RICOVERI PER NAVI MILITARI NEI PORTI DEL MEDITERRANEO ANTICO E MEDIEVALE

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Navigation du Savoir Project: 
reviewing the experience of having knowledge across the seas through a MEDA Heritage II EU Project*

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A New Understanding of Heritage

Our understanding of heritage, as a cultural stake and ensemble, has considerably widened and diversified over the last twenty years. For evidence of this thematic enlargement, one only needs to look at the vocabulary in use – ‘industrial’, ‘maritime’, ‘under-water archaeology’, ‘intangible’ heritage, and so on – to realise that the term ‘heritage’ has undergone an evolution and to our traditional concept of ‘heritage’ were added new terms to be utilized in relation to and at the service of identities. Nowadays, by the phrase ‘cultural heritage’, one understands also the strengthening of the social bonds, and protecting, promoting, illustrating and putting into practice one’s values. This evolution underlines the working mechanisms in this project, where calls for our heritage in all its forms (starting from very specific sites) to be protected, saved, restored, and re-vitalized by the local community were initiated and responded to. In this case, those who work to safeguard heritage should be directly concerned with the reunification, if not unearthing, of lost identities in the life of a community. The management of heritage concerns, after all, the local populations who must not only be associated with it but also feel that a cultural project brings cohesion to their civil society.

Thus, every society has its particular requirements and constraints when it comes to cultural management and perhaps such requirements and constraints are more strongly felt in the southern part of the Mediterranean. This is particularly true of tourism, since southern countries suffer from an unequal distribution, with a lot of tourism gravitating to the north. In various southern countries, the development of tourism has become a major priority, notably to finance imports. This situation can lead to the implementation of a number of unwise policies which, for the sake of increasing mass tourism, can result in irreparable damage to cultural sites.

There is one added reason for the south urgently to improve protection, management and highlighting of its natural sites, its countryside and its maritime legacy, including underwater heritage. For both cultural and historical reasons, this heritage has suffered more than its counterpart in the north because of indiscriminate urbanization, notably due to the rapid increase in population and uncontrolled development along the coasts. For several countries, such as Malta, Tunisia and Morocco, their heritage

* This paper is based on the study made by the Navigation du Savoir consortium for the implementation of this project.
is their principal source of wealth. How does one exploit these resources on a long-term basis? Despite the urgency, the safeguarding of heritage is not always felt and valued as a matter of priority by the state.

Such prioritising entails a considerable effort at the level of the organization and transmission of knowledge and specialized techniques. Economic progress is unfortunately being calculated by increases in the number of tourists over the previous years rather than by the revenue they generate. The transfer of learning and digital technology assumes a capital role in improving the evaluation of all heritage and historic sites, and in earmarking new initiatives. One is usually confronted by lacunae in all these domains and in particular on the plane of exact identification, both quantitative and qualitative, of needs and priorities, as well as the opportunities for new projects that need to be created at a regional level. To this, one must add the necessary harmonization of the methods of investigation and elaboration of norms of common labelling of some of the cultural products and the improvement in quality tourism with a strong Mediterranean identity.

Very few studies have been made in the South in the field of conservation, restoration and publication which are aimed at making known the full value of specific sites and how such sites enrich understanding of Mediterranean civilisation. It is therefore necessary to carry out works which are geared more to managing sites and elaborating plans of action, in order to place heritage at the core of the politics of development.

It is also necessary and urgent that protection, conservation and presentation of cultural and natural heritage, still very poorly indexed in various Mediterranean countries, become the object of national strategies endorsing their integration with plans of social and economic development, management and use of territory. The effect of the perceptions of heritage by the colonial powers, often favouring Greco-Roman heritage, is still felt today.

How does one respond to the plundering of historical sites, the inflow of tourists, and the creation and realization of urgently needed infrastructures? The answer to this question is a challenge in itself. The simple transfer of knowledge and technologies does not suffice; there is a totally new concept to develop at the level of responsibility but also of mentality. To be lasting and effective, the transfer must take into consideration cultural contexts.

The integration of maritime heritage with the collective life of the community, where the same heritage is to be found, is often missing among various communities in the Mediterranean, in particular those living on the Southern shores. The numerous initiatives, efforts and attempts made so far, unfortunately, have not been conducive to a systematic implementation. Such a policy, on the other hand, cannot depend on the responsibility of one organization entrusted with the preservation of heritage. To be truly effective, it must be assumed by the highest authorities and be the object of the widest possible co-ordination.

