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## PREFACE

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Analysing the Prometheus project requires a long-term retrospective perspective. Multiple lines of research intertwined over the years, often generating unexpected results in line with experimental inquiry. Yet the analysis must go beyond scientific outcomes to include the researchers and human capital that underpinned the project. This is essential because Prometheus focuses on academic exchange and knowledge circulation, and because the human value underlies its themes. The premises of this journey date back to 2010, when, as a non-tenured PhD holder at the University of Pavia, I coordinated workshops and international research activities for the University of Florence, engaging in particular with the University of Oulu in Finland and Petrozavodsk State University in Karelia. At a time when I was still unfamiliar with European project design, I undertook an independent study that led to the successful award of a Marie Curie People grant under the 7th Framework Programme of the European Union. The project *WoodenArchitecture* (ID: 269185) is built on a strong relationship with the University of Petrozavodsk and focuses on traditional Russian wooden architecture of the Karelian peoples. It studied historic villages and the design of buildings. This work was a natural extension of earlier activities starting in 2006. During these years, I collaborated with various levels of the Russian administration, managing cultural heritage, including major sites such as Kizhi Island, where I spent at least three summers documenting each building. I involved colleagues and Italian companies specialising in restoration, leading to practical experiences that, though mostly unpublished, laid the groundwork for further scientific development. However, the deeper roots of the Prometheus project lie in the long-standing, fruitful collaboration with colleagues from Perm State Polytechnic University in Russia. Following a conference on heritage documentation held in Perm in 2011, a year celebrating cultural friendship between Italy and Russia, I was invited as a visiting professor to contribute to the newly established degree programme in Architecture and Urban Planning. By then, I had become a researcher at the University of Pavia, and activities with Perm were becoming institutionally consolidated. Over the years, this visiting professorship enabled me to coordinate numerous workshops and seminars, strengthening scientific ties with the Department of Urban Planning and encountering strong interest from students in disciplines related to surveying, documentation, and the development of digital technologies applied to heritage protection. This cooperation was sustained by constant reciprocity: many initiatives I organised included active participation from Russian colleagues, who, in turn, regularly involved me in their research activities, fostering a virtuous cycle of academic exchange. The synergy with the Department's leadership led to the creation of a permanent activity at Perm. We set up an experimental lab to acquire advanced equipment and, more importantly, train specialised researchers and technicians. The goal was to raise regional awareness of the strategic importance of architectural documentation. It was the Department Director, Svetlana Maksimova, who provided the decisive impetus for the next phase.

Aware of my interest in traditional Russian architecture and drawing on her strong institutional relationships with the provinces of Solikamsk and Usolye, she proposed concentrating scientific efforts on those territories, particularly the Usolye site. On this basis, following the conclusion of *WoodenArchitecture*, we began in 2015—when I was an Associate Professor at the University of Pavia—the complex design phase of *Prometheus*. Unlike the previous project, which was funded on the first attempt, *Prometheus* required greater resilience: the proposal was submitted to the European Commission over three consecutive calls, receiving final approval only in 2018. This lengthy refinement process allowed the official launch of activities in 2019, initiating a period of research marked by exceptional intensity and enthusiasm. To complete the consortium, I involved colleagues from the *Universitat Politècnica de València*, with whom I had collaborated within UNESCO-related networks concerning technological analysis competencies. This resulted in a highly balanced international synergy: the Italian component focused on surveying methodologies, the Spanish on construction technologies, and the Russian on territorial and urban aspects. The primary objective of the project was to study the remarkable architectural heritage associated with salt merchants in the border region of the Urals, at the easternmost edge of Europe. Coordinating a large, diverse team with different methods and schedules—especially with time zones—was demanding. Team cohesion takes time beyond the coordinator's enthusiasm. The process is like starting a complex machine that requires shared language, methods, and interpersonal trust, especially in a field that blends technical and human aspects. However, just as the project seemed to have reached full operational capacity, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 abruptly interrupted its development. The health emergency struck at the heart of the execution phase, preventing Russian colleagues from completing their secondments and interrupting the Italian team's research stays. During that year, we invested all our efforts in maintaining team cohesion through continuous online meetings and digital initiatives to preserve scientific synergy while awaiting the resumption of in-person activities. Unfortunately, just as a return to normal exchanges seemed imminent, the outbreak of war and the European Commission's decision to suspend all research relations with the Russian Federation brought our original vision to a definitive halt. The results of this intense, albeit fragmented, research period are now collected in the volume dedicated to the Upper Kama. These outcomes represent a document of inestimable value for that region of Europe: a scientific testimony to a remarkable architectural heritage that now appears inexorably destined for oblivion or disappearance. Faced with the impossibility of continuing as originally planned, the project underwent substantial restructuring. The working group sought to develop a deeper reflection on the concept of cultural routes, applying the case study across three distinct scales: territorial, provincial, and urban. This approach enabled the hypothesis that similar protocols could be applied across different European contexts, fostering a more inclusive and adaptable experimental framework. Thanks to collaborations already active in other European projects I was coordinating at the time, it was possible to integrate

colleagues from the University of Gdańsk into the consortium, replacing the Russian partners. This proved to be a strategically successful choice, confirming the importance of cultural cohesion and alignment among unit leaders. The programme revision also included new companies and a radical reorganisation of secondments, redistributing mobility periods among all partners. In retrospect, this restructuring became a strength, though regret remains for the exclusion of Russian colleagues and for the political reasons. The changes improved quality, led to unexpected technical results, and better scientific dissemination. However, the project always needed updated objectives. Fieldwork was enriching, but managing administration and documents was the main challenge. Numerous amendments required constant updates to the project text, sapping energy and limiting focus on scientific work. Ultimately, the project mobilised around fifty researchers and involved approximately 200 students over four years: a significant scientific community that fostered not only research advancement but also strong human connections and friendships. Before Prometheus, I founded DAda-LAB at the University of Pavia, a research, education, and technology-transfer lab in Drawing and Representation, which quickly became a leading centre. Its success led to requests for a similar facility at the University of Gdańsk, resulting in the DAB Lab. Prometheus enabled this symmetrical infrastructure and an integrated university-industry ecosystem. The project acted as an incubator for human capital, fostering professional growth at all levels. Its structure encouraged cross-border integration between academia and industry, facilitating direct knowledge transfer. Students attending summer schools often secured employment within partner companies, while researchers advanced academically, achieving positions as lecturers and associate professors. This growth also included my own appointment as Full Professor, marking my transition from the University of Pavia to the University of Florence, and necessitating a final amendment to ensure continuity. At the conclusion of the project, the research group expressed the desire to continue, requesting a new European proposal to consolidate the network on cultural routes. This request represented the most meaningful recognition: a testament to both the method's validity and the younger researchers' commitment to advancing the work. Some team members have since successfully pursued Marie Curie actions independently. In response, I coordinated the launch of the HEPHAESTUS programme, funded under Horizon Europe (ID: 101182877), currently ongoing. Many participants continue Prometheus research lines, with some former doctoral and postdoctoral researchers now holding leadership roles. I hope these pages provide a comprehensive understanding of the project's structure and evolution. This volume introduces the general methodology, while subsequent volumes detail documentation and analysis at different scales. Finally, I hope that the knowledge developed through collaboration will serve as a lasting asset for each researcher and that each participant retains a personal imprint of the research and places encountered. Ultimately, I entrust this work to the hope that it may contribute to the representation and narration of heritage, preserving the past while looking towards a future Europe that embraces cultural diversity and where drawing and digitalisation play a key role in shaping a shared cultural identity.