commitment involved introducing local owners of church values to the NARRATE project and explaining the significance of involving them in the project's work. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivaylo Naydenov took on a similar role, working with priests and museum workers in the Stara Zagora Metropolis, which also encompasses other major cities such as Svilengrad, Haskovo, Harmanli, etc. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ventzislav Karavalchev committed to working in the Sliven Metropolis, covering the easternmost part of the region of Northern Thrace, the Black Sea coast in Bulgaria, and the Strandzha and Sakar mountains – regions known for their early Christian monuments. Additionally, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ventzislav Karavalchev took on the task of studying the bibliography proposed by the international participants, analyzing it, and presenting the findings to the Bulgarian team. Before commencing the fieldwork, three working meetings of the Sofia team were held. In these meetings Assoc. Prof. Dr. Karavalchev summarized the scientific literature and achievements recommended by the partners.

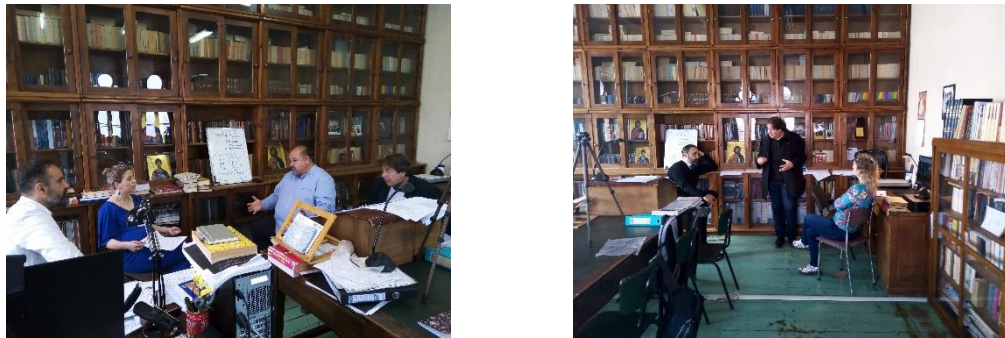


Figure 2: Regular meetings of Sofia team

2.3 Literature review of the scientific literature on the topic

Current titles with resources on topics close to the topic of the NARRATE project were read and analyzed by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ventsyaslav Karavalchev, who presented them to the Sofia project team. These are:

2.3.1. Research projects

ReIReS - Research Infrastructure on Religious Studies¹: A preliminary project which has become a powerful tool for the digitization of scientific literature.

RESILIENCE²: A unique, interdisciplinary and invigorating research infrastructure for Religious Studies - A project on the theological and religious heritage of Europe. Within its framework, the entire religious and theological literature of Europe is digitized and uploaded to the Internet for free access. This is particularly important for the preservation of the local identities of the old continent and of the traditional way of life in Europe.

KADOC³: Documentation and Research Centre on Religion Culture and Society Research centre.

¹ <https://reires.eu/>

² <https://www.resilience-ri.eu/>

³ <https://kadoc.kuleuven.be/english>

2.3.2. Good practices literature

UNESCO heritage of religious interest ⁴: UNESCO Initiative

Mount Athos Repository⁵: "Project repository / website" - exploit modern information and communication technologies by digitalizing, documenting and disseminating its cultural heritage.

European Digital Treasures: Management of centennial archives in the 21st century⁶: Research Project - The project aims at bringing joint European heritage, especially its digital versions, major visibility, outreach and use.

Basilica San Nicola Bari ⁷: 3D Virtual tour – Very good 3D presentation of the famous basilica

Monasteries of Greece ⁸: virtual guide/map

National Archaeological museum Sofia⁹: virtual guide with explanation of the relics -

National Historical museum Sofia¹⁰:

British Library Endangered Archives Programme¹¹: Creating a digital archive of ecclesiastical records in the original seven Villas of Cuba - Research Project - To digitize over 500,000 pages of unique documents that record the history of the African diaspora in the seven oldest cities of Cuba.

The documentation of ecclesiastical cultural heritage sites in Cyprus ¹²: Paper Journal - The paper discusses the integration of various technologies to document the 12th century St. Efstathios Chapel in Kolossi, Cyprus.

