

Strategies Sectors | **Culture & Society**

Cultural Heritage Protection in the Mediterranean Region: Beyond Resilience

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This year is the European Year of Cultural Heritage. The EU has been struggling with an existential crisis for more than a decade. Too many doubts lead us to focus on what we feel secure about: a golden age, some glorified past, a common world, the roots of who we are and what we would like our ancestors to inherit from us: our heritage. In times when a New Narrative for a European Renaissance has failed to emerge, the recourse to heritage both as a source of self-confidence as much as a source of trust in the future, is almost inevitable.

From the Mediterranean angle, three myths, according to Jean-François Daguzan, have vanished: the lost paradise described by Fernand Braudel, the Al-Andalus' peaceful coexistence and the American neoconservatives' *New Middle East*.

This short article explores whether there is something left of what has been considered so far in regional policy frameworks as shared tangible and intangible heritage in the Mediterranean region: a history of flows and tensions as well as united, co-existing or fragmented communities composing mixed societal models, religious references and sources of dialogue. Beyond a review of existing and past technical initiatives and toolkits,¹ and instead of relying on the notion of cultural citizenship that would minimize cultural differences, this article

considers multi-dimensional creative partnerships as avenues towards the (re)composition of cultural commons around cultural heritage.

A Petrified Mediterranean Heritage?

Ironically, while science has never helped us so much to recognize that there is indeed a shared cultural heritage around the Mediterranean Sea, interconnectivity does not mean cultural convergence and mobility, technological progress does not mean mutual understanding and geographical proximity does not mean enhanced trust. The Mediterranean has been analyzed as a space and a sea that both unites and divides.

What remains from the idea of a shared Mediterranean culture is mostly related to ancient cultural heritage. Today's regional dynamics are not very encouraging for the idea of a shared Mediterranean space: tensions around migration management have not diminished; conflict in Syria and instability in Libya undermine mutual understanding in the region.²

The history of the twentieth century revolves around a common past made of conquests, joint battlefields, independence struggles and the Cold War, but not necessarily shared memories and heritage. Unlike the US in Saudi Arabia, the EU does not have its 'best enemy' in the Mediterranean.³ Instead, it has created the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), an institutional forum in which shared heritage is not really

¹ EUROMED HERITAGE. *Mediterranean Cultural Heritage, A Manual for Good Practice – A Euromed Heritage Experience*, Libri Publishing Ltd, 2013, 484p.

² FLORENSA Senén. "Foreword," *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2017*. www.iemed.org/observatori/arees-danalisi/arxiu-adjunts/anuari/med.2017/IEMed_MedYearbook2017_foreword_senen_florensa.pdf

³ KENNEDY, D. "Best of Enemies by Jean-Pierre Filiu and David B.," *The Times*, 16 June 2012 www.thetimes.co.uk/article/best-of-enemies-by-jean-pierre-filiu-and-david-b-hqzq85d35p

at the core. State diplomacy has maintained relations with regimes according to the 'authoritarian stability' principle (Védrine). The issue with this approach is that as a rule (and there are nuances in each country) it fuelled even more distrust in Arab societies' perceptions of the EU and Europe (the case of Israel and Turkey are perhaps more specific).⁴

The region therefore seems to be 'petrified': it has become more and more challenging to give speeches emphasizing 'common values' while the space for democratic practices is shrinking.

Migration, as an historical phenomenon, has also been part of the region's heritage for centuries. It has now been denied as such by the new narrative on the 'root causes of migration.' Think tanks have hardly confronted this new policy line.

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Transformations in the Arab world indicate that instability is here to stay. Recent EUISS foresights for the region in *Arab Futures* are gloomy, implying that joint Mediterranean efforts to protect heritage will neither be a priority for all nor the result of an easily achieved shared vision.

Based on the assumption that the very idea of 'the Mediterranean' will be questioned ("*La Méditerranée se retrouve encore une fois sans vision*"⁵) and needs to be refreshed, the prospects for herit-

age protection will also require thorough exchanges between experts, societies and policy makers.

