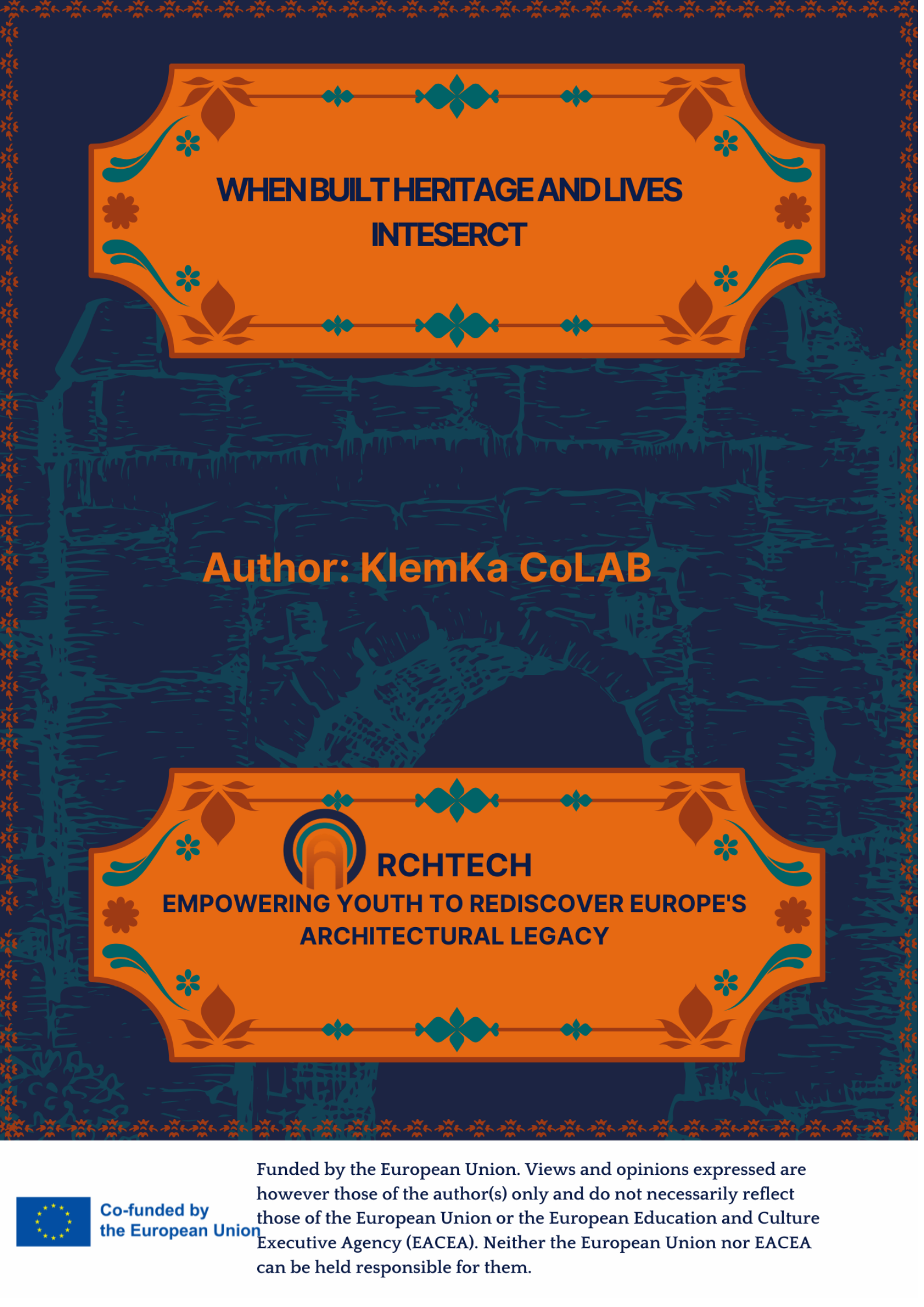




WHEN BUILT HERITAGE AND LIVES INTERSECT

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RCHTECH

**EMPOWERING YOUTH TO REDISCOVER EUROPE'S
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Built heritage plays a central role in shaping the urban experience in European cities by influencing identity, culture, tourism, social interaction, and economic development. According to UNESCO, historic buildings, streets, squares, and monuments are not only reminders of the past but also active parts of everyday urban life. They foster a sense of identity and belonging among residents and also shape in part urban architecture and how these crosscut with the lives of citizens.

For instance, studies confirm that historic streets, public squares, and traditional architecture create visually appealing, walkable environments that encourage exploration and social interaction. Built heritage is also one of the main tourism attractions. While on the one hand this generates employment and (think of all the tourist guides, museums, souvenir shops, restaurants and the many other services you find in the proximities of the Colosseum, Mont Martre, or the Acropolis), on the other hand ever since the world overcame the pandemics of COVID-19 the increasing tourism has also disrupted the lives of citizens and has created challenges for urban planning.

The increase of housing costs, the reduction of housing supply due to short-term holiday rental, new development and gentrification of central areas have created challenges and unsustainable practices that have affected the resident's life quality. Also, the effects of these phenomena also extend to the environment and economic quality. The pression on natural areas increases and many of the jobs that are created are seasonal and low-paid. Therefore, while tourism is indeed beneficial for cities, we need to think about the tourism model that does not generate detrimental effects in the objects of its appeal and the lives of its citizens.

Shifting the focus back to built heritage, another advantage of them is that they encourage social cohesion. Historic public spaces often function as gathering places where festivals, markets, protests, and community events occur. These spaces strengthen social interaction and collective memory. Also, adaptive reuse of historic buildings—such as converting factories into museums, libraries, or cultural centers—also creates new opportunities for community engagement while preserving historic character.

The ArchTech project explored these topics by integrating many in-person visits to many activities in France, Cyprus, Greece, Malta and Spain. The participants were able to discuss about their own

experience and the importance of the humanization of heritage and the stories behind it. The more they knew about a building the more attached they felt to it and the more compelled they felt to protect them.

Overall, the historic fabric of European cities continues to influence how people experience and understand urban environments. From everyday interactions in centuries-old streets and squares to the economic and cultural opportunities created by preserved landmarks, these places provide continuity between past and present. At the same time, changing urban demands require thoughtful planning that respects historical significance without preventing innovation or meeting contemporary needs. Achieving this balance is essential to ensuring that Europe's cities remain attractive, inclusive, and adaptable, allowing future generations to benefit from the rich legacy embedded within their urban landscapes.