⁴ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/religious-sacred-heritage/>

⁵ <https://www.mountathos.org/el-GR/syloges.aspx>

⁶ <https://www.digitaltreasures.eu/about/project-objectives/>

⁷ <https://www.basilicasannicola.it/tourvirtuale/>

⁸ <https://www.monastiria.gr/monasteries-google-map/?lang=en>

⁹ <http://naim.bg/bg/tour/>

¹⁰ <https://historymuseum.org/>

¹¹ <https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP955/search>

¹² <https://www.spiedigitallibrary.org/conference-proceedings-of-spie/11534/2574015/The-documentation-of-ecclesiastical-cultural-heritage-sites-in-Cyprus/10.1117/12.2574015.short?SSO=1>

The European Library¹³: Website / repository - Users can cross-search and reuse over 26,394,274 digital items and 168,238,832 bibliographic records. The objects come from institutions located in countries which are members of the Council of Europe and range from catalogue records to full-text books, magazines, journals and audio recordings.

Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents (CSAD)¹⁴: Research Center / Projects - "This research center focuses on the study of ancient documents. The research center has important archives of epigraphical material. This includes one of the largest collections of squeezes (paper impressions) of Greek inscriptions, together with the Haverfield archive of Roman inscriptions from Britain, and a substantial photographic collection."

"Ψηφιοποιώντας "Ξεχασμένους" πολιτιστικούς θησαυρούς¹⁵: MoCaCu - (Portable Unit for the Protection, Documentation and Conservation of Movable Cultural Heritage in Remote Areas of Greece)" - Paper Journal / project.

Survey Report on Digitisation in European Cultural Heritage Institutions 2014¹⁶: Report - The report focuses on the current state of digitisation in Europe. It is the result of a survey carried out by the ENUMERATE Thematic Network, with the help of national coordinators, in 33 European countries (in 11 languages).

Ethio-SPaRe Manuscript Conservation Programme¹⁷: Report / project - The study of the local ecclesiastic libraries and the manuscript culture in its original context, improving the conditions of some ecclesiastic libraries and conservation of some selected manuscripts were essential parts of the project's plan of work.

Europeana¹⁸: Website / repository - Europe's digital cultural heritage

¹³<https://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/>

¹⁴<https://www.csad.ox.ac.uk/current-projects>

¹⁵<https://timeheritage.gr/3-cultural-heritage-promotion/?lang=en>

¹⁶<http://enumeratedataplatfrom.digibis.com/reports>

¹⁷<https://www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/en/ethiostudies/research/ethiospare/missions/pdf/conservation-report.pdf>

¹⁸<https://www.europeana.eu/en>

2.3.3. References and literature

Special Issue "Religious Space as Cultural Heritage" ¹⁹: Journal

Sacredness as an Underlying Value of Cultural Heritage Law in Europe ²⁰: Journal

How do Museums Affect Sacredness? Three Suggested Models ²¹: Journal

Περιλήψεις Εισηγήσεων 1ης Ημερίδας Συντήρησης & Μελέτης Εκκλησιαστικών
Κειμηλίων(in Greek)²²: Conference

Abstracts from the 2nd International Meeting for the Conservation & Documentation of
Ecclesiastical Artefacts (IMCDEA) ²³: Conference

International seminar on Movable Religious Heritage ²⁴: Seminar

MANAGEMENT OF ECCLESIASTICAL RELICS ²⁵: Academic program

Guidelines on Ways of Dealing with Religious Objects ²⁶: Guidelines

Διπλωματική Εργασία «3δ Ψηφιοποίηση και Ανάδειξη Εκκλησιαστικής Κληρονομιάς»²⁷:
Thesis (In Greek)

¹⁹https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/religious_heritage

²⁰<https://journals.openedition.org/rdr/810?lang=en>

²¹<https://journals.openedition.org/iss/1917?lang=en>

²²https://www.academia.edu/8022365/Abstracts_from_the_1st_International_Meeting_for_the_Conservation_and_Documentation_of_Ecclesiastical_Artefacts_IMCDEA_Theological_School_of_Halki_Istanbul

²³https://www.academia.edu/36199153/Abstracts_from_the_2nd_International_Meeting_for_the_Conservation_and_Documentation_of_Ecclesiastical_Artefacts_IMCDEA

²⁴<https://www.frh-europe.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2013-Conference-in-Utrecht-Movable-Religious-Heritage-report-feedback-programme-speakers-delegates.pdf>

²⁵<https://aeaa.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/English-programme-of-Studies-PDEK1.pdf>

²⁶. https://www.catharijneconvent.nl/documents/56/Guidelines_dealing_with_religious_objects_oyww2E0.pdf

²⁷<https://hellanicus.lib.aegean.gr/bitstream/handle/11610/18428/%CE%94%CE%99%CE%A0%CE%9B%CE%A9%CE%9C%CE%91%CE%A4%CE%99%CE%9A%CE%97%20A%CE%A6%CE%91%CE%9D%CE%A4%CE%95%CE%9D%CE%9F%CE%A5.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

European Network for historic places of worship/Future for religious heritage ²⁸: European network.