Moreover, Technological transformations add to the current political challenges already facing regional heritage policies: the 4th industrial revolution (Digitalization, 3D reproduction, globalized and transnational cybernetworks) brings with it new questions (where do authenticity and ownership lie?), dilemmas (do we want to recreate destroyed heritage and for what purpose?) and opportunities (virtual safeguard) for the cultural heritage sector.⁶

The realm of heritage policies in the Mediterranean is undergoing profound mutations: their scope has become wider and deeper. It now includes landscapes, gastronomy (the Mediterranean diet), and tourism strategies (territorial branding towards a variety of audiences from the Gulf, Asia or the US). It also has global or intercontinental ramifications (for instance the *zalabia*⁷ sweet pastry could be seen as shared heritage with parts of Asia). In this moving and opening environment, new tools and new skills will be needed for cultural heritage management adaptation. Is the Mediterranean framework fit for this purpose?

Cultural Heritage and the Reinvention of Shared Purposes

The scope of cultural heritage management is widening and it is expected that it contributes to sustainable development. In conflict settings, it has also become part of a fundamental struggle against violent and nihilist ideologies aiming at the complete destruction of civilizations' remnants. In this new equation, variables have changed. Those living and working around the Mediterranean are adjusting to new assumptions, new methods, new purposes, and, sometimes, with new partners.

Mediterranean myths and grand visions do not make people dream anymore. Massacres and conflict in Syria challenge our humanity and our belief in the ex-

⁴ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. *Preparatory Action on Culture in External Relations*, Country reports on Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia, 2014. https://ec.europa.eu/culture/initiatives/external-relations_en

⁵ DAGUZAN Jean-François. "Les politiques méditerranéennes de l'Europe : trente ans d'occasions manquées," *Politique étrangère*, 2016/4 (Hiver), p. 11-24. DOI: 10.3917/pe.164.0011. www.cairn.info/revue-politique-etrangere-2016-4-page-11.htm

⁶ *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, for instance, is a journal publishing numerous articles on technological methods in cultural heritage management. www.maajournal.com/

⁷ *alabia* (Julebi, with many variations in different languages) are deep-fried flour batter in (most frequently) circular shapes and then soaked in sugar syrup. (Various versions are described by Wikipedia articles)

istence of a common humanity. For those who live in peaceful settings, networks and groups seize all opportunities to protect and promote their heritage if it brings them immediate benefit. This is why the cultural tourism paradigm has remained paramount in Turkey, the Adriatic coast, southern France, Spain, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Israel. In crisis-prone territories, heritage is at risk but a far lesser priority for those struggling to survive. New threats have rebalanced attitudes towards cultural heritage. Although it is still deemed essential, heritage has become a luxury or the memory of a golden age. Where it has disappeared, it leaves a scar, a wound, a hole that life has to fill again with reinvented identities.⁸

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As for those crossing the Mediterranean from further afield (East, West or Central Africa), they bring their often unknown and unseen heritage with them. The Mediterranean 'cemetery'⁹ and states' bargains on migration management have also become part of our shared heritage. This situation will have an enduring effect on mutual perceptions. The rhetoric of the 'root causes of migration' (as if migration were both fundamentally negative as well as a problem to be solved by 'Africa's development') and the image of 'Fortress Europe' are preventing the emergence of new Mediterranean imagined myths and remembrance. Investments in intercultural dialogue and youth exchanges,

as useful as they are, will hardly compensate the damage made by hindering mobility.

For heritage protection in the region to become meaningful again and not limited to regional archaeological cooperation programmes therefore requires new purposes. Many debates and strategies across the Mediterranean have key priorities in common, such as: youth, jobs, migration and interreligious relations.

One approach to elaborate on those purposes is perhaps to search for new partnership models to develop and promote the specificities and richness of each group's heritage. This approach, as simple as it looks, is a real challenge when violence, migration policies and undemocratic governance fuel, at best, frustration, and, more often, mistrust and hatred among young generations.

Trust among people, if nurtured creatively by initiatives managed as closely as possible to communities, also generates self-confidence, entrepreneurship and a sense of belonging. Countries and international organizations around the Mediterranean will have to arrive on time at the 'meeting they have with each other'¹⁰ if they want to mix all the ingredients needed to reinvent a positive attitude towards each other through all forms of heritage.