The creation of cultural and tourism enterprises, the strengthening above all of those which already exist, the necessity to develop a permanent structure to employ the human resources to the best advantage, starting at the local development stage, assumes a particular urgency in the light of the depletion of the rural environment. Countering the brain drain and the disappearance of certain conservation skills is also crucial, and can instigate the necessary awareness within the populations concerned, for the benefit of whom this project is ultimately aimed.

The phrase “cultural tourism” is now becoming a catchphrase, but it is more than that. It proposes tourism of the future, a source of cultural dialogue and individual enrichment. In Malta, as well as in other countries of the Mediterranean, we are currently undergoing a period of transition, in the course of which culture and tourism are more cohesively coordinated, and the resulting unity will hopefully create forms of tourism that are of high quality and become increasingly popular. One of the driving forces of this evolution is undoubtedly a new awareness of the economic dimension of these two sectors of activity: in particular, their capacity to create new employment, notably for women (tourism is the leading economic world activity, the culture of the future). The European Commission recognises that tourism is a major source of employment. These functions can be created either directly by cultural and tourism enterprises, but also through European projects.

For the reasons mentioned above, the central purpose of the project was the diffusion of knowledge by means of the most advanced digital technologies and the development of new initiatives promoting widespread yet focused cultural tourism within the framework of development favouring the safe-
guarding and the growth of heritage and traditional skills. Through a number of planned activities, the subject of this project became known to hundreds, and a movement was initiated which progressively extended to a growing number of countries in the Mediterranean.

Target Groups and Activities

The target groups of the project were both the think-tanks and the qualified workers in the fields they cover: that is, individuals responsible for heritage sites and cultural tourism, and specialists in threatened maritime skills, such as carpenters who specialise in the construction of traditional boats. Finally, it sought to instruct the general public in the widest and popular sense. Participants were chosen on the basis of their capacity to disseminate culture and at the same time safeguard threatened cultural heritage.

The project had five major objectives leading to reconciliation and dialogue amongst the cultures of the Mediterranean, in conformity with the aims of the Declaration of Barcelona, and to this end:

1. It sought to raise awareness and knowledge about the Mediterranean common heritage and make decision-makers more conscious of the neglected wealth of heritage to be found in the Mediterranean Sea. Then, it worked to sensitise the operators of cultural sites and the public.

2. The members of this consortium were urged to support and promote policies aimed at protecting and promoting the historical heritage of their country. Moreover, they were urged to exchange their experience in this field through regular meetings of the scientific council. It was during these meetings that various members, who occupied high positions of cultural management in their respective countries, shared experiences which helped in improving their ability as programming managers. It was also at these meetings that the participating managers, from some of the principal institutions in Europe dealing with maritime heritage, exchanged useful information concerning their work, the problems they face, the possibility of exchanging solutions (notably in the domain of protection, promotion and valorisation of heritage), the development of new forms of cultural tourism and the creation of employment in the traditional professional branches.

3. Insofar as cultural management was concerned, the members also worked hard to develop and highlight ways of dealing with the natural, cultural, material and immaterial heritage. By the word "immaterial" is meant the intangible heritage that was transmitted to us by our forefathers, and such heritage has usually escaped written attestation in historical documents. Aspects of intangible heritage are: oral traditions, singing, oral history and craft knowledge which used to be passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth. On the other hand, the material heritage is much more visible and can be accounted for as it leaves tangible traces and evidence. This project sought to study aspects of the tangible heritage of the sea, such as different types of floating vessels, as well as delving into the underwater heritage. Finally it sought to explore how these assets can become a "stake" with enduring economic returns.

4. The project also aimed to move to tangible actions and help in the development of human resources and educational formation of an elite core trained in the safeguarding of traditional maritime skills. The aim was for this core to become the future teachers who would preserve and pass on dying maritime trades. The members of the consortium considered the preservation of these trades a niche for the development of an employment sector in marine carpentry. As the teachers of these schools and naval shipyards originated from both the north and south of the Mediterranean, this represented a sort of cultural continuity.

5. In a nutshell, the project sought to contribute significantly to the development of intercultural and eco-cultural tourism in the Mediterranean, notably thanks to some specialised education projects adapted for the Mediterranean context, stressing the regional, trans-national and the common aspects of heritage and culture. An Itinerant Exhibition on the Cultural Maritime Heritage of the Mediterranean and training courses on techniques in underwater archaeology further strengthened this initiative.