Religious database ²⁹: Encyclopedia

"UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" ³⁰: Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2022 Edition)

UNESCO Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage ³¹: foster cooperation, awareness-raising and capacity-building, and propose standard ethical, legal and technical guidelines, to support the preservation of the digital heritage -

IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) ³²: Guidelines for Digitalization Projects for collections and holdings in the public domain, particularly those held by libraries and archives .

UCL Press Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage ³³: The interlinkage of cultural memory, heritage and discourses of construction, transformation and destruction. Veysel Apaydin.

UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage ³⁴: Guidance Note for Inventorying Intangible Cultural Heritage .

Museum International ³⁵: Views and visions of the intangible; Museum international; ISSN 1350-0775, No. 221–222 (Vol. 56, No. 1–2, 2004)

²⁸<https://www.frh-europe.org/about-frh/organization/documents/policy-documents/>

²⁹<https://religiondatabase.org/landing/>

³⁰https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/2003_Convention_Basic_Texts-2022_version-EN_.pdf

³¹<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000179529>

³²<https://www.ifla.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/assets/preservation-and-conservation/publications/digitization-projects-guidelines.pdf>

³³<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10091628/1/Critical-Perspectives-on-Cultural-Memory-and-Heritage.pdf>

³⁴<https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/50279-EN.pdf>

³⁵ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000135852>

Digital Vatican Library ³⁶: A digital platform that provides access to digitized manuscripts, codices, and other cultural heritage objects from the Vatican Library's collections.

Digital Bodleian ³⁷: A digital platform that provides access to digitized manuscripts, maps, and other cultural heritage objects from the Bodleian Libraries at the University of Oxford.

Smithsonian Open Access ³⁸: Open Access brings Smithsonian collections to people in new ways, to engage with the public, and provide important context for challenging 21st century issues.

THE ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites ³⁹: outline the principles and guidelines for interpreting and presenting cultural heritage sites to promote their understanding and appreciation.

Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (CULTNAT) ⁴⁰: for the preservation and documentation of Egypt's cultural and natural heritage.

Cultural and Historical Heritage⁴¹: Preservation, Presentation, Digitalization . Journal – Open access

Jolanta Sroczynska, Modern Presentation of Cultural Heritage: a Review of Selected Documents ⁴²: Article.

lected_Documents Sophia Labadi, World Heritage: Challenges for the Millennium ⁴³: Book.

³⁶ <https://digi.vatlib.it/>

³⁷ - <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>

³⁸ - <https://www.si.edu/openaccess>

³⁹ -https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Charters/interpretation_e.pdf

⁴⁰ <https://www.cultnat.org/About>

⁴¹ <http://www.math.bas.bg/vt/kin/archive.php?v=9&i=1&l=en>

⁴²https://www.academia.edu/15217131/Modern_Presentation_of_Cultural_Heritage_a_Review_of_S

⁴³https://www.academia.edu/87570239/World_Heritage_Challenges_for_the_Millennium

Daniela Arroyo Barrantes, World Heritage in Europe Today ⁴⁴: Book.

2.4 Developing a user needs analysis methodology

The first step of this study was the identification of a suitable methodology to be implemented. The methodology should establish a comprehensive and cohesive framework for information extraction, accessibility, and active participation in the documentation process of ecclesiastical treasures. This approach directly involves clerics, church officials, and museum professionals who are responsible for and have access to a diverse range of ecclesiastical artifacts. However, in the three countries subject to the project there are significant features to take into consideration. In Bulgaria, a significant part of artifacts is held by state institutions, such as museums and archives, while in Turkey, Patriarchate and Rum Foundations play a significant role in preserving and managing these treasures. In Greece, such treasures are at the disposal of each church that owns them. Taking into consideration that the primary goal of the project is for the stakeholders to be actively involved in this process and then proceed to the creation of a repository for digital archiving tailored to their needs, the implemented methodology was structured in four stages:

1. Identifying documentation and recording needs
2. User needs assessment for the digital archive
3. Codification of documentation standards
4. Creation of the Digital Repository

The needs analysis model is further described in the next paragraph.

