

Mediterranean Seascapes
*Proceedings of an International Conference
held in Malta in conjunction with the
Euromed Heritage II
Navigation du Savoir Project
(Valletta, 2004)*

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University of Malta
Mediterranean Institute



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pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

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(Private collection)

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To
my daughter
Dindora
who was born during the
Navigation du Savoir
festival of Malta

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Introduction:

**Conjectures on a Mediterranean Road Map
through the Salon of the
Navigation du Savoir project**

The mission statement of the Mediterranean Institute, as drawn up by its current Chairman and ex-Rector of the University of Malta, Peter Serracino-Inglott, states that the Institute's main objective "is to promote Mediterranean Studies in both the arts and social sciences, through a holistic understanding of this historic region, its culture and its people".

It was for the achievement of this purpose that the University of Malta entrusted to the Mediterranean Institute the teaching of a number of topics which promote the culture of dialogue, in particular Anthropology, Geography, Hispanic Studies, History of Mediterranean Civilisation, Music and Theatre Studies. A factor of unity in these courses is interdisciplinarity, a feature which is making them very attractive to students.

A projected outcome of this interdisciplinary philosophy is the participation of the Mediterranean Institute in European projects. For this reason, the Mediterranean Institute accepted to participate in a number of MEDA projects (see below) and also agreed to become the coordinator of Sub-Project Four, under the auspices of which both the Malta Exhibition and the academic conference that led to these proceedings were held.

One notes with pleasure that the current philosophy which is fostered by the Mediterranean Institute falls in line with the precepts of the Barcelona Process. True to the aims of this Process, the Mediterranean Institute continually seeks the building of innovative forms of dialogue and cooperation through the highlighting of cultural diversity and universal values by promoting understanding between different social and ethnic groups. In fact the Mediterranean Institute, through the MEDA project under Heritage II (see below), promotes mobility of people and multilateral cooperation.

Unfortunately, cultural dialogue is under constant attack from different academic quarters as well as society at large. Its ability to

bridge cultures was criticised for occasionally being achieved at the expense of rigorous content. In other words, the concept of cultural dialogue is sometimes perceived as being thin, broad and at the same time, shallow. Yet the very fact of conflict is in the eyes of other commentators on cultural dialogue something that lends itself to the possibility of rigour and depth.

The logic of choice of the Mediterranean Institute, in favouring dialogue against the narrow concept of a clash of civilisations, can have serious repercussions on continued support for its rationale. In a contemporary world where the social, cultural and economic structures rest on a tripod made of consumers, markets and governments, whilst policies are judged on opinion polls, the propagation of the concept of dialogue can suprisingly be interpreted as hinting at uniformity and inviting the erasure of difference. To answer that view, it is the concept of conflict that supports the idea of diversity. This brings in a pertinent question. Why should people be uniform?

There is no doubt that the idea of hegemony, uniqueness and wholeness has a long historical track. A look at Mediterranean History exposes the dangers of megalomaniac, homogenising authority. Monotheism is in itself an expression of hegemony. But dissidence within religions gave space for divergence, and in past societies where intolerance could be associated with the persecution of those holding different ideas to what was orthodox thought, spaces were in fact created to offer a haven for dissidents. The island of Lampedusa offers an excellent example of tolerance; this deserted island became a symbol of tolerance. A cave on the island in which was situated a tomb of a Muslim saintly man and a Christian effigy of the Virgin Mary became a haven for both Christian and Muslims, during time of trouble. Seafarers from both religious denominations left food in this cave for any distressed sailor who sought refuge on this lonely island.

This historic example offers an illustration of cultural dialogue in a world which is normally associated in history with intolerance and religious fanaticism. Ten years ago, the EU sought to give a new response to contemporary cultural challenges, when it launched the EU-Mediterranean dialogue or what came to be known as the Barcelona Process. It resulted in the promotion of cultural dialogue between North/South, East/West, supported by massive financial aid and

programmes. As part of the 10th Anniversary celebrations held in 2005, Luxembourg's EU Presidency pledged to enhance the Economic/Financial and the Social/Cultural/Human chapters of the Barcelona Process. Moreover, there exists a general consensus within the EU, in particular at this particular period in time when the popularity of the Union could be healthier, to devote more energy to boost the visibility of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

The recent decision to have a new structure for dialogue between cultures, under the title of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures is a particularly important initiative in this context. It re-evokes an old spirit encoded in an unwritten agreement between corsairs on opposing borders of the Mediterranean to assist each other in case of emergency. The new Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation is intended to be a new instrument to identify a framing common culture infrastructure network. One hopes that this Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures will become an important benchmark for the future in terms of political perceptions.