Detailed Description of Activities

The Navigation du Savoir project was based on the constitution of a network of "historical arsenals" in the Mediterranean, and links these historical sites, that are cradles of industry and knowledge, from the north to the south of the Mediterranean Basin.
Today, many of these sites are threatened with destruction. As the meaning of the word "arsenal" indicates (a word derived from the Arabic daar senaa, meaning the "house of crafts"), these places have housed, from antiquity to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period, from the north to the south, all scientific and technical knowledge of the times (astronomy, mathematics, geography, cartography, naval shipbuilding, medicine, and the art of navigation and war). They have been places of "forced ecumenism", for the galley-slaves were, more often than not, prisoners of war or victims of the corsairs. In these places or next to them, there were places of worship. Thus, there was a mosque in the arsenal of Genoa as well as in that of Villefranche-sur-Mer. In Malta, it was situated in the slave prison which was situated next to the galley arsenal.

The destiny reserved for these galley-slaves deserves particular investigation, within the framework of an action concerning the memory and the defence of human rights in the Mediterranean. The transformation of arsenals, bound intimately to war and slavery, into instruments of dialogue of cultures and peace through the testimony of a common cultural heritage on the two shores of the Mediterranean — which was one of the objectives of this project — is a stake whose importance is strengthened by the growing "visibility" of maritime heritage (nature, sites, ships, floating and underwater heritage). It inscribes its name in the frame of a political opening towards tolerance, peace and stability in the region, based on a consciousness of sharing a natural, architectural and naval common heritage, from the prisons to the rowers and oarsmen on ships such as the Xebec, a community of skills and techniques, ways of life and maritime traditions. It also acknowledges a common historical responsibility for the inhuman treatment that the galley-slaves received in the past.

The arsenals today face the same difficulties and have the same urgencies: the re-conversion of their spaces. The immediate concern is in the transformation of these places into tourist attractions. However, this development needs to occur within the context of respect of the environment. On the other hand, in a number of arsenals, the repairing of large vessels is still taking place. These naval dockyards, together with the warehouses, lazarettos and hospitals of the galley-slaves, need to be preserved, and with them one needs also to preserve the specific technologies linked to port and maritime activities. Situated by the sea, depending on administrations with diverging objectives (port authorities, town councils, ministries of sea and transport, etc.), these areas stir up the greed of real estate dealers, chain hoteliers, and diverse tourist enterprises which are hardly interested in the cultural and historic interest of the "memory sites" of an extreme heritage value. Putting into the network players who directly worked in the maritime heritage field ensured lasting economic effect in the domains of training, management, and cultural tourism, and an immediate repercussion on the development of employment. For this reason, during the first phase of the project, the enlargement of the network was sought, in order to include, as much as possible, historic arsenals and those practising sea skills in all the countries of the Mediterranean.

The field of action of this project was the diffusion of knowledge, as well as some components of human resources and evaluations. Thus it was spread over six sub-projects of which two (sub-projects 5 and 6) have the particular objective of strengthening the protection and promotion of heritage through apprenticeship, exchange of experiences and the transferring of skills, technical assistance, developing human resources and training in skills and professions linked to heritage and related activities.

The first sub-project involved the creation of a network of multimedia poles aimed at the transmission of maritime knowledge under the responsibility of the Consorzio Pisa Ricerche. The mission of this sub-project was to promote awareness and knowledge of the Mediterranean maritime heritage, in particular thanks to the new technologies of information and communication.

The second sub-project focused on Tourism Development. It was under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture of Tunisia. This sub-project aimed at reinforcing the training of operators, starting with existing courses in Mediterranean countries, an inventory of which was to be prepared by a specialist starting with the information furnished by the Ministries concerned, the schools and the competent universities, the professional organizations and the World Tourist Organization.

The programme, aimed towards the formation of expertise in cultural tourism, eco-culture and inter-cultural exchange in the Mediterranean, was organ-
ized and delivered by historians, archaeologists and professional instructors on tourism.

Some curricula and training modules meant for tourism professionals, in particular guides and curators, was prepared by qualified and recognized experts and relied on the input of the project "Cultural Tourism: for an alliance of network information and experiences in Europe", carried out between 1995 and 1996 with the Action Plan of the Community in favour of a guided tourism by DG XXIII of the European Commission. In particular, it is a matter of better evaluating cultural heritage without having tourists damage the integrity of heritage, but, on the contrary, respecting a true cultural practice. It is also a question of elaborating a holistic, integrated and coherent project on a regional scale, strengthening local Mediterranean cultural identities by concentrated valorisation of the heritage of the Mediterranean basin.

Arsenals need to develop their respective cultural itineraries and be better known. They need to begin to be called upon so that they can play a prominent role in highlighting less known maritime or virtually neglected heritage. Furthermore, to achieve this aim, interdisciplinary research and cultural exchanges were also employed in the construction of postgraduate courses in maritime heritage and cultural management. This form of tourism studies is considered particularly suited to youth and apprenticeship training. It is therefore desirable to associate experts in the field as well as university professors, and their input would then be followed by pupils and students. Thus a veritable common pedagogic project was set up, highlighting cultural convergence and shared values.

