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Coord.
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Dykinson, S.L.

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PARTE III.
COMUNICACIÓN, TURISMO, HUMANIDADES
Y CIENCIAS SOCIALES

SECCIÓN I.
EXPERIENCIAS INNOVADORAS
Y APRENDIZAJE EXPERIENCIAL

SECCIÓN II.
GAMIFICACIÓN, CREATIVIDAD Y NARRATIVA

DESIGNING A BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAMME FOR INTERNATIONAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY LANDSCAPE EDUCATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Landscape Convention (ELC), signed in Florence in 2000, is the first international treaty dedicated to the protection, management, and planning of all European landscapes, encompassing natural and rural areas as well as urban and peri-urban environments (Council of Europe, 2000). Since the treaty came into force, numerous research studies have emerged in response to the various guidelines it outlines (Pătru-Stupariu & Nita, 2022).

Article 6 of the ELC, entitled "Specific Measures", refers to landscape-related education and training, stating that each party undertakes to promote: i) the training of specialists in landscape assessment and intervention; ii) the development of multidisciplinary training programs in landscape policy, protection, management, and planning, targeting professionals in both the private and public sectors, as well as relevant associations; and iii) the introduction of school and university courses that, within the relevant disciplines, address landscape-related values and issues concerning its protection, management, and planning.

In recent years, there has been an increase in scientific publications exploring landscape education in Europe from multiple disciplines and perspectives, as a result of the guidelines stemming from the ELC. A notable example is the special issue recently published in the *Landscape Research* journal, titled *'Landscape and Education: Politics of/in Practices*' (2022). This special issue aims to provide an overview of the various ways in which landscape and education interact with politics. It takes into account the inherently political nature of educational processes, as well as the political issues addressed in landscape education activities (Cisani et al., 2022).

Various studies examine the presence of landscape in geography curricula at different educational levels. For instance, Alomar-Garau et al. (2017) analyse the teaching of landscape in geography degree programmes at Spanish universities, and Armas-Quintá et al. (2022) conduct a curricular review of primary education in Galicia, Spain, to understand how landscape is studied in geography-related subjects. Meanwhile, Jørgensen et al. (2020) explore the historical development of landscape architecture and the increasing international collaboration in teaching this discipline at a European level since the implementation of the ELC. Furthermore, Meneghello et al. (2022) focus on the landscape-tourism nexus as a learning object comparing two Italian didactical experiences in geography higher education

From the perspective of teacher training, recent studies have also examined the knowledge and awareness of landscape among current pre-service primary teachers, whose entire education has taken place within the framework of the ELC (Crespo Castellanos et al., 2023), as well as the impact of a landscape education approach on the attitudes of prospective primary teachers towards landscape (Scippo et al., 2024).

Despite the abundant scientific literature on landscape teaching and education that has emerged since the adoption of the ELC, there is a scarcity of methodological studies or those addressing landscape education through international programs. In this regard, in the current context of the internationalization of higher education (Knight & Wit, 2018), the European Higher Education Area and the ELC represent a unique opportunity for the development of international training programs in the field of landscape.

The EU's Erasmus+ programme opens up a wealth of opportunities for the development of international training programmes. Erasmus+ has been a key driver in the internationalisation of higher education across the continent, promoting the mobility of students and teaching staff among European institutions. Since its inception in 1987, the number of participants in mobility activities under the Erasmus+ programme has reached 15.1 million (European Commission, 2023).

As part of the generation of Erasmus programmes for the 2021–2027 period, the so-called Blended Intensive Programmes (BIP) have emerged. The European Commission defines BIP as follows:

> …are short, intensive programmes that use innovative ways of learning and teaching, including the use of online cooperation. The programmes may include challenge-based learning where transnational and transdisciplinary teams work together to tackle challenges for example those linked to the United Nations' sustainable development goals or other societal challenges identified by regions, cities, or companies. The intensive programme should have added value compared to existing courses or trainings offered by the participating HEIs and can be multi-annual. By enabling new and more flexible mobility formats that combine physical mobility with a virtual part, blended intensive programmes aim at reaching all types of students from all backgrounds, study fields and cycles. [….] During these blended intensive programmes, groups of students and/or staff as learners will undertake a short-term physical mobility abroad combined with a compulsory virtual component facilitating collaborative online learning exchange and teamwork. The virtual component must bring the learners together online to work collectively and simultaneously on specific assignments that are integrated in the blended intensive programme and count towards the overall learning outcomes (Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2025; page 48).