Balancing this cultural initiative, the EU has also introduced what is being termed a Neighbourhood Policy aimed to provide better security in Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East region. This would be achieved through a number of action plans endorsing, among others, intermodality, port reform, and the simplification and harmonisation of procedures for border crossing. On its part, the European Council welcomed the start of the implementation of the EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East. It reiterated the importance of the commitment of the partners concerned to engage in reform and recognised that the EU's relations with these countries have distinct characteristics that merit a differentiated approach.

The European Neighbourhood Action Plans are intended to support other EU programmes which are also aimed for the Mediterranean and fall under the umbrella of MEDA. The Euromed Heritage II Regional Programme offers one of the most comprehensive programmes at regional level and is composed of projects such as Euromed Audiovisual, Euromed Heritage, EUMEDIS, and Euromed Youth. Most of these programmes are managed by Europe Aid Cooperation Office. A particular

acknowledgement by the EU went to the valuable work being done by a Malta-managed programme – the Youth Platform. The EU agreed to enhance the Euromed Youth programme, which has given more than 15,000 young people the opportunity to work together on common cultural values. A further objective for the future should be to promote mobility and exchanges and thus allow youth to discover the diversity of cultures by travelling, taking part in exchanges as one of the main ways for mutual understanding and promoting respect for cultural differences.

Approved programmes by the Europe Aid Cooperation Office have at least one of the features indicated below. They encourage cross-sectoral thinking and collaboration, assist integration, support civil society and analysis, whilst also providing a diagnostic critique of Mediterranean issues. Another consideration is that the approved projects underscore effectively different policy areas at national level and identify priorities for harmonisation. Training activities and exchange of experience/best practice, through seminars and workshops, networking and webpages, sharing know-how and training modules, are supported. In other words, the Europe Aid Cooperation Office seeks to base itself on mutual respect between partners, whilst being multi-faceted but at the same time having a harmonised approach.

This is extremely positive. It is also very positive that the EU is realising the importance of interdisciplinarity, which is being approached through the opportunities provided by twinning. A number of twinning projects have already been approved. The adoption of the concept of interdisciplinarity, together with long-term vision, can further assist in making European projects more effective. Society and governing bodies depart from a theoretical level, through initiatives normally executed on a short-term basis, but then it needs a long-term perspective for any concept to be executed with fruitful results. This is what the Mediterranean Institute at the University of Malta sought to do through the MEDA-funded cultural project, *Navigation du Savoir*.

The attunement to a long-term perspective needs an incentivising policy based on a road map. As indicated above, the EU has along the years, in particular during these last ten years, created a number of programmes, action plans and foundations, all promoting and rewarding outstanding achievement. Yet it is true, as has been repeated more than

once, that Europe is yet again in a process of metamorphosis: the challenges and risks of the next few months and years are such that Europe has energetically sought to persuade its citizens, stabilize the whole political project, open up new perspectives and mobilize all its dynamic forces. Europe therefore needs accelerators of progress and signs that a long-term vision can work.

In his report entitled *Accelerators of Progress for Europe*, Raymond Van Ermen has suggested a three-pronged strategy, which I would like to refer to in evoking the aims of the exhibition and work of this conference: (i) shared identity and citizenship (ii) cohesion and competitiveness (iii) the metamorphosis of the Union which lies in making a success of its enlargement and its partnerships with and within the Mediterranean Basin.

The road to setting these values is proving to be very difficult and challenging. One has to have a look at the itinerary of the approval of the EU Constitution by the member states, to have a clear idea of this culture of diffidence and conservatism. I repeat that the road is going to be difficult but projects such as *Navigation du Savoir* help in making it easier. With a situation in Europe where the ageing population is increasing, and the younger generation decreasing due to a fall in birth rate, the political consequences are very clear. The political spectrum appears destined for more so-called conservative politics. Yet, this should not preclude Europe from expressing or creating a charter of values it holds true, and which it can hold up to its citizens. The absolute values need also to be embraced by all its citizens. Globalisation can be a solution. The mass migratory flow of contemporary times is the fruit of globalisation. Yet it is a migration composed mostly of young people. They are the body which can help to rejuvenate Europe. They can guarantee a demographic shift which can result in new politics. In this new human perspective, interdisciplinarity is destined to be an indispensable tool for the understanding of converse cultures that are now present in Europe.

Fortunately enough, the current programmes funded by the EU have helped us to understand better different cultural realities, even if sometimes they may have been less effective in creating a common heritage. At least, they succeeded in creating a forum for dialogue. Europe needs to go beyond this phase. It needs to create its own road

map of how it is going to create the framework on which the idea of a common European heritage is built. Finally this needs to be explained and to be made acceptable to its citizens.