2.5 The needs analysis model

The needs analysis model was specifically designed to address the structured documentation and digital archiving of ecclesiastical treasures. It followed a systematic

⁴⁴https://www.academia.edu/29501292/Ouidallie_A_and_Young_C_2016_World_Heritage_in_Europe_Today_Paris_UNESCO_Contributions_to_Case_Studies

approach to ensure that the recording, organization, and management of these cultural treasures will align with both technical and user-driven requirements. The key components of the needs analysis model are analysed as follows:

1. Identifying documentation and recording needs: The first step involved assessing the actual requirements for documenting ecclesiastical assets. This was accomplished through a review of existing documentation practices for identifying how ecclesiastical artifacts, structures, and liturgical items were previously recorded. Additionally, gaps in metadata structuring, file formats, and cataloguing methodologies that needed improvement were also examined. Engaging clergy and non-clergy community (conservators, theologians, archivists etc) and to define the essential data points required for a comprehensive record was important at this stage. The identification of potential stakeholders who possess these artifacts was essential for identifying the specific sites and individuals within the primary target groups of our research.

2. User needs assessment for the digital archive: A core aspect of the needs analysis will be ensuring the usability of the proposed digital repository for different stakeholders, including clergy and non-clergy community. Thus, for the user needs assessment this phase incorporated:

- Categorization of users: distinguishing between the main focus groups (clergy, non-clergy community) to tailor digital archiving solutions accordingly.
- Surveys and structured interviews: Collecting qualitative insights from users regarding their expectations, challenges, and preferences in accessing and managing digital records. Both in-person and online options were provided to make the process as easy and user-friendly as possible. This approach facilitated the collection of diverse perspectives, helping to identify key areas for further investigation. At this stage, sending an official letter to the metropolitans of the relevant dioceses was crucial, for acquiring an official permission to conduct work within the territory of their specified metropolises. Notably, the majority of responses were gathered through face-to-face interactions, allowing for real-time engagement and clarification of answers. Additionally, interviews encouraged participants to reflect on and share their personal stories, offering rich and detailed accounts of their experiences. This method provided deeper insight into how individuals interpret their experiences through storytelling, allowing us to analyze the meanings and underlying assumptions within their narratives.

3. Codification of documentation standards: Based on the insights gathered, the model proposes a standardized methodology for recording ecclesiastical artifacts. This includes metadata structuring for establishing consistent taxonomies and ontologies for data entry to ensure interoperability and accessibility, and multimedia integration for defining best practices for incorporating images and textual descriptions in a cohesive digital format.

4. Creation of the Digital Repository: The platform for the digital archiving aims to be a valuable tool accessible to all stakeholders interested in documenting and sharing their ecclesiastical assets. This platform will provide a means to protect these artifacts, but will also foster collaboration among researchers, academics, professionals, and the local community interested in the ecclesiastical-historical heritage.