Since these are relatively recent training programmes, there are still few scientific publications that address the design and outcomes of these international learning experiences (O'Dowd & Werner, 2024). However, recent studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of these programmes in achieving intercultural excellence through international teamwork, with a focus on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (De Prada et al., 2025). Likewise, Serrano-Montes et al. (2024) highlight the suitability of BIPs for developing interdisciplinary training programmes on landscape, within the framework of education for sustainability and in line with the guidelines of the ELC.

The main objective of this chapter is to present the design of an international and interdisciplinary training programme for landscape education, implemented in the format of a *Blended Intensive Programme* (BIP). The pedagogical advantages and limitations of the BIP for landscape teaching will be discussed, and recommendations for improving the future design of interdisciplinary blended mobility programmes will be provided, based on the experience gained from this BIP.

2. PLANNING AND ORGANISATION OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

2.1. Background, Partner Institutions, Theme, and Aims of the BIP

This Blended Intensive Programme is part of the Arqus European University Alliance initiative, aimed at fostering interdisciplinary and cross-institutional collaboration across Europe. It builds on previous joint efforts to explore pressing contemporary issues through innovative, short-term mobility formats that combine virtual and physical learning experiences.

The programme we present here originated in 2023, when a group of lecturers took the initiative to organise, for the first time, a BIP involving three European universities from the Arqus Alliance: the University of Padua (UNIPD), the University of Granada (UGR), and the University of Minho (UM). These three universities are connected through inter-institutional agreements and experiences in research exchange stays, students and professors mobilities, they all offer courses in geography, landscape, and planning, and they share a similar geographical context: all are located in Southern Europe.

The first edition of the BIP took place during the 2023/2024 academic year, with the University of Granada serving as the host institution. During the initial planning meetings, it was decided to give the programme a geographical focus, leading to the acronym *BIP-GEO*. Furthermore, landscape studies were selected as the central thematic focus of the training programme. In line with the guidelines set by the European Commission for the design of BIPs, landscape is an

interdisciplinary field of study that lends itself well to methodologies such as challenge-based learning. Moreover, landscape provides an ideal framework for teaching that addresses the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda.

The design of an interdisciplinary and international educational programme focused on the study of landscape also responds to the "specific measures" set out in the European Landscape Convention regarding landscape training and education.

Given the polysemic nature of the concept of landscape and the multiple fields and disciplines involved in its study, this BIP takes as its main reference the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological framework provided by the ELC. This European treaty defines landscape as "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors" (Council of Europe, 2000). Two key aspects of this theoretical-conceptual framework are particularly relevant for the design of the BIP-GEO's teaching and learning activities:

i. The perceptual dimension of landscape, already emphasized in the ELC's own definition;
ii. The importance the Convention places on public participation in the processes of landscape protection, management, and planning.

In line with the aforementioned framework, the first BIP on landscape (BIP-GEO 2024) focused on extensive livestock systems and landscapes in Southern Europe (Serrano-Montes et al., 2024). Continuing with landscape as the central theme, the second edition—hosted and organized by the University of Minho—addresses another highly relevant and timely topic: landscape transformations in peripheral rural areas. Accordingly, the title of BIP-GEO 2025 is "Landscape Transformations, Abandonment and Resilience in Peripheral Rural Areas in Southern Europe".

The selected theme is aligned with several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is particularly connected to

SDG 2 “Zero Hunger,” SDG 12 “Responsible Consumption and Production,” SDG 13 “Climate Action,” and SDG 15 “Life on Land”.

