

MEDINA: A PORTAL FOR MEDITERRANEAN CULTURE

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1. Introduction

The program EUMEDIS, of the European Culture, aims at developing cooperation among Mediterranean countries on a number of themes among which we find Cultural Heritage (intended in a broad sense, including also traditions, food, etc.) and Tourism. Another aim of the program is the development of “sustainable” activities, i.e. activities that could balance promotion and diffusion of Cultural Heritage with viable business and economic model. MEDINA is a project of the EU Program EUMEDIS. Its main goal is the development of the MEDINA portal, whose contents will allow the users to plan a global tourist activity across several countries. The Project is coordinated by IMED-Mediterranean Institute, in agreement with the Italian Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism, and in cooperation with the Institutions responsible for Tourism and Culture in five member States of the EU (Italy, Austria, Belgium, France, Greece) and nine Mediterranean Partner Countries (Algeria, , Cyprus, , Jordanian, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia).

2. Project Objectives

In the frame of its basic goal (that is, to promote a new approach to culture-oriented tourism, as I said), the project hosts other goals of different natures: cultural objectives, social objectives, economic objectives, organisational objectives and technical objectives. On the whole, we can say that the project aims at:

- building an infrastructure capable of developing and maintaining a structured intervention towards culture-oriented tourism;
- - increasing the knowledge of the opportunities emerging from ICT when applied to tourism.
- Implementing an “application framework”, that is, a general design, for this new kind of application.

3. Basic assumptions

This approach is based on the following assumptions:

- tourists, globally speaking, have a narrow and stereotype image of the Mediterranean countries;

- as a consequence tourists' demand addresses a limited group of world-wide known "targets": therefore severe environmental impacts are emerging and enhancement of precious heritage is neglected;
- tourism supply, especially in non-EU countries, not yet enhances aspects of culture (especially immaterial ones) that are nevertheless fundamental to understand local identities;
- accessibility and dissemination of cultural heritage is still limited at national and regional level; Internet access could be a powerful tool to facilitate a basic approach to Mediterranean culture and heritage, especially for non specialists categories (children, students, retired people, families, etc.);
- strengthening and enhancing local identities in cultural terms, is always envisaged as an important factor in social and economic development.

4. The contents' level

In this brief presentation I shall focus mainly on the Cultural objectives, of which I'm in charge. You will find a detailed description of the others in the conference proceedings. As I said, the project aims at developing a new approach to culture-oriented tourism; we speak of "culture" in a broad sense, including both the traditional "high" culture and the "material" culture related to everyday life. The project aims at improving the quality of tourism for those users who have specific cultural interests and of integrating of the "cultural" aspects with the practical concerns (restaurants, hotels, etc.).

The cultural information will be organised along the following basic cultural axes:

Material heritage

By material heritage we mean all the historical, artistic, architectural and archaeological evidences of the different cultures that followed one another in the Mediterranean region. This classification therefore includes both movable heritage (for ex. museum collections) and immovable heritage (sites, monuments, etc.).

Performing Arts

Music (ritual music, processional chants, music linked to particular local events), Dance (particular dances linked to individual events (baptism, marriages, etc.) and collective (saints' feasts, religious and ritual celebrations, etc), and Theatre (of popular matrix, from sacred representations to the deeds of heroes).

Folk traditions

A key element to “get around” in folk traditions is that of identifying some basic traces enabling to establish continuity elements and diversity hints among peoples and ethnic worlds inhabiting the Mediterranean shores. They accumulated during the centuries very different, yet contemporaneous, cultural forms, integrated, sometimes in opposition, but more often in a complex system of coexistence. Four subtopics (sub-axes) have been identified: “the festivals”, “the market”, “religiousness and spirituality”, “health care”.

Food and gastronomic culture

Food traditions enable to retrace a path crossing many dimensions: social, historic, anthropologic and psychological. Moreover cuisine is currently an important economic resource, particularly for quality-oriented tourism. Mediterranean cuisines have been developing in centuries specific recipes, habits and culinary rites, but matrixes of a common root can be retraced.

Handicraft

Handicraft has assumed a significant value as high display of culture and evidence of popular work. Its spreading in the Mediterranean basin in past times has trodden paths that nowadays archaeologists, anthropologists and historians of art are carefully retracing.

The organisation of the information on each cultural axis will be open and flexible to the development of cultural tourism thematic pathways. Possible suggestions for the themes could be the following:

- *Agro pastoral culture.* Pastoral culture links many areas around the Mediterranean basin and its influence on cultural heritage, food, handicraft, performing arts and folks traditions is strong and evident.
- *Rupestrian civilisation.* The history of rupestrian civilisation is one of the most relevant page of the history of the Mediterranean basin. Different historical sedimentation and ethnical, political and geographical realities show common unifying elements for the morphological continuity of landscape and the similarity of the settlement process.
- *Myths pathways.* Areas and places linked to mythological traditions and all related activities, such as archaeological sites open to visitors, historical reconstruction, exhibition of cultural events, etc.
- *Trade paths and courses, including ports.* Commerce is undoubtedly a unifying factor in the Mediterranean basin. Ports and harbours cities are the melting pot of the Mediterranean culture.
- *Rite pathways.* Areas and spaces reserved to spirituality and religion and events linked to them, including traditional food. Eastern ancient rites came to the western side of the Mediterranean: this exchange was so intense and relevant to influence up to modern times the rites and traditions of people living here and there along the Mediterranean.

- *Ceramics paths and production cycles.* Old ceramics recall past cultures' everyday life and rites; the production and spreading of ceramics in the Mediterranean basin gives evidence of cross-fertilisation among civilisations and people. Strong links still exist among ancient traditions in ceramics production and decoration and contemporary handicraft workshops production. "Surfing" on ceramics waves can lead MEDINA Portal users to knowledge on lifestyle and traditional habits.

The project's steps

MEDINA will promote the creation of National Websites

the MEDINA portal itself will integrate and "re-interpret" parts of the national content in a Mediterranean perspective

The existence of the portal will work as a "spur" to the maintenance and feeding of the National Websites

Conclusions

The innovative approach of the MEDINA Portal is the focusing on original Euro-Mediterranean horizontal issues independently from specific historical periods and referring to enlarged supranational geographical areas and/or groups of regions. The MEDINA portal will give birth to a new way of approaching culture-oriented tourism...

...providing a comprehensive supranational view on Mediterranean cultural heritage And integrating cultural aspects with practical concerns (hotels, restaurants).

It will also promote a strong Euro-Mediterranean partnership on the theme of technology supported tourism...

...at the same time strengthening and enhancing local identities