

Mediterranean Heritage, an opportunity for dialogue

Euromed Heritage: a worthy perspective on cultural heritage development

 CHRISTIANE DABDOUB NASSER

Team Leader of the Regional Monitoring and Support Unit, Euromed Heritage IV

The inter-relationship between cultural heritage, development, awareness and tourism has been attracting considerable attention of late. The complexity and the changes they introduce present new challenges and require new ways of addressing constantly emerging problems. In Europe, considerable progress has been accomplished in this direction and this has nurtured the conviction that culture will be the making of Europe and will support its citizens as they blossom and prosper. In the context of the Mediterranean region - cradle of such a mixture of civilisations, witness to millennia of cultural exchanges as well as “cultural clashes”, and stage where the age-old relationship between Europe and the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean has been played out through the ages - Europe has emerged as both a major actor and a major stakeholder. The birth of the Euromed Heritage Programme (EH) in 1998 is one of the outcomes of the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, and can be perceived within the above context¹. Timely and influential in regions at the conjunction of Europe and its Mediterranean neighbours, the Euromed Heritage programme is an expression of this relatively new geo-political configuration. Euromed is a new “borderland zone on the edge of Europe”², and the programme embodies the potential that cultural heritage incorporates as “a tool for a policy of openness, tolerance, peace and stability in the region”³.

With a decade-long history, EH stands out as a successful programme that rallies conservation experts, heritage institutions, administrations and civil society institutions from the countries of the Mediterranean region to work together on specific aspects of cultural heritage development, articulated within a call for proposals for each phase. It is particularly distinctive in that each phase within the programme builds upon the experiences and results of the former, with a marked progression in the methodology and approach it stipulates: the main goal of EH I was the creation of heritage inventories and facilitation of networking between museums and other cultural institutions; EH II and EH III focussed on the increasing of Mediterranean countries’ capacities in managing and developing their cultural heritage with a special focus on intangible heritage; EH IV puts appropriation by the populations themselves of their cultural heritage at the core of the actions and therefore stresses actions

of communication and dissemination of research and examples of good professional practice. Its approach entails a reasonable balance between research and practice, and calls on creativity and innovation in the development of methodologies and production of outputs and activities.

 The storyteller Damascus, Syria

 Le conteur à Damas, Syrie

photo: Christophe Graz



¹ The Euromed Heritage Programme was created in the wake of the Barcelona declaration in 1995 which aimed towards building an “area of peace, security and prosperity” within the region of the Mediterranean basin. The European Commission’s EuropeAid Cooperation Office has spent 57 million euros on this programme, which is now just starting its fourth phase - Euromed Heritage IV (EH IV) - with a budget allocation of 13.5 million euros. This funding is disbursed, through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), the new funding mechanism for European Community external assistance. A Regional Monitoring and Support Unit (RMSU) based in Brussels will work in close collaboration with EuropeAid to support EH IV partners and projects in implementing Programme objectives.

² Julie Scott “Imagining the Mediterranean”, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*. Volume 15, Number 2, 2005, 219-243.

³ Euromed Heritage II notes for guidance.

Photographs are from the successful “Museum With No Frontiers”, funded through the Euromed Heritage IV programme which promotes intercultural dialogue between countries bordering the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

Photos sont issues du « Musée sans frontière », un projet qui a bénéficié du soutien Euromed Heritage IV afin de promouvoir le dialogue interculturel entre les pays du bassin méditerranéen.

Ruins of cities, Syria

Villes mortes, Syrie

photo: Christophe Graz



An added value...

One important aspect of Euromed Heritage IV is reflected in the wide variety of actors it will rally from Europe and the Mediterranean partner countries - archaeologists, architects, urban planners, sociologists, anthropologists, decision makers, curators, civic leaders, artists, craftsmen and artisans - who will work together towards exploring new venues in the field of cultural heritage development in both its tangible and intangible manifestations. This mixture of disciplines and skills, called for by the dual approach it proposes,

is an added value and reflects the variety of themes emerging through the Programme on the one hand, and the significance staked upon interdisciplinary and regional exchange on the other. Supported by horizontal networking and the sharing of activities, the regional scope of the Programme is a multiplier effect in terms of impact and sustainability.

Last but not least, the Programme will promote the agency of local groups in the valorisation of their heritage as researchers, conservators, decision makers, administrators, promoters and users. A whole programme of capacity and institution building is planned towards this end, particularly where it concerns improving the institutional and legislative frameworks surrounding cultural heritage among

Discovering Islamic Art

The project “Discovering Islamic Art” is an innovative showcase of how to bring art to the public. It gave birth to the virtual “Museum With No Frontiers”, allowing people from everywhere in the world to take note of the historical and cultural Islamic heritage around the Mediterranean, even that stemming from remote locations. Crafts and architecture, as well as information about specific customs, themes and minority groups, such as the Mamelouks in Egypt, or the Umayyades in Jordan, are displayed and documented. The project was initiated after a cycle of thematic exhibitions was held on Islamic Art in nine countries around the Mediterranean. The underlying idea was to link the different collections and themes so as to show Islamic art in all its varieties and, at the same time, allow access to a wider audience. Since then the museum gradually opened its virtual doors to other collections and sites as well. The programme is based on cooperation between Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Turkey, Tunisia, Algeria, Syria, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, and is the collective result of 250 experts from all over the region working together. For those that prefer the actual over the virtual, and like to experience, smell and touch the beauties of Islamic craft and art in the “real world”, the “Museum With No Frontiers” organises thematic cultural travels to the exhibiting countries. By doing so the project generates income while also attracting new commercial partners. This is a reassuring development helping ensure that heritage has a sustainable future.