Moreover, the theme proposed for this BIP addresses issues related to the environment and climate change in transforming rural areas, which aligns with one of the fundamental priorities of the Erasmus programme—“environment and climate change”—as highlighted in the 2023 European Commission report.

Once the theme of the BIP was defined, the programme coordinators agreed upon the following specific objectives (SO) and transversal objectives (TO):

- SO1) to introduce students to the current issues, challenges, and transformations affecting landscapes in peripheral rural areas of Southern Europe.
- SO2) to present in situ various strategies for the sustainable planning and management of these transforming landscapes.
- SO3) to gain insight into real-life experiences through engagement with local social actors and communities.
- TO1) to provide a multidisciplinary platform for students and early-career researchers to explore key questions related to landscape in Southern Europe.
- TO2) to foster intercultural dialogue and academic exchange among participants from diverse backgrounds.
- TO3) to develop collaborative skills through joint activities and group projects across institutions.
- TO4) to strengthen the European dimension in higher education through the Arqus Alliance framework.
- TO5) to combine academic content with professional development and international networking opportunities.

2.2. Participants

Following the guidelines of the European Commission for this type of program, an interdisciplinary training program was designed from the very first edition of the BIP-GEO. In 2024, five undergraduate and

master's degree programs from the three participating institutions were involved in the BIP. Aiming to enhance the program's interdisciplinarity, the number of participating degree programs increased to nine in the 2025 edition. The participating degree programs from each university are listed below:

- Bachelor's Degree in Geography and Planning (UM)
- Master's Degree in Geography (UM)
- Master's Degree in Sociology (UM)
- Master's Degree in Landscape Studies (UNIPD)
- Master's Degree in Local Development (UNIPD)
- Bachelor's Degree in Geography and Land Management (UGR)
- Bachelor's Degree in History of Art (UGR)
- Bachelor's Degree in Social and Cultural Anthropology (UGR)
- Master's Degree in Territorial Planning, Governance and Leadership (UGR)

Students from disciplines such as geography, sociology, political science, history of art, and anthropology can bring rich, interdisciplinary insights to a BIP like this, which is focused on the landscapes of peripheral rural areas in Southern Europe. Each discipline offers a unique perspective, and together they provide a holistic understanding of rural landscapes — including their physical form, social dynamics, cultural significance, and evolving meanings.

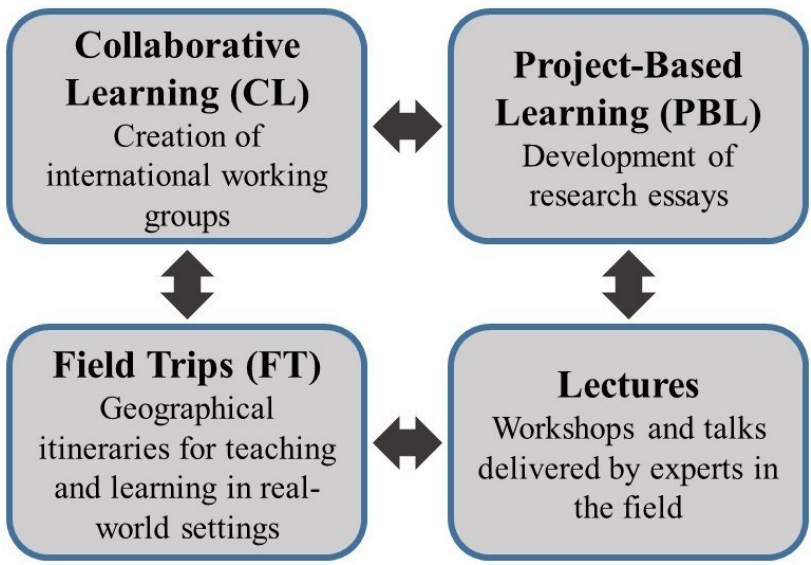
In this way, a total of 27 students from the aforementioned disciplines participated in the training program: 10 from the University of Granada, 10 from the University of Padua, and 7 from the University of Minho.