The third sub-project was entitled "Cultural Itineraries in Historic Arsenals of the Mediterranean". It was under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture, Algeria. This sub-project has components relevant to the field of human resources and those of evaluation. The historical arsenals of the Mediterranean are under-exploited from a tourism point of view. This affirmation holds or virtually neglected heritage. Furthermore, to achieve this aim, interdisciplinary research and cultural exchanges were also employed in the construction of postgraduate courses in maritime heritage and cultural management. This form of tourism studies is considered particularly suited to youth and apprenticeship training. It is therefore desirable to associate experts in the field as well as university professors, and their input would then be followed by pupils and students. Thus a veritable common pedagogic project was set up, highlighting cultural convergence and shared values.

The settiing of cultural tourism programmes and the efficacy of guidance courses necessitates the updating of the concept of lifelong learning through specific educational arrangements. These training courses should, in particular, transmit to the participating students and future tourist guides, the transnational knowledge which lies behind the great cultural currents of the Euro-Mediterranean area.

The other experts in the field that were invited were individuals who train conference guides, heritage mediators responsible for the setting of cultural tourism, administrators responsible for the assessment of heritage sites and staff working on the management of tourist flow. Many of the training courses for these personnel still contain numerous lacunae in the knowledge of "new heritages", both in the regional Euro-Mediterranean dimension and the trans-cultural dimension of this heritage, as well as in the utilization of new technologies and in the organization and functioning of tourism.

One of the goals of the project was to establish modules of specific training on these diverse subjects as well as on the problem of the safeguarding and restoration of sites and artefacts of Mediterranean maritime cultural heritage. These training courses were the basis for the apprenticeship in new technologies in the domain of information, communication, conservation and presentation.

Sub-project four sought the setting-up of an itinerant exhibition of natural, tangible and intangible heritage, floating and underwater maritime heritage. This was considered one of the strong points of this project. The exhibitions were seen as a presentation of the dialogue between cultures in action, bringing together insights and exchanges from and beyond ethnography, history, archaeology and traditional arts and crafts. They were aimed as a meeting place for the representatives of all these sectors. The traditional crafts were chosen as the showpiece of these exhibitions. Moreover, this project considered cultural itineraries as the most perfect expression of this programme, bearers for the future visibility of maritime heritage and crucial in the building of identity-awareness through dialogue. The emphasis was on the interaction between cultures and the dynamics and creative spirit which can result from such a merger.

The first exhibition was held at Villefranche-sur-
Mer and the second one at the Valletta Waterfront, Malta. These exhibitions were also part of the annual meeting for all the partners. Each exhibition was dedicated to a theme: proper exhibitions with stands were planned, together with conferences, skill demonstrations, arts and crafts. Documentaries and cultural shows were held during these 'salons'. The aim of these exhibitions was to enable visitors and exhibitors to understand the diversity and the unity of the Mediterranean heritage, by implementing and exchanging information and experiences. Through round tables, members discussed both the tangible and intangible heritage. These 'salons' were also a media oriented event, providing a show-window on the work of the Navigation du Savoir consortium. The Malta exhibition was piloted by the University of Malta, with the help of the Mediterranean Institute, which has vast experience in international meetings. In order to ensure rigorous methodology and organization, there was collaboration with professional organizers and promoters of exhibitions and cutting-edge cultural shows.

Sub-project five entailed elements relevant to the field of human resources but also to that of cultural appreciation. It involved the organisation of courses to teach aspects of traditional Mediterranean maritime carpentry. The responsibility of this project was in the hands of the Consortia de les Dressiness de Barcelona. In this project, the work of this Consortium was not a matter of creating a new school, but of strengthening, protecting, and developing the existing one, by setting up a network through which the exchange of teachers and pupils would take place. These training courses aimed at the exchange of experiences between the participating students and the transfer of skills between young talented marine carpenters having the benefit of advanced training. The courses were both technical and practical. The students were sent for training and placements, but used information technology and advanced communication systems in their studies.

It is all a matter of safeguarding a rich intangible cultural heritage threatened with disappearance, to improve knowledge of the entire basin by combining the traditions of the North and the South, to highlight those traditions and practices which are common, and also to explore the differences. Finally, this part of the sub-project sought to introduce young people in Mediterranean countries to those professional branches which can generate new employment opportunities.

