

**Cultural heritage and Euro-Mediterranean interregional partnership**  
**A conference sponsored by the Sicilian Region to strengthen the dialogue through**  
**research, training, education and local development**

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**Palermo Declaration**

More than 130 participants from European, Mediterranean and Balkan countries met in Palermo to share views and examine cultural heritage issues within the framework of Euro-Med relations. Following upon intense discussions in four thematic workshops, the participants unanimously agreed on the following declaration:

The Euro-Mediterranean Region is characterised by a wealth of common cultural and natural heritage which is potentially an effective unifying element in fostering mutual understanding and in the pursuit of a common vision among partners.

By emphasising the historical links among the different Mediterranean cultures, which have not been reinforced recently, it will be possible to contribute significantly to the promotion of peace in the region and to strengthen interregional socio-economic development on the basis of working together, joint planning, and cooperative scientific research and education.

In particular, the participants agreed that the Mediterranean Region is today at the centre of strategic changes between Europe and its partners in the southern and eastern Mediterranean. The current geopolitical scenario is conducive to a radical reorganisation of the region on the basis of more symmetric relations among partners.

Accordingly, this declaration aims to attract the attention of European institutions to the need for strengthening the conservation and management of cultural heritage in regional and international community programs. In this respect and considering the strategic importance of cultural heritage, furthering collaboration and co-operative relations through the concept of "cultural landscape (1)", the concept of cultural heritage and the land, emerges as a useful tool for strengthening the role of local institutions in developing joint, integrated management plans of cultural heritage of the Mediterranean region. The aim is of creating a common vision of a common past as a means of enabling a peaceful, prosperous future.

The participants stressed previous positive partnership experiences among regions, local authorities, towns, universities, public and private research institutions, foundations and civil society, and affirmed their willingness to reinforce existing models of partnerships, to complement bilateral and multi-lateral relations, and to develop an overall conservation and cultural management strategy that capitalises on existing strength and create a whole greater than its parts.

1 The definition of Landscape refers to the 2000 European Convention: "Landscape" means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

This framework of Cultural Heritage Partnership will play a key role, so far vastly under-developed, in facilitating and promoting research, education, and training aimed at creating shared knowledge of the common heritage of the Mediterranean Region and its historical links to its neighbours. The processes by which a common history was created in the past. This shared knowledge will be the basis of a genuine partnership recognising the active, historical interactions among distinct regional and natural provinces contributing to a common, dynamic and vibrant region.

Accordingly, the participants urge that "Cultural Heritage" to be considered as one of the priorities of the Wider Europe – New Neighbourhood Initiative. The participants also emphasised the need to meet again on a regular basis in order to formulate new model of partnerships on a more equitable basis.

The Declaration of Palermo is the first step in a strategic plan with the following objectives:

1. develop policies and integrated programming models which reinforces the role of local institutions in the management of the territory through the active involvement of all stakeholders, both public and private;
2. propose cultural landscapes as a new concept for conservation and management able to link the conservation of material and intangible heritage with local development;
3. share existing knowledge and "good practices" related to preventive preservation and the development of innovative management systems and new partnerships. A strong integration of high quality cultural and tourist services will be a key feature;
4. develop management and promotion of cultural heritage by applying the opportunities offered by the Information Society and web-based culture in order to promote a quality tourism, disseminate researches, fall-out and the training offer;
5. complement the approach based on restoration with a new focus on preventive preservation and systematic maintenance with emphasis on long-term conservation and management and develop management models for emergencies caused by natural and man-made calamities in terms of early warning, protection plans and temporary transfers of heritages exposed to calamities, mitigation risks and emergency interventions of a pure symbolic value;
6. contribute with training activities to reinforce the skills of the actors involved in the endogenous development related to programmed maintenance with particular attention to the restorers, and professionals responsible for maintenance;
7. promote the development of integrated, secondary and university level curricula with a common cultural experiences and the historical dynamism of the Mediterranean as a region. Curricula will be integrated through mobility programmes, flexible shared modules, exchange of trainers and students. Text books and Multimedia Educational Products will be developed using a standard methodology and a common vision;
8. identify information and communication strategies targeting the general public (public education) to increase the knowledge of cultural heritage. The organisation of guided tours in the Region developed, will facilitate the above.

The participants agree on the need to establish an Euro-Mediterranean Contact Group with National Institutions, Regions and Local Authorities. The Contact Group will be in charge to coordinate and promote partnerships in the Region and make proposal to the neighbourhood initiative.

The Regione Siciliana via its Regional Centre for Restoration candidates itself to secure a follow-up and forward the Declaration of Palermo to the European Institutions and to promote future meetings.

The recommendations of the 4 working groups on Research, Training, Knowledge and Education, Cultural Heritage and local development are integral part of the Palermo declaration.