The BIP also involved 11 lecturers from various Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian institutions: University of Minho (Portugal), University of Granada (Spain), University of Cantabria (Spain), University of Padua (Italy), Gran Sasso Institute (Italy), and IUAV University of Venice (Italy).

3. PEDAGOGICAL METHODOLOGY AND TIMELINE

In terms of the teaching methodology adopted in the training programme, a variety of techniques and pedagogical approaches were combined (FIGURE 1). The BIP was designed to integrate collaborative learning activities, project-based methods, fieldwork, and expert-led lectures. This combination of methodologies is particularly well suited for international and interdisciplinary programmes focused on landscape studies, as it promotes intercultural and international learning, teamwork, experiential understanding of landscape-related challenges, and exposure to cutting-edge research in the field.

FIGURE 1. *Framework of the teaching methods used in the BIP*



Source: own elaboration

Project-Based Learning (PBL) represents one of the central pillars of the teaching methodology used in the BIP. According to this pedagogical approach, students acquire knowledge and skills by working on projects that address real-world problems or challenges. This student-centered methodology promotes active, collaborative, and meaningful learning (Kokotsaki et al., 2016).

The scientific literature includes numerous examples of educational innovation based on the PBL methodology for teaching and learning in disciplines such as geography and landscape studies (see, for example, Solís et al., 2017; Serrano-Montes et al., 2024).

To implement PBL within this training programme, students were asked to produce a research essay on a topic connected to the central theme of the BIP: landscape transformations in peripheral rural areas of southern Europe. For this purpose, the coordinating faculty selected the following 10 research topics (T):

- T1. Challenges of Depopulation in Peripheral Rural Areas in Southern Europe.
- T2. New Migration in Peripheral Rural Areas in Southern Europe.
- T3. Green Extractivism, Sustainability and Resistance.
- T4. Aging and Marginality in Peripheral Rural Areas.
- T5. The Traditional Agrarian Landscape as a Tourism Resource in Southern Europe.
- T6. Thematization and Trivialization of Rural Landscapes.
- T7. Transhumant Landscapes: Conservation of Knowledge and Heritage Practices in Extensive Livestock Farming in Southern Europe.
- T8. Protected Areas and Tourism Sustainability.
- T9. Landscapes in Transition: Exploring the Impact of Renewable Energy on the Peripheral Areas of Southern Europe.
- T10. Living in Rural Peripheral Contexts: Challenges and Opportunities Arising from Housing and Education Issues, Economic Services and Accessibility.

The 27 participating students were asked to indicate their preferred topics from the proposed list. These preferences were then used to form working groups based on shared interests.

Thus, PBL is closely linked to another core teaching method in the BIP: Collaborative Learning (CL). This educational approach, which emphasizes teamwork, is well suited for the development of interdisciplinary and international programmes such as the BIP (Hoalst-Pullen & Gatrell, 2011; Serrano-Montes et al., 2024). Instead of learning individually, students work together to solve problems, complete tasks, and learn from one another. This teaching methodology has become common in higher education geography teaching and learning processes (Krahenbuhl, 2014).

For the CL activities of the BIP-GEO 2025, 10 international working groups were created, each consisting of one student from each university, based on the topics previously selected by the students. In addition, each working group was supported by a supervising professor who provided guidance throughout the project.

The CL and PBL activities were carried out primarily in a virtual format. Each working group – along with its supervisor – held regular meetings via videoconferencing platforms and maintained ongoing communication by email throughout the research essay development period. A new feature in the 2025 edition was the inclusion of an in-person CL session on the first day of the face-to-face phase at the University of Minho. This session proved highly valuable, as it helped build trust among group members who, until then, had only interacted through a screen.

In addition, during the face-to-face phase, each group was required to present their research essays to the rest of the students and participating professors. After each presentation, time was allocated for discussion, which encouraged a fruitful exchange of experiences and ideas.

The development of research projects (PBL) by international student teams (CL), combined with the use of English as the programme's working language, ensured a high level of internationalisation within this BIP.

