

Participative closing session

Report

Leonardo Chiesi, University of Florence, Italy

In the light of new research on conference organization and on large group events, we decided to design a participative session at the end of the conference. This research shows that the structure of an ordinary conference is in fact largely inadequate to provide room for real participation and that at least some of time available should to be devoted to innovative methods of participation.

The purpose of this session was to provide a framework for collective discussion where, instead of assigning to an individual the responsibility to draw some conclusions and deliver them in a one-to-many fashion, closing remarks would be delivered together by all participants. To do so, we designed a two-step event: first, a session of group work (30 minutes) where people discussed about their experience of the conference. To facilitate the discussion, we provided some guidelines in the form of four questions (which we called “the four Ws of conference assessment”; see below) that would help people to focus and structure their interaction. After the group work, people were gathered in a plenary session, where each group reported their discussion to everybody else through the concise talk of a spokesperson who was selected by the group itself. During this reporting, everybody had a chance to express their thoughts, and as a matter of fact there was a lively interaction among all participants. During this last session, what was being said was also typed in a document that was projected on a large screen, so that all observations were integrated in a sort of instant report of the discussion. This document constituted a written legacy of the conference, and will be used for future reference (see below for the integral version of the instant report).

As an independent observer, I can note that the level of attention throughout the Regional Conference was very high: people were intensely motivated to listen to the speeches; to share contents during the workshops; to engage in participative sessions.

It was clear to me how well trained those who attended were: the level of discussion was always high, focused and knowledgeable. It was particularly striking to me as a sociologist, to notice how even after two days of extreme intensity, people were still willing to share their thoughts with one another at the end of the conference when we presented the idea of a participative closing session: that is a clear sign of motivation and interest, and could also be considered as a sign of general success of the whole Conference. Had the Conference not met the needs and expectations of the participants, we would not have had such a remarkable level of participation at the closing session.

The output of the closing session could be summarized as follows:

Assessment of the regional Conference

Participants expressed a high appreciation for the event, recognizing how it brought them from being focused on individual project to becoming aware of the bigger picture represented by EH4, where all projects are connected in a network of mutual relationships. The Conference thus facilitated a sense



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of collective enterprise regarding the whole of Euromed Heritage 4 Programme, transforming it into a community, rather than a collection of individual projects.

Need for more participation and communication

Participants expressed the need for a more frequent chance to communicate with one another about the projects and their implementation. A need for informal ways to share knowledge and experiences was also expressed.

Need for more occasions of critical debate

Participants expressed the need for more frequent chances of discussing the underpinnings of Euromed Heritage 4 and of single projects within Euromed Heritage 4. Participants expressed the desire for occasions where general questions about the social and political implications of Euromed Heritage 4 and projects could be posed and then critically discussed, both with experts and among the participants themselves.



The four Ws of conference assessment
Instant Report

Where we were when we came ?

Où en étions-nous à notre arrivée ici ?

- All focusing on own individual projects
- Came from own projects – with complex range of backgrounds
- Different backdrops – sections within community
- Isolated from our individual projects and ignored the other projects
- Each of us was limited to our specialist subject and some of us were not having an effect focus on issues such as gender

What we did ?

Qu'avons-nous fait ?

- Changed our experiences and set up some working groups
- Further questions about Euromed itself: eg. Mare nostrum, why such labels today – what type of relationship between north/south, reciprocal?
- Why aren't Africa/Asia represented in the title euro-med?
- Know more about each other's ideas
- Possibly a few too many cases to understand in such a short period

Where we are now ?

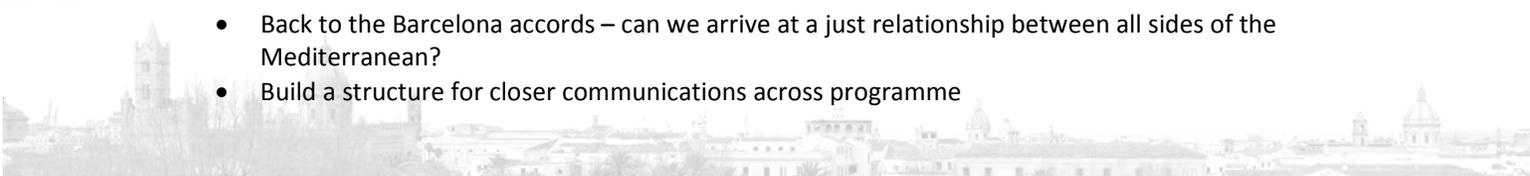
Où en sommes-nous à présent ?

- Concept of community – what is the relationship between the researchers and projects and the 'community'. Honest definition of that
- Can we ensure our concerns are fed back and acted upon within the EU?
- More analysis within reporting
- Role of civil society – we haven't quite touched on a practical methodology
- The workshop and conference have been motivational and energising
- Bridges have been built across projects
- Participation of civil society is of the greatest importance
- Through discussion we've come to see the relevance of intangible heritage across a wide sweep of heritage interests
- Redefined ourselves and how we work
- Better connected
- Sense of being valued

What we would like to happen next?

Qu'attendons-nous pour la suite ?

- Back to the Barcelona accords – can we arrive at a just relationship between all sides of the Mediterranean?
- Build a structure for closer communications across programme





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- Need a private chat room for the projects on the EH4 website
- Arabic should be a working language within the workshops and events of Euromed/ accord in other working groups about need for greater use of Arabic
- Governmental individuals who sign and attend activities may not have strong/close link with communities – so should bring in broader involvement of NGOs, other associations
- Important not to lose connections formed over conference
- Further opportunities to meet
- Finding ways to keep in touch between meetings, in order to maintain synergies between projects