The teaching and training of experts in both the theoretical and practical side of traditional maritime carpentry had the objective of strengthening what already existed but also served for the formation of new ideas. An exchange of experiences between scholars from the North and the South of the Mediterranean was envisaged through the exchange of professors and professional carpenters from the two coasts. Participants exchanged and shared knowledge through apprenticeship courses by qualified trainers from the two shores in traditional boat-building techniques, including sea vessels used for fishing, transport and pleasure and the formation of internet tools, notably in view of specialized courses.

The sub-project also helped to pinpoint master carpenters still active in the Mediterranean; the identification of existing yards and an appraisal of their special characteristics. Meeting-places and training centres, plans, access to ancient documents, and graphic and oral documentation were also discussed and presented to students during these courses.

Each initiative involved four to six training courses of one month duration. During the year 2003 the first pilot training course was held at the arsenal of Barcelona. In 2004, the second training course was held at Valletta. Participants in the training courses at Valletta took part in the Exhibition of Mediterranean Maritime Heritage that was organised in Malta in that particular year. This was undertaken in order to allow participants to take advantage of professional contacts.

The schooner Santa Eulalia also visited the Malta training centre. Her presence gave invaluable prestige to both the exhibition and the carpentry workshop, since the ship is one of the rare traditional Mediterranean schooners to have been restored professionally in order to continue sailing the seas.

Sub-project six sought to study training techniques regarding underwater archaeology in the Mediterranean. The responsibility for this particular sub-project fell on GRAN (the 'Groupe de Recherche en Archéologie Navale'—the 'Research Group in Nautical Archaeology').

This part of the project had the objective of reinforcing the capabilities of targeted countries in this domain and an awareness of a common heritage starting from the discoveries and the appreciation of
underwater archaeology in the Mediterranean. The students were trained and guided by GRAN, in collaboration with the network of the Maritime museums of the Mediterranean and their corresponding centres, in particular, Tunisia and Malta, as well as through the assistance given by the Mediterranean Institute. GRAN contributed to the setting up of an information base on the subject of maritime archaeology through the use of the Multimedia pole and the linking of sites featuring underwater archaeological sites in the Mediterranean. Here, too, a profitable balance was achieved through the establishment of work in situ and interactive training on the Internet. Thus, the objective of this sub-project can be summarised as the concrete formation of professionally trained personnel in underwater heritage, and initiatives in broader appreciation of that heritage. As Malta had expressed in the sixties, the seabed can be used as a symbol of a common Euro-Mediterranean heritage.

The teaching of underwater archaeology techniques was undertaken through the formation of a school. Three different wrecks were identified in each of the three countries involved in this project: that is, France, Tunisia and Malta. The chosen wreck had to be situated close to the shore, in a favourable environment — that is, in a depth less than 25 metres — and where the water-area is relatively sheltered, with few underwater currents and with favourable visibility. The chosen wreck also had to have its structure relatively well preserved to allow proper study of the hull.

The programme allowed for the introduction of innovative techniques in the search for underwater wrecks, the study of naval architecture, as well as the implementation of preventive conservation. Each training course was undertaken over a period of one month and involved the participation of four to six students. The results were given during each campaign, and presented within the framework of the Exhibition on Mediterranean Maritime Heritage which was held in connection with this project.

Conclusion

Therefore, these sub-projects aimed at bringing together, through specially organised technical meetings, managers of historic arsenals, historians, archaeologists, economic and social players, and specialists in tourism development in the North and South. The aim was to organize the theme of arsenal sites, within the context of mass cultural tourism.

It aimed to help managers of historic arsenals to improve or re-convert these sites. Creating a network of historic arsenals of the Mediterranean offers them a means of direct and permanent communication and a forum of discussion that allows them to exchange experiences and, therefore, to help each other in the process.

It created an instrument giving professionals in tourism, in particular women, training and pedagogic tools adapted for the context of Mediterranean countries. It also brought specialised expert knowledge to the management of these sites and aided in intercultural exchange.

The main elements of communications and publicity envisaged beyond that of communication through the traditional media are: books on the historical arsenals of the Mediterranean, tourism brochures, training courses, pedagogic material, CD ROM on the arsenals and a television documentary.

In fact, the project represented for all the partners an opportunity where they could exchange inter-regional experiences and objectives within a context of Mediterranean-wide cooperation. It was wholly conceived with a view to securing lasting Euro-Mediterranean exchanges at the cultural, economic and social levels. The structural impact of the project was equally distributed between a concerted effort to bring the idea that these historical arsenals are venues for cultural tourism; and at the same time, bring in a general understanding about the need that these places have codes to control their cultural character as well as their contribution to eco-cultural and intercultural tourism.