Field trips are another key component of the educational methodology employed in the BIP. They represent a highly valuable pedagogical tool to enrich the teaching and learning process. Field excursions allow students to observe, experience, and apply the knowledge acquired in the classroom to real-world contexts (experiential learning). For this

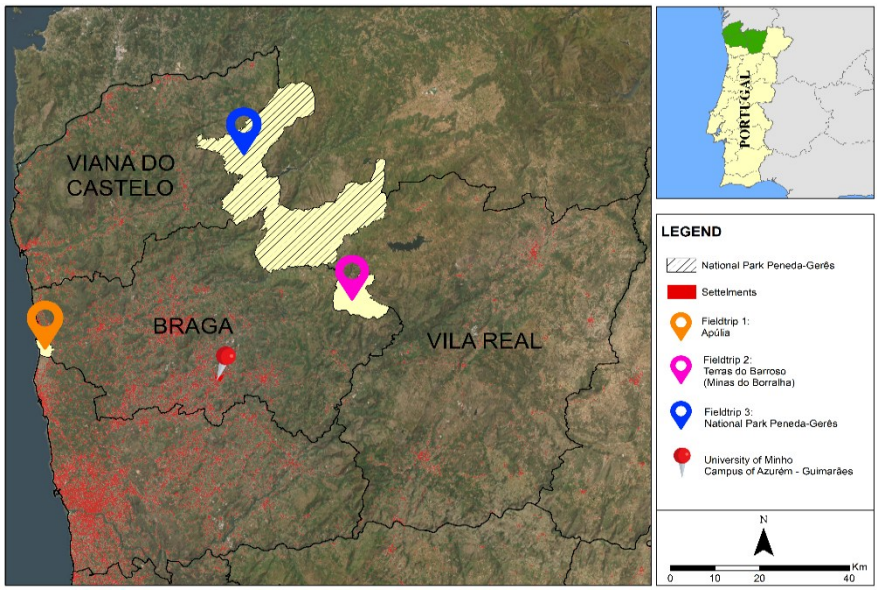
reason, fieldwork is a well-established and pedagogically valuable practice in the teaching of disciplines such as geography (Krakowka, 2012; Krahenbuhl, 2014; Mol et al., 2019; García de la Vega, 2022) and landscape studies (Gustavsson et al., 2019; Meneghello et al., 2022).

Field trips are particularly valuable for teaching landscape studies, as they enable learning in real-world settings and promote experiential learning: the field becomes an ideal classroom to study, analyse, and understand landscape dynamics. Moreover, in line with the guidelines established by the ELC, field trips allow students, through direct contact with the local population, to gain first-hand knowledge and understanding of their perceptions and aspirations regarding the transformations and characteristics of their surrounding landscape.

In this way, BIP-GEO 2025 included three field trips designed to introduce students to the challenges, opportunities, and management strategies associated with transforming rural landscapes. These field activities followed itineraries through peripheral and cross-border rural areas in the Minho and Trás-os-Montes regions of northern Portugal (FIGURE 2). The selected sites illustrated both the abandonment of territories and traditional ways of life, as well as successful examples of public and private policy initiatives. All excursions departed from the city of Guimarães, home to the University of Minho, which hosted the face-to-face phase of the training programme. The destinations of the three field trips were as follows:

- Fieldtrip I: Coastal landscapes and agromaritime cultures [Apúlia & Neiva]
- Fieldtrip II: Mining Landscapes: ruins and New Green Extractivism [Minas da Borralha & Covas do Barroso]
- Fieldtrip III: Protected Areas and Transforming Landscapes - Peneda-Gerês National Park [Castro Laboreiro & Melgaço]