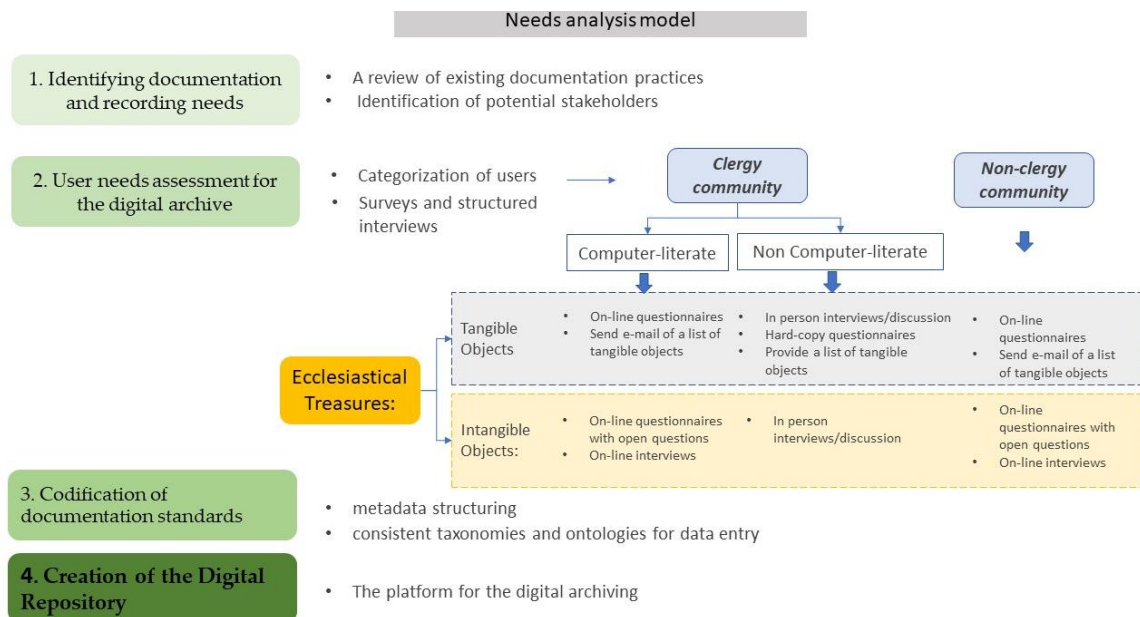


Figure 3: Conceptual workflow of the applied methodology.

This report focuses on the initial two stages of the applied methodology, which involve identifying and analyzing best practices for documentation needs of ecclesiastical heritage. The following steps outline the approach taken in this direction.

Step 1. Contact regional metropolitans, abbots of stauropegial monasteries, and museum curators to inform them about the NARRATE project’s scope and objectives

Step 2. The following step is to identify the specific sites and people from the primary target groups that will be the focus of our research. Following the initial round of data

collection, the focus should be expanded to include other groups such as church council members, parishioners, members of local cultural associations, and so on.

Step 3. Identification of Stakeholders (Target Groups) of ecclesiastical treasures.

- In connection with this point, the following stakeholders of ecclesiastical treasures were identified to be directed to the attention of the team and to be attracted to active assistance in the project. *The primary target group of Stakeholders is the next:* Local Metropolitans, Parish Priests, Chancellor, Abbots, Monks, Museum Curators, Church Museums, Folk Museums and Municipal Servants.
- *Secondary target group of Stakeholders is the next:* Members of the Church Councils, Parishioners, Conservators, (art) historians, local guides, etc., Local Cultural Associations and Organizations.

Step 4. Sending an official letter to the metropolitan of the relevant diocese to request permission from him to work in the territory of the given metropolis.

The letter must be on behalf of the institution whose employees are supposed to operate in the territory of the given metropolis. In case permission to work in a monastery brotherhood is requested, then an official letter is sent to the abbot of the monastery. If it is a stauropelial monastery, a letter is sent to the superior of the given local church. If the monastery brotherhood/nunnery has less than four monks, then permission is sought from the metropolitan of the given diocese. The permission obtained from the given bishop should be in writing and should be available to the interviewers in their field work.

Step 5. Sending a contact letter and permission for the activity to the museums and regional authorities can also be referred to the same activity. Active cooperation is expected from them, since the project involves the promotion of local cultural and religious attractions, which will certainly have a beneficial effect on the local economy. Mostly on tourism and pilgrimage.

The purpose of these letters is to present the NARRATE project in a few sentences, to identify those willing to cooperate and, after receiving positive feedback, to request organized meetings in the metropolises and museums. In the case of metropolitan cities, the meeting should be with the priests from the diocese and restorers working for them, and in museums – with the museum workers and restorers. Already at this stage, face-

to-face or online meetings can be requested and, depending on the response, they can be held in the appropriate order.

Step 6. Attendance meetings in the metropolises and museums. After obtaining permission: Through in-depth interviews, we address the stakeholders needs. Questions on the provenance of the objects could be added. The questions will be in compliance with our project partners. The interviewing process starts with a verbal explanation of the project and a request for a “written consent form” as the conversation will be recorded. This issue is to be discussed with our project partners/ Ethics Committee.

This meeting can be conducted in several main parts:

- Introducing the audience to the NARRATE project;
- Questioning the audience for ideas on how they envision such a site and what would be useful for them to convey their history and church heritage through the site;
- For the effectiveness of the discussion, guiding questions can be used to direct the audience, for example: How familiar are they with the ecclesiastical heritage of the region, the temple, the monastery in which they serve or manage?
- Which items such as utensils, icons, etc. deserves special attention and why?
- Are they familiar with the history of these artefacts?
- What is their current use (active use in cult/storage/museum display, etc.)?
- What measures have been taken to promote and preserve these values? Are there art objects and ecclesiastical-historical values restored in its object (by whom they were restored - from the local budget of the municipality; from a state fund; from the church; on the initiative of the temple/ monastery/ metropolis/ museum; according to a European program)
- What do they think would be good to do for better promotion, display, preservation and conservation?
- Are they familiar with the ways, methods and benefits associated with digitizing church heritage?
- If they are aware, what do they think could still be done. What are the objects that must be digitized? What details of an ecclesiastical heritage site should be included in a digital description?
- Are they aware of similar projects - descriptions of the church's historical heritage and if so, can they point to something that deeply impressed them? Does they

have their own vision of what such a project should include, what goals and tasks it should pursue and with what methodology?

