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التراث الأوروبي المتوسطي

Wells, cisterns, irrigation canals, fogaras: rediscovering water heritage and the Mediterranean landscape

*For centuries, an entire landscape has been harmoniously shaped around the water heritage of the Mediterranean and where human activity, based on practices and traditional knowledge developed in equilibrium with nature. All this may now disappear with serious consequences for the environment and the communities in the region. However, a mobilising action is possible: **Matthieu Guary**, head of international actions at APARE and project coordinator of **REMEE - rediscovering together the water heritage in the Mediterranean region** – brings us concrete actions for the maintenance and enhancement of this heritage, and this unique blessing, water.*

(Interviewed by: Giuliano Salis)

In what context was REMEE's project conceived and what needs does it intend to meet?

From the experience we gained in the preservation of dry stone heritage related to water management and environmental education, we realised that working on water heritage means working on problems related to the management of both the resource and the ecology. Water management is a crucial issue but not easy to tackle, especially when it is presented in demoralising terms of endangerment and the pressure of shortages. However, through the perspective of heritage conservation this issue becomes more understandable, and enables an easier mobilisation of civil society and youth in particular, for example through educational programmes which allow to link water heritage to good practices in management and environmental education.

On what type of heritage assets do you focus your actions and in what country?

We will work mainly on the vernacular heritage rather than on the monumental heritage, which is more dramatic, such as aqueducts and ancient Roman baths and gardens that we can find in Granada or in Marrakesh. This heritage is strongly present in the Mediterranean region, and is linked to ancestral and local customs and the control of water in urban areas- steam-baths, fountains - and rural areas - irrigation canals, wells, cisterns, fogaras, etc. Our work takes place in France, Greece, southern Turkey, but especially in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

What is the current situation of the water heritage in the Mediterranean area?

In the north the risk of its disappearance is imminent, with the notable exception of landscapes with cultivated terraces, which mainly hold the water in arid lands and block erosion. In the south this heritage is still operative but the modernisation of agricultural in rural areas and the changing lifestyles in urban areas - such as the development of water supply in apartments; although an improvement, it has led up to the disappearance of collective uses and fountains- puts it at risk too. REMEE will enhance community practices related to water and avoid the complete loss of the memory associated with water management techniques and irrigation tailored to a particular terrain, systems of flood prevention, etc.

How will REMEE contribute to the establishment of an effective strategy for preventive conservation?

I can give you an example. We are currently developing in Marrakesh a restoration project of a fountain, with the help of local craftsmen to enable them to change practices that are not appropriate for the proper management of water resources or dangerous to the use of the fountain: this will contribute to a better conservation of the fountain over time. We will educate the local community (users, hammam owners, the municipality) on how to reconcile conservation with the modernisation of the hydraulic system of this heritage, and involve it in the process of developing eco-labels that would guarantee the appropriate conditions for maintaining a symbol of the Medina of Marrakesh whilst at the same time contributing to a better management of water resources and the reduction of waste. It is important to associate heritage to domestic or agricultural uses, to educate users of this heritage and help them discover the links between heritage conservation and renovating its function.

What type of awareness campaign are you planning?

First, we are planning for a transnational educational programme, targeting young people between ages 10 and 16 and that can mobilise at least a hundred youth from each of the eight areas in which we work: the theme is the rediscovery of water heritage and of its links with the development of the territory through history. The activity will be implemented mainly in schools but also in cooperation with youth centres, cultural centres and local associations. Second, we will organise participatory activities such as meetings and public surveys targeting communities, which we have already started. In the four pilot areas (Hammamet, Marrakesh, Tamseloht, Tipaza), high visibility actions aimed at local communities and tourists: the creation of an eco-museum of the “orange orchards” of Hammamet will help enhance the history of agricultural and arboreal culture in the region, its landscape and heritage, as well as a garden designed to highlight good practices in water management related to the traditional culture of the orange trees. We will also organise exhibitions, educational trails and a collection anthology of stories and traditions about water practices in the region of Tipaza. Finally, a touring exhibition will present the results of the project: in Corsica it will be incorporated into the creation of a *Maison Régionale de l'Eau*, a regional centre dedicated to the traditional use of water. Meanwhile we organise voluntary work camps mobilising local communities to help put into practice what is learned during these activities.

What do you wish to achieve by the end of the project?

That all partners in the project understand the stakes of mobilisation: community involvement in the development of heritage is not only possible and consistent with carrying on living on one's own territory, but also necessary in order to realise concrete and useful actions. The valorisation of water heritage can lead to a rediscovery of the territory and, in the future, to a development of sustainable rural and ecological tourism that would contribute to the economic wealth of communities, through developing an appropriate infrastructure that counters the trend of mass tourism with its large hotel structures, often favoured by governments in Tunisia and Morocco. Finally, we would like to broaden our scope of action to new regions and new countries to capture the attention of Mediterranean

citizens, making them aware that the preservation of the water heritage of the Mediterranean area may be linked to safeguarding water resources in the region.

For more information about the project:

http://www.euromedheritage.net/euroshared/doc/REMEE_EN.pdf

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