FIGURE 2. *Field Trip Locations – BIP-GEO 2025*



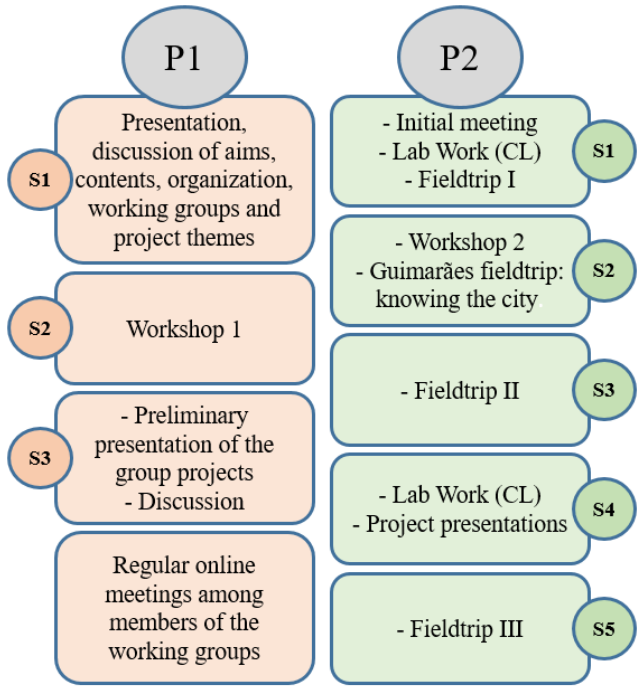
Source: own elaboration

Finally, the structure of the BIP's teaching methodology was completed with expert-led lectures. These were organised in the form of two workshops — one held during the virtual phase and the other during the face-to-face phase — featuring six invited speakers who are experts in the field, three in each workshop. The topics addressed in these lectures were as follows:

> "Northeastern Portugal: Declining Population, Vacant Properties, Changing Landscapes — Case Studies from the Barroso Region"
>
> "Renewable Energy and the Transformation of Rural Landscapes: From Peripheral Spaces to Energy Frontiers"
>
> "Living on the Margins: A Public Engagement Project from a Dolomite Municipality at Risk of Abandonment"
>
> "Food System Dynamics and Prospects for Peripheral Rural Areas of Southern Europe"
>
> "Ecomuseums and Local Development in Marginal Mountain Areas: The Case of the Val del Biois Ecomuseum"
>
> "Current Situation and Management of the Landscape of Protected Areas: Peneda-Gerês National Park (Portugal)"

Regarding the scheduling of the training programme (FIGURE 3), the virtual phase (P1) was structured around three joint online sessions held via Google Meet and Zoom between March 3 and April 30, 2025.

FIGURE 3. *BIP Schedule: Sessions (S) During the Virtual (P1) and Face-to-Face (P2) Phases*



Source: own elaboration

In addition to these three joint virtual sessions — attended by all participating students and faculty — each working group held regular virtual meetings throughout the two-month period dedicated to the preparation of their research essays.

The face-to-face phase (P2), held in Guimarães (Portugal), lasted five days, from May 5 to 9, 2025. Finally, the deadline for submitting the final version of the research essays produced by the working groups was set for May 17, 2025.

4. RESOURCES SUPPORTING THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

This BIP was organised with the support of Erasmus+ funding under KA131 (formerly KA107). Erasmus+ provided mobility grants to support students and staff from Granada and Padua during the physical mobility phase in Portugal. The University of Minho also received funding to organise virtual and in-person activities, including field trips, as well as covering travel expenses for invited speakers at the face-to-face workshop.

Beyond the funding resources, the programme's organizing faculty developed various support materials to enhance the teaching and learning process. First, a dedicated website was created for the BIP, serving as the official communication channel for the programme and allowing the dissemination of all relevant information regarding activities and key dates (https://sites.google.com/view/bipgeo2025/bip-home).

Additionally, a *Padlet* board was set up to support the Collaborative Learning (CL) and Project-Based Learning (PBL) activities. This board facilitated the exchange of diverse resources, including scientific articles, videos, web links, and more. In the absence of a common institutional platform shared by the three universities, the *Padlet* worked as a common forum for discussion and idea exchange among faculty and students from all institutions. Moreover, the *Padlet* forum encouraged participation from more reserved students or those hesitant to speak publicly in English.