➔ www.discoverislaamicart.org



Mediterranean authorities. Indeed, this aspect is at the core of the EH IV objectives and is crucial for the overall success of the Programme.

New perspectives, new prospects

There is no question that the large number of applications for EH IV, a total of 344, is indicative of the increasing interest in the field of cultural heritage among Mediterranean partner countries and reflects the spirit of cooperation and exchange the EH programme has succeeded in establishing throughout the years of its existence. This programme can certainly be interpreted as a vital "space" where Euro-Mediterranean cultural commonalities and differences are argued and the notions of shared universal values and social and cultural ties are revisited and reconfigured. From this perspective, the interest EH has been able to muster and, more importantly, the impact it has had among peoples of the region cannot be underestimated in the current climate of uncertainty and turbulence brought forth by globalization on the one hand, and polarisation between cultures on the other. New perspectives are envisioned at the termination of this programme in three years time, and it is hoped that new prospects will lie ahead for



Mediterraneo Nostra

Fondée en Sicile à Catania en décembre 2006, l'association du patrimoine culturel « Mediterraneo Nostra » s'attelle à sauvegarder le patrimoine militaire qui borde les côtes de la Méditerranée. Aujourd'hui, elle est soutenue par une quinzaine d'associations, instituts et universités, aussi bien gouvernementales que non gouvernementales de pays comme l'Italie, la France, la Grèce, l'Espagne, Malte, Chypre, la Turquie, la Syrie et le Maroc. Centre d'échange sur le patrimoine fortifié, l'association partage également les expériences et les approches de chacun sur l'usage actuel des systèmes de défense. Soutenant des projets de sauvegarde ainsi que de la recherche sur la préservation, la restauration et l'utilisation de technologies adaptées, elle joue aussi un rôle de sensibilisation à travers différentes initiatives et événements culturels.

← www.castit.it (Sezione Sicilia of Istituto Italiano dei Castelli)

Founded in December 2006, "Mediterraneo Nostra" concentrates on safeguarding military heritage of the areas bordering the Mediterranean. Supported by public and private funding, it aims to be a network and a centre of expertise regarding the restoration of these ancient systems of defence, and their adaptation to potential new functions to ensure their long term survival.

furthering the blossoming of the cultural melting pot of Mediterranean region.



Hebron, Palestine

Hebron, Palestine

photo: Christophe Graz

Florence, Italy

Florence, Italie

photo: Christophe Graz

Le patrimoine méditerranéen, une opportunité pour le dialogue

La Méditerranée, berceau de nombreuses civilisations, fait partie de notre patrimoine commun. Afin de valoriser ses sites historiques et archéologiques, ses coutumes et son artisanat traditionnel, EuroMed Héritage (EH) a été lancé en 1998. Dans l'esprit de la déclaration de Barcelone en 1995, EH contribue à développer la compréhension mutuelle et le dialogue entre les pays de la Méditerranée à travers de nombreux projets culturels. Financé par l'Union européenne, ce programme régional, en jouant un rôle de catalyseur et de moteur, s'inscrit dans un volet de partenariat culturel, social et humain entre les pays du bassin méditerranéen.

Cette initiative a déjà permis de démarrer des inventaires, de développer des programmes de recherche, de soutenir l'organisation de nombreux événements (EH I). La mise en place d'un réseau a offert la possibilité aux musées et autres institutions culturelles, ainsi qu'aux étudiants et aux professeurs d'université de se rencontrer, d'établir des contacts et d'unir leurs efforts de préservation de ces trésors du patrimoine méditerranéen. Les programmes EuroMed

Héritage II et III ont été consacrés aux expressions matérielles et immatérielles de la culture qui font la spécificité de la Méditerranée. Mais aujourd'hui, EuroMed Héritage IV (2008-2011) vise plus particulièrement à approfondir le sentiment d'appartenance des populations méditerranéennes à leur patrimoine en favorisant notamment l'accès à l'éducation et la connaissance.

Dans ce contexte, le projet « A la découverte de l'art islamique » est un bel exemple et une manière innovante de mettre l'art au contact du public. Ce « Musée sans frontière » virtuel permet d'accéder, des quatre coins du monde, au patrimoine culturel islamique du bassin méditerranéen, quel que soit l'endroit où l'on se trouve. Lancé après un cycle d'expositions organisé dans neuf pays de la Méditerranée, il offre aussi bien des informations sur l'artisanat et l'architecture que sur des coutumes, des sujets ou des minorités spécifiques. Fondé grâce à la coopération de nombreux pays, cette initiative montre magnifiquement toute la diversité de l'art islamique.