

MEDITERRANEAN HERITAGE: A PROJECT FOR THE FUTURE

The mirror of cultural identity: handicrafts and traditional skills



Mediterranean civilisation, with its immense diversity and a history spanning centuries, has developed its own language of colour, structure and form expressed in rituals, objects, art forms, performances and celebrations. Mediterranean crafts are not just bearers of heritage. Leveraging on traditional knowledge, they can and should be the foundations of new and innovative designs.

As a regional programme funded by the European Union since 1998, Euromed Heritage, has contributed substantially to the development of cultural heritage of the Mediterranean Region at many levels and within an approach that promotes socio-economic development among local communities, while contributing to the enhancement of regional identities. Euromed Heritage 4 represents a further milestone in the process of recognizing 'culture' as a catalyst for mutual understanding between the people of the Mediterranean, and aims to facilitate the appropriation by people of their own national and regional cultural legacy through easier access to education and knowledge on cultural heritage.

Handicrafts and the development of traditional skills have been at the heart of several of the projects within the successive phases of the programme.

A holistic approach

Centred on the preservation of both tangible and intangible heritage within a holistic approach, some projects have focused on the development of handicrafts as part of community development and the development of women's status, as well as tourism development. The Mediterranean's rich cultural heritage and centuries of evolutionary tradition is manifested by the immense variety of handicrafts produced throughout the region. Handicrafts are a mirror of the cultural identity of the ethnic people who make it. Through the ages, handicrafts like ceramics, textiles, embroidery, jewellery, woodwork, engravings, etc. have maintained their exclusiveness. They have survived through the ages but are now at risk of extinction because of lack of interest and resources, and under the pressures of industrialisation, mass production of cheap replicas, and globalisation.

The contribution of Euromed Heritage projects to the preservation of handicrafts involved a whole range of activities, including the recording of traditional skills and patterns (inventories); training in the production of



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un programme financé par l'Union européenne /
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handicrafts – both traditional and innovative; training in management and marketing, as well as access to micro-financing; the creation of a label of quality and authenticity; and the creation of handicrafts networks. This well-rounded approach contributes to secure the sustainability of the projects' actions beyond the lifetime of each phase of the programme.

Project details

1. **Filières Innovantes** www.filières.polimi.it (EH phase 2)
Focus on handicrafts – textiles, ceramic, and metal
 - i. The project developed an **inventory** of local know-how (which can be accessed on request through web.filières@polimi.it)
 - ii. 13 pilot projects offered **training** in best techniques of production and in marketing products to tourists and for exportThe results are available in a **computerised network of local knowledge** in the Mediterranean.
2. **PRODECOM (Product-Development-Communication)** <http://www.chbeauxarts-prodecom.org/> (EH phase 2)
Preserving and promoting arts and crafts, based on an approach of cultural heritage as a factor for local development, with women as major stakeholders.
 - i. Craftspeople received **training in marketing and management** and had access to information relating to micro finance in order to ensure their project's sustainability.
 - ii. Focus on the **implementation of a regional label** «cultural development products®» to ensure high standards, quality control and accessibility to European and other markets.
 - iii. Published a **guide** on the different artistic crafts, as well as a CD-ROM on decorative patterns of the region.
 - iv. Provided **training** in different techniques in the field of arts and crafts, in traditional production as well as new techniques, in basic marketing and management knowledge, including information on the availability of micro-credits.
 - v. Organised a travelling **exhibition**, contributing to the promotion of the commercialisation of the arts and crafts.
3. **Salambo** (EH phase 1):
Preserving practical skills in traditional decorative techniques like woodcarving and plasterwork (for buildings)
4. **Mare Nostrum** (EH phase 4)
<http://www.euromedheritage.net/intern.cfm?menuID=12&submenuID=13&idproject=46>
Within its overarching action – the promotion of port cities on the ancient Phoenician route – the project aims to promote Mediterranean handicrafts, safeguard designs and promote production as part of developing sustainable tourism on this route
5. **Siwa-Tangier** (EH phase 4)
<http://www.euromedheritage.net/intern.cfm?menuID=12&submenuID=13&idproject=47>
Revitalisation and development of local arts and crafts as well as their marketing, as a means to promote socio-economic development – focus on women as major stakeholders, aiming to create a network of artisans and artists

More themes tackled within Euromed Heritage:

Archaeological sites and ancient theatres; audiovisual archives; education and the production of tool kits; manuscripts; oral history; traditional hammams; vernacular and monumental architecture; water heritage; women and youth.