Guiding questions will differ depending on whether the audience is clergy or museum workers. In the case of museum workers, the questions will be oriented more towards digitization as a method of preserving church cultural heritage.

Step 7. Face-to-face interviews. The general discussion transitions to individual face-to-face interviews. The purpose of the personal meeting is to predispose the owners of ecclesiastical treasures to accept the NARRATE 2022 project as their initiative in which to actively participate. Additionally, in cases where a certain group of possessors is distrustful of persons outside the Church, personal contact with people from the academic sphere has a salutary influence.

Step 8. Circulating a working version of the survey/questionnaire (which we are currently developing) after the oral interviews are completed. It is planned to distribute two versions of the questionnaire - one for the priests, the second for the museum employees, in both paper and electronic formats. The electronic version will be accessible for those who prefer using a telephone device or a computer. Both paper and electronic versions are provided for both questionnaires - for clergy and museum workers.

Step 9. Online meetings. In the framework of the exploratory meetings, online meetings may also take place. After a positive response to the possibility of an online meeting, it can be held in the following order: A meeting on the Zoom platform to present the Project, discussion, clarification of the meaning of the electronic questionnaire that will be sent to all interested target groups.

Step 10. After receiving the data, it should be summarized and analyzed.

2.6 The NARRATE questionnaire

The questions included in the NARRATE questionnaires were established after the formation of the above-mentioned methodology conducted by NARRATE's research teams of Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey (Figure 3).

Detailed analysis of the questions used in the questionnaires are described in Report R6 of WP2.

3. Analysis of the user needs

After the working meetings of the team which focused on studying the methodology and exchanging experiences, the stage of practical implementation of the preliminary meetings to analyze the needs of users and owners of ecclesiastical treasures began. In accordance with the previously developed methodology of the NARRATE project, the following preliminary meetings were held with stakeholders of ecclesiastical treasures

Reaching out to and introducing the project to the stakeholders was the crucial initial step that needed to be taken before conducting surveys. Therefore, it was necessary for all three research teams from Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey to allow generous time to engage with the community by meeting during religious gatherings and through acquaintances within the congregation.

Given the significance of hierarchy, it was crucial to introduce the project to the high-level authorities. The purpose was to inform the community about the project's partners and details well in advance of distributing the surveys, ensuring that the community is well-informed and receptive to the forthcoming questionnaires. In addition, the absence of any prior research on the digitalization of church assets made it crucial to emphasize that this project would not be a local initiative but rather an academic endeavor involving three different countries under the Erasmus framework. Despite being three different countries, the similarity in church organizational structures and the familiarity among the clergy/community were expected to contribute to the project's recognition, particularly between Greece and Turkey.

Moreover, since there were no previous examples of similar projects, a natural inclination toward caution and risk aversion in embracing digitalization was evident, mainly in Turkey. This led to a dilemma during the survey, as in Turkey, participants inquired about the final product and its associated risks. We clarified that the project's outcome would be influenced by their survey responses.

The following paragraphs describe the implementation of the methodology by Sofia University team. The same procedures were followed accordingly by the team of AUTH University in Greece and KMKD team in Turkey.

3.1 Methodology implementation

- On March 23, 2023 Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ventsislav Karavalchev and Chief. Assistant Dr. Tatyana Ivanova presented the NARRATE 2022 project to the employees of the town

hall and the Historical Museum in the city of Burgas/Pyrgos. The event was held in the gallery of the Historical Museum in the city, a highly significant cultural and industrial center on the Black Sea coast. The city is situated in the metropolis of Sliven.



