

Montada promotes heritage value of Kairouan

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Thanks to a programme financed by the European Union, the inhabitants of this town in central Tunisia are beginning to value their architectural heritage- and are becoming aware of the need to take care of it. Kairouan's water and openings are the themes around which various activities will be organized: photography competitions, training courses for young people, conferences, exhibitions...

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Photos by **Montada Project**

KAIROUAN - Teaching people from Kairouan about Kairouan? This is what is planned for September 2010 in four schools of this city in central Tunisia. It is essentially a teaching and learning tool, which has been developed by the Montada project and will be made available to teachers in Kairouan, through a project funded by the European Union to be implemented in six North African cities (Salé and Marrakesh in Morocco, Ghardaïa and Dellys in Algeria, Kairouan and Sousse in Tunisia). The aim: to raise awareness among people, starting with the youngest, about the importance of conserving architectural heritage.

Named Montada, this project is carried out within the framework of the "Euromed Heritage" programme, which has a total budget of 17 million Euros intended to be used to aid local populations in "appropriating their own cultural heritage".

Heritage, a key issue

To achieve this goal, Montada has scheduled various activities (communicating via a dedicated website and newspapers, debate meetings, technical assistance for the renovation of buildings, education and training, cultural initiatives for heritage

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promotion, etc..) in order make people aware of the importance of this asset from a cultural, social, historical and economic standpoint.

In Kairouan the project is rooted in Islamic history. Founded in 670 by Okba Ibn Nafaa, a commander of Muslim troops who conquered Ifriqiya on behalf of Muawiya, the Umayyad Caliphate, this city - which gave its name to the governorate of central Tunisia of which it is the administrative capital - flourished under the Aghlabid dynasty in the ninth century. The many vestiges of this era- particularly religious monuments (such as the Great Mosque, the Mosque of the Three Gates and the Barbier Mosque) and Aghlabid cisterns which supplied the city with water- led to the city being listed, in 1988, as a UNESCO world heritage site.

When ASMK (the Society for the Preservation of the Medina of Kairouan) was founded in 1977, the architectural heritage of the city was, as it still is in other historic cities in Tunisia, under threat. Since then, the action taken by the society, with the support of heritage authorities and institutions, has helped to stop the deterioration.

However, much remains to be done in terms of safeguarding and promoting heritage. And this will necessitate additional effort, in particular in raising awareness among all members of the population, observed Mourad Rammah, doctor of Islamic Archaeology and the author of a thesis on Sousse. This is the reason why all of the programmes funded for this purpose by the European Union are of such importance - Discover Islamic Art, Rehabimed, Qantara, as well as the most recent of them, Montada – and those in which Kairouan has taken part.

Kairouan's water and the openings

As in the other five North African cities involved, this project places emphasis on the establishment, in Kairouan, of local forums, a modern online version of the ancient Greek Agora. Supervised by an "international and multidisciplinary team of experts (EIDEIM)", these forums are intended to involve citizens in the debate on heritage preservation and to ensure "the suitability and sustainability of the action taken, the adaptation of this action to the reality of each place and the success and quality of the activities." This was carried out following discussions with several associations and agencies. In operation from March 2009 by the ASMK, a brainstorming session led to the selection of two pathways intended to be used to guide its awareness raising work.

In Kairouan, it will be based around the theme of water – "because this city, constructed in a semi-arid area, is, in this respect, a challenge to nature. Kairouan, which became known in the Middle Ages the town of the water cisterns, developed an ingenious water system which has allowed it to combat hunger and water shortage," proclaims Mr. Rammah Murad, president of the ASMK – and the architectural heritage represented by the openings: the doors and their frames made from carved and decorated stone, windows and "Gannarias" (emerging wooden passageways) dominate the surrounding terraces and provide a panoramic view of the city.

On the first theme, ASMK plans to develop signage and to create an itinerary for visits



■ Mourad Rammah, President of the Society for the preservation of the Medina of Kairouan

"This city, constructed in a semi-arid area, represents a challenge to nature."

Visits to the Aghlabid cisterns will be organized in order to train and raise awareness among tourist guides.

■ Kairouan became known in the Middle Ages as the town of the water cisterns



The city will be represented by its doors, its windows and the "Gannarias", its emerging wooden passageways, and the focus of a photography competition.

■ The architectural heritage of Kairouan, represented by doors, windows and "Gan-narias" (emerging wooden passageways) dominate the surrounding terraces and provide a panoramic view of the city



based around the main water facilities: Aghlabid cisterns, Raqqada cisterns, the tanks of the Great Mosque, the Bir Barrouta well tanks, etc. A permanent exhibition on the theme of water will be set up on the site of the Aghlabid cisterns in January 2011, in addition to a symposium on water in the Maghreb in the Middle Ages. On the second theme, the ASMK has run a photography competition for young people who have been encouraged to discover the wealth of the architecture of Kairouan. Because, says Mourad Rammah, "we cannot tackle the fragility of our heritage and avoid losing it without continued work to ensure that future generations are more aware of these problems." In addition, renovation work on the typical architecture of Kairouan, such as doors and windows, will be conducted by the ASMK in collaboration with the citizens who own the homes which are at risk of falling into disrepair.

Euromed Heritage IV

<http://www.euromedheritage.net>

Contributing to the exchange of cultural heritage experiences, establishing networks and promoting cooperation.

Participating countries

Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Syria, Tunisia

Timeframe

2008-2012

Budget

€17 million

Aims

Building on the objectives of the Strategy for the development of Euro-Mediterranean Cultural Heritage: Priorities for Mediterranean countries (2007-2013), the programme aims to promote appropriation by local people of their cultural heritage and access to education and knowledge regarding heritage. The programme acts to support a framework for the exchange of experiences, dissemination channels for good practices and new perspectives, aiming to develop an institutional cultural environment. A regional support and management unit (RMSU) provides technical assistance to twelve projects, including MONTADA.

Find out more

Website of the Montada project > <http://www.montada-forum.net/fr/montada/montada.htm>

Website of the Rehabimed project > www.rehabimed.net

The traditional architecture of the city of Kairouan >

http://www.rehabimed.net/Documents/docs/op_kairouan/fra/02_lavillekairouan.pdf

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