Finally, a logo was created for the training programme. The use of a logo in the educational context serves various purposes, as it acts as a visual tool that reinforces the identity and values of the educational project. The logo also helps participants, partners, and stakeholders easily recognize and remember the programme. Since interdisciplinary programmes—like BIP-GEO 2025—bring together students and staff from different fields, the logo serves as a common symbol representing shared goals and values across disciplines. The BIP logo was included on all digital and printed materials provided to students, helping to consistently promote the programme and attract interest (FIGURE 4).

FIGURE 4. *A) Logo of BIP-GEO 2025; B) Screenshot of the Padlet board*

5. STUDENT FEEDBACK ON THE BIP

An online questionnaire was designed to gather students' feedback on the training programme. The form was structured into three sections. First, students were invited to evaluate the teaching methods and all activities carried out during the programme. Second, the questionnaire aimed to assess students' perceptions of the knowledge they had acquired and its potential application in their academic careers or future professional paths.

In a third section of the evaluation form, participants were asked to provide suggestions for improving the BIP in future editions.

Twenty-five of the twenty-seven participating students completed the questionnaire. The results obtained from this questionnaire, handled in a completely anonymous and confidential manner, will help improve the design of BIP-GEO in future editions.

Given the significant involvement of faculty members in organising and supervising this training programme, it would be valuable to gather their perspectives and suggestions for improving the BIP.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The 2025 BIP's edition has confirmed the validity of the teaching approach first implemented in the 2024 BIP's edition.

The 2025 edition in Portugal highlighted the effectiveness of the following key methodological features defining this interdisciplinary and international teaching programme:

- the selection of undergraduate and graduate students who, as a result of coming from different disciplines, have a rich variety of approaches to address the concept of landscape;
- the creation of working groups that bring together students from different nationalities and disciplines with the aim to enrich the level of discussions among them and the outputs coming from their research;
- the constant support of tutor/lecturers who guide, advise and accompany the learning process of fundamental skills for doing scientific research; this concerns not only focusing on the topic and bibliographic research but also the practical ability to write and present a scientific paper to an audience;
- the mix of virtual meetings for getting to know each other and preparing for the fieldtrips and the variety of experiences both in classroom and on-site proposed during the in-situ phase;
- - the confrontation with scientific experts in the field from different universities and other organisations with different backgrounds, but also the enrichment that comes from meeting in the field with local actors, institutions, cultural, agricultural and tourist operators, and citizens.

Certainly, the improvements in the design of this edition compared to the 2024 one will help to align BIP's values in landscape education even more closely with the guidelines of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) and also with the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular with reference to SDG 4 - Quality Education.

Beyond the evaluation conducted by the organisers in this BIP through a form filled out by the students and the general satisfaction of all participants, it would be valuable to analyse the evaluation reports from the European Commission, which participants in these programmes are

required to complete in order to understand whether there may be further lines for future improvements.

A possible trajectory of BIP's development could be the potential expansion of the number of participating universities. On the one hand this expansion could increase the variety of landscapes to be studied, departing from landscapes in Southern Europe to other European regions. On the other hand, it would foster the opportunities for other exchange between researchers and students, and the methodological approaches to be shared and implemented.

Further improvement directions could include future adaptation of BIP activities to students with specific educational support needs. According to the 2023 European Commission report, one of the key priorities of the Erasmus programme is "inclusion and diversity" (p. 95 of the report). Challenges such as adapting online sessions, travel and fieldwork would have to be considered carefully.

Future prospects are already foreseeing in the coming months the organization of the next BIP-GEO 2026 edition that will be held in Padua, Italy, where the University of Padua is based, which will organise the next edition.

The topic of BIP-GEO 2026 will be "Landscape stewardship beyond the nature-culture dichotomy". The training program will provide for a series of theoretical-practical collaborative learning activities that aim to introduce students to the processes of landscape conservation, management and transformations connected to care and stewardship practices in peri-urban and rural contexts, where it is possible to challenge the nature-culture binary.

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