Belief and hope in new purposes might often emanate from urban areas, but not exclusively. Socio-economic gains obtained from the opening of public spaces in cities favour creative expression and give greater emphasis to heritage. This was tried during the 2011 Arab revolutions. Unless the region is at ease with itself, how can it expect to attract new partners to promote its rich cultural heritage?

Beyond Resilience: Heritage Protection versus Violence

What is the horizon then? How could the Mediterranean remain the same while everything is now upside down? Will new methods, new action make the difference?

⁸ UNESCO. *The Value of Heritage*, video for the Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Cultural Heritage, UNESCO programme funded by the European Union. www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1_f-GqaHHo

⁹ "We cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a vast cemetery," stated Pope Francis in his Address to the European Parliament, 25 November 2014. https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141125_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html

¹⁰ OREL, Pierre. "Synthèse," in *Protection et Conservation du Patrimoine Culturel en Méditerranée une responsabilité commune. Actes du forum Limassol, Chypre - 22-23 novembre 2012*, p. 138. www.fondationordredemalte.org/pdf/MALTE_FR.pdf

Bloodshed, war and repression make it impossible today to make any promises about cultural heritage protection: the focus is on resilience across the board. It is about emergency protection and safeguarding. Crisis situations require legal paradigm shifts to prosecute those who have committed crimes against cultural heritage.¹¹ Security systems have to adjust their capabilities to respond to new threats against cultural heritage. Lessons from Syria also show that aid money could partly go to communities to help them protect their heritage.¹²

Although it is difficult to imagine creative partnerships that would be exempt from political interference, cultural clusters could still act as trust-building spaces and places for the reinvention of cultural heritage in museums, sites and resorts, in physical or virtual forms

Looking at the next decade though, an upgraded EU cultural heritage protection agenda addressing conflict areas looks very much within reach. It is even in its interest. At a limited political cost, the EU could become a leader in heritage protection in conflict areas. It would benefit European heritage experts and would position Member States and the EU as the main enabler in the field of access to protected heritage.

Beyond conflict zones, there is also great potential for cultural heritage policies as part of the EU's international cooperation. Heritage is one of the three pillars of the 2016 strategy for EU international cultural relations.

A new policy-making method has to be pursued by the EU, in line with its 2016 strategy on international

cultural relations: the systematic co-design and composition of country-specific cultural relations strategies between EU institutions, Member States and Mediterranean partners.

Dialogue and exchanges on cultural relations strategies could include the composition of more explicit approaches to cultural branding (how and if respective societies, cultural groups and societies seek to promote themselves externally) and external perceptions management (whether or not they are equipped to do it). Designing cultural strategies will also clarify where new priorities lie and the kind of space the EU and its interlocutors in the region want to dedicate to 'Mediterranean' frameworks when it comes to making cultural relations flourish. Respective roles of states, local and global markets, as well as international partners, would also become clearer and pave the way for the launch of new creative partnerships and the (re)composition of some shared commons. Although it is difficult to imagine creative partnerships that would be exempt from political interference, cultural clusters could still act as trust-building spaces and places for the reinvention of cultural heritage in museums, sites and resorts, in physical or virtual forms.

New technologies in heritage protection are developing so fast that innovative public-private partnerships will rapidly emerge in the region. Structural transformations of the 4th Industrial Revolution will not only bring about technological innovation but also new social innovation methods that will impact on Mediterranean societies in a diverse fashion. The future of cultural heritage in the region will probably lead to increased diversity in societies' and individuals' experience. However, one shared need that is likely to remain – apart from sustainable peace – will be mobility. It is to be hoped that people's mobility will find pragmatic innovative solutions to transform humanitarian crises and drama into previously unthinkable common visions of the future: tomorrow's cultural heritage of its own kind.

¹¹ ELLY, Damien. "Scenario configurations for the EU as an international cultural heritage protection actor in conflict," *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, to be published, 2018.

¹² S. AL QUNTAR. "Syrian Cultural Property in the Crossfire: Reality and Effectiveness of Protection Efforts," *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology & Heritage Studies*, Vol. 1 (4), pp. 348-351.