Figure 4: Methodology of NARRATE Questionnaires formation and Impementation

- In the period of May 23-25, 2023, Assoc. Prof. Svetoslav Ribolov made a business trip to Plovdiv/ Philippopolis. During his visit, he held meetings with officials of the metropolis, including priests Georgi Gugov (teacher at the Plovdiv Ecclesiastical Seminary), priest Emil Paralingov (Responsible for the treasury of the metropolis) and vicar bishop Arseniy. Ribolov visited the former Metropolitan Cathedral of St. Marina, where he presented the project to the chanters and clergy of the church. He also visited and met also clerics in St. Constantine and St. Helena Church, St. Paraskeva the Old One, St. Dimitrios Church, St. Paraskeva the New One, etc. Additionally, the next day, he presented the project to the team of the Episcopal Basilica Museum in Plovdiv. A meeting was also held with the sisters from the monastery of St. Cyricus and Julitta near the village of Gorni Voden/Vodena. Assoc. Prof. Ribolov received an assurance of readiness for cooperation from the Abbess Sister Philoteia. Chief Assistant Prof. Dr. Tatyana Ivanova made a business trip to Plovdiv between May 26 and May 28, 2023, and visited the Plovdiv Historical Museum. During her visit, she explained to the museum staff, restorers and collaborators the goals, tasks, and activities of the project. She also presented them with the future survey and arrange the way in which it would be conducted.



Figure 5: Fr. Emil Paralingov in St. Paraskeva the New One, Plovdiv

Figure 6: The Bishops' Basilica Museum, Plovdiv



Figure 7: With the Chanter of St. Marina Church, Plovdiv

Figure 8: With the nun Philothea in Cericus and Jilitta Monastery, Vodena

- The business trip of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ventzyslav Karavalchev proved to be particularly valuable for the project. He visited several important centers of Christianity in the region of Sliven Metropolis from late antiquity to the present day. Between May 28 and June 3, 2023 Karavalchev visited: Burgas, Pomorie/Anchialos, Nessebar/Mesembria, Kraimorie, Chernomorets/Saint Nicholas, Sozoupoli, Tsarevo/Vasiliko, Ahtopol/Agathoupoli, Malko Tarnovo, Golyamobukovsky Monastery, Kabile Monastery. All these settlements are located in the Sliven Metropolis, so Assoc. Prof. Dr. Karavalchev also visited the Sliven Metropolis itself, where he met with officials. The Vicar Bishop of Sliven Metropolis Hierotheos welcomed Assoc. Prof. Dr. Karavalchev in the Pomorie Monastery of St. George.



Figure 9: With the Director of The Burgas Hist. Museum Dr. Nikolov



Figure 10: With the Vicar-Bishop of Sliven Ierothey, Pomorie/Anhialos



Figure 11: With Museum workers in Anhialo/Pomorie



Figure 12: With Fr. Dimitar in Sozoupoli



Figure 13: With the Director of the Hist. Museum in Malko Tarnovo, Dr. Filtcheva



Figure 14: With Fr. Julian in Chernomorets



Figure 15: With Museum workers in Nessebar/ Messimvria

Between May 30 and June 1, 2023, Associate Professor Svetoslav Ribolov made a business trip to Asenovgrad/Stenimachos and Bachkovo Monastery “Assumption of Holy Virgin”. During the trip, he met with the director of the museum, Mina Hristemova, and museum workers, members of the brotherhood of the Bachkovo Monastery.



Figure 16: On Orthros in the Church of Dormition of God’s Mother, Asenovgrad/Stenimachos



Figure 17: Guest of Dr. Mina Chystemova at Historical Museum of Asenovgrad/Stenimachos

- Between June 14 and 16, 2023, after the questionnaire was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Assoc. Prof. Ivaylo Naydenov made a business trip to the metropolis of Stara Zagora. He visited Svilengrad, Haskovo and Stara Zagora. In the three cities, he held meetings with church officials and interested persons. In Stara Zagora, on June 16, he participated in the regular priest's conference, where he explained the goals and tasks of the project and highlighted the benefits of its implementation. At the end of the conference, he received the blessing of Metropolitan Cyprian to conduct the survey with the questionnaire among the priests and monks present. They approached the task conscientiously, and practically all completed the survey.



Figure 18: Metropolitan Cyprian fulfills Questionnaire



Figure 19: Priests from Metropole of Stara Zagora fulfill Questionnaires



Figure 20: Priests, Nuns, Monks and Church servants at the Metropole of Stara Zagora fulfill questionnaires of NARRATE 2022 project.