In a recent speech given by EU Commissioner for the Economy Peter Mandelson on the Lisbon Agenda organised by the Swedish Government in Stockholm, the prospects of economic growth were discussed. Commissioner Mandelson recognised that trade is an important dimension for strong competitiveness and growth. Consequently, Mandelson made an important announcement which I would like to reproduce here. He affirmed that Europe is in the process of establishing ‘a mechanism to monitor the rolling out of our development and trade-related assistance, to check continuously whether or not it is delivering the right results to build up local economic capacity, and that the process really does constitute the true economic partnership I insist on for these agreements’.

What Peter Mandelson had said on economic growth in the context of the EU partnership agreement can very easily, and perhaps more effectively, be adopted for the achievement of cultural cohesion in the Europe in general and the Mediterranean. It can be a solid basis on which the concept of a common European heritage can be built. Therefore, globalisation would be turned, as in the economic world, into a cultural asset for Europe – a label that would identify the people living in this geographical area as one “race”. It is a race that is not based on skin colour, culture, nationality, language or religion, as idiosyncratic variables, but all these ingredients can at the same time be identified as part of common strategies for the formation of a European common heritage, which in turn can promote Pan-Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. The interventions in the conference sought to address the various themes considered above, mainly, from a historical perspective.

They also accorded with the fact that the EU vision was in these last years focused on the economic and cultural flowering of the member states and at the same time it has sought to respect national and regional diversities whilst avoiding any sectoral compartmentalisation. Its policies are directed towards fostering greater cooperation between cultural actors and cross-sector cultural initiatives.

The publication of these proceedings is not only being undertaken

as a souvenir of this project but also to give to the general public new historical information on Mediterranean history.

These Acts seek to open a window on the history of peace and war of the Mediterranean from the fortified Islands in the Mediterranean, to their history of isolation and openness to the outside world. But the history of the Mediterranean is not limited to the political world. The publication of these acts seeks to study the relevance of Mediterranean landscapes and their respective social fabric. It also seeks to open a window on the future. A number of papers analyse the tangible and intangible heritage of the Mediterranean world. The project ends with questioning if there is a future for the study of Mediterranean historical artifacts but also offers remedies and solutions through plans for the launching of Cultural Management courses.

A number of papers refer to the Mediterranean maritime world. Simon Mercieca gives a reappraisal of the Maltese medieval arsenal of Birgu, whilst Pietro Maniscalco gives a short overview of the arsenal of Palermo and Anton Quintano writes on the development of the Order's naval shipyard in the Eighteenth century.

Aspects of the Maltese historical experience were also analysed by Godfrey Wettinger. He discusses the situation of black slavery in Malta during the time of the Knights of St John. Slaves were part of the maritime economy of the time and many were employed as rowers on galleys or as handymen at the arsenal. The rest of the slaves found work in a domestic environment or in Malta's flourishing building industry. The maritime importance of Malta was also discussed by Xavier Labat Saint Vincent in relationship to France's interest of exploiting the Island's strategic position. Labat Saint Vincent speaks about the failed attempt by the French to take over Malta in March 1798.

The isolation and history of fortress islands is analysed by Henry Frendo providing comparisons between the strategies operated in Malta and Gibraltar.

The general maritime history of the Mediterranean is discussed by Salvatore Giannino and Francesco Frasca. Giannino discusses the big ships of the Renaissance whilst Frasca focuses on the Battle of the Nile and the triumph of the British Navy.

The islands of Sardinia and Corsica also fell under the lens of this conference. Alessandra Stanganelli discusses the relationship between

the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Crown of Aragon. Laurent Serpentini discusses the presence of a Maltese colony in Corsica, in a telling example of the maritime routes and contacts that existed in the Mediterranean during the eighteenth century.

Joe Muscat, meanwhile, gives an overview of forty ship graffiti existing in Malta, dating to the period between 1500 and 1900.

More focused on the “intangible heritage” are the papers of Gloria Lolivier Rahola and Vivan Sortlund. Lolivier Rahola discusses the metaphoric significance laying behind the cultivation of olive trees in the Mediterranean. In “Cultural Rights or Contentious Heritage?” Vivan Sortlund argues for greater recognition in social policy of the status of artistic creation as work. John A. Schembri and Maria Attard analyse the geographical position of Manoel Island and question its political future in the context of rapid urban development that is taking place in this area.

The last words of this short introduction to the publication of these acts go to a number of individuals who have directly or indirectly helped me in this publication. I am grateful to Dr. Ivan Callus for giving useful editorial advice. I want also to thank Mr. Ivan Grech, Ms. Giulia Martin and Ms. Paola Festa for proofing the Italian papers and to Mr. Damien Delgrossi, Ms. Sarah Di Scala and Mr. Samuel Carcanague for going through the French texts.

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