3.2 Results evaluation in Greece

In Greece, focusing on both clergy and non-clergy stakeholders we performed our surveys in the Thrace Region in Xanthi, Didymoteichon, Alexandroupoli and the Maroneia region, as post Byzantine Ecclesiastical treasures are expected to be in abundance. In total we collected 81 questionnaires from clergy and 40 from non-clergy individuals, with the majority collected in person.

All survey participants have shown great interest on the NARRATE Project and all of them provided answers. They expressed keen interest in the history and culture of their region and its ecclesiastical heritage recognizing the need to digitize the ecclesiastical-historical heritage in their region.

3.3 Results evaluation in Bulgaria

After conducting interviews and familiarization meetings with stakeholders of ecclesiastical treasures, several important points for correcting the methodology were identified. In general, for the older generation of people serving in the Church, electronic means of communication proved to be a significant challenge. Most of them expressed a desire to receive paper surveys. Even those monks, priests and, museum workers who preferred an electronic form stated a preference for a form designed to be printed on paper rather than filling out a programmed form online.

Additionally, almost all stated that, for their ministry, the work of describing, displaying online, and popularizing the ecclesiastical treasures and intangible cultural assets available in their monastery, church, diocese is not of primary importance. However, in general, most people's attitude towards the project is positive, and they would be happy to join it. Proof of this is the fact that after the presentation of Associate Professor Ivaylo Naydenov at the priests' conference in Stara Zagora on June 16, 2023, almost all participants expressed a desire to fill out the questionnaire on the spot, rather than waiting for it to be sent to them later.

The questionnaires for the Sliven Metropolis were sent by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ventzyslav Karavalchev to the relevant parishes, monasteries and in the Metropolis itself. Those for the Plovdiv/Philippopolis Metropolis were sent by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Svetoslav Ribolov to

the priests and monks in the district, and to the museum workers in the Provdiv/Philippopolis Metropolis, by Chief Assistant Prof. Dr. Tatiana Ivanova.

It is important to note that the director of the Historical Museum in the city of Assenovgrad/Stenimachos, Mrs. Mina Hristemova, was particularly useful for the work of the project on site in the Asenovgrad region and the surrounding villages. She collected and returned to Sofia all surveys from the region – 24 in number.

3.4 Results evaluation in Turkey

In Turkey, focusing on clergy stakeholders, we reached out to a total of 50 individuals for participation in the surveys. However, the response rate was relatively modest, with only 14 clergies providing completed questionnaires. 7 respondents expressed reluctance to participate, while an additional 29 did not respond to any of our follow-up attempts.

For non-clergy individuals, focusing on museum professionals/restorers, we reached out to a total of 47 individuals for participation in the survey. We have 7 of them who provided the answers which are directly involved in the cultural heritage field. 4 respondents expressed reluctance to participate, the rest did not respond to any of our follow-up attempts.

Despite the lower-than-expected response rate and perceived indifference, we consistently encountered a welcoming and informative approach during our visits to the churches. The clergy and other stakeholders provided valuable insights and demonstrated cooperation while discussing the religious objects. Consequently, despite initial indications of indifference towards digitalization, it is worth considering that the stakeholders might be quite receptive and collaborative when it comes to preservation and educational purposes.

4. Conclusions

The methodology for implementing the NARRATE project has been developed based on best practices recognized within the EU. A thorough review of relevant scientific literature, combined with strong coordination and collaboration among international partners, has led to the creation of a streamlined and cohesive approach. This methodology facilitates information extraction, access to ecclesiastical treasures, and the active participation of the stakeholders; church clerics, officials, and museum professionals.

A key objective of the project is to ensure that these stakeholders play an active role in 'narrating', showcasing, and displaying the ecclesiastical treasures within their institutions. To achieve this, the methodological framework is designed to center on the perspectives and engagement of these stakeholders, emphasizing their vision for the digital exposure of their collections.

Recognizing the distinct conditions in Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey, the project team developed a specialized protocol for engaging potential target groups. This protocol was implemented through field presentations, during which the project's methodology was introduced and explained to relevant stakeholders.

The final phase of Work Package 2 involved distributing questionnaires to the identified focus groups of ecclesiastical treasures, enabling them to share their perspectives on the online presentation and promotion of these artifacts. The survey collection concluded in July 2023, with the Bulgarian team gathering over 106 responses, the Greek team collecting 121, and the KMKD team in Turkey obtaining 21. The analysis of these responses will provide valuable insights, allowing for cross-country comparisons and an in-depth examination of the opportunities, challenges, and future prospects for the project across the three participating nations.