

# HIDDEN MEDITERRANEAN

CULTURE, HISTORY,  
ENVIRONMENT AND PEOPLE  
TO EXPAND SUSTAINABLE  
TOURISM IN ITALY, JORDAN,  
LEBANON AND PALESTINE

*The Work and Impact of the CROSSDEV Project*

*Edited by*





## Cultural Routes for Sustainable Social and economic Development in Mediterranean

[www.enicbcmec.eu/projects/crossdev](http://www.enicbcmec.eu/projects/crossdev)

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- EU contribution € 2.2M
- 10% Project co-financing
- Implementation period: September 2019 - August 2023



**HIDDEN  
MEDITERRANEAN**  
WHERE CULTURES MEET

### Lead



### Partners



### Associates

- Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities - State of Palestine
- Ministry of Tourism - Lebanese Republic
- Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (Jordan)
- International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO)
- Regione Sicilia, Soprintendenza del Mare, Dipartimento beni culturali e identità siciliana, Assessorato regionale beni culturali e identità siciliana (Italy)
- Bethlehem University - Institute of Hotel Management and Tourism (Palestine)
- Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna, Center for Advanced Studies in Tourism - CAST, (Rimini Campus) (Italy)

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## Foreword

### *Sustainable Tourism for the Development of Peoples*

**By Gianluca Falcitelli**

*Director of geographic area Middle East and Mediterranean, CISP*

You might expect this book to talk about many different people and places in the Mediterranean.

It does, but most importantly, this book tells a unique collective story. Yes, this story was dreamed about and then realized by many different actors, from NGOs and associations to economic operators, Universities, Institutions, public authorities and so on. But those different souls had one common vision: to create something meaningful to improve the lives of people living today and those who will live in the future.

One might wonder what so many different actors could have in common to get together and how it all started.



The initial idea dates back to 2017, when a European Program was about to launch a call for proposals for sustainable tourism projects in the Mediterranean. At that time, we as CISP decided that it was worth stepping in, convinced that sustainable tourism is a powerful tool for the development of peoples, our organization's ultimate mission. So, to that end, we started building a partnership by bringing together different players from the Mediterranean with different skills, knowledge, cultures, and origins.

However, it would be better to say that the initial idea has more ancient roots which date back 40 years, when CISP was founded.

When, in January 1983, we sat in the notary's office in Rome to sign the birth of CISP, we were a small group of young people, some of us in our twenties, some a little older, all full of passion and with a dream: to change what we thought was wrong in this world. Where we saw inequality, exploitation, poverty, food crises, we wanted to act and contribute to get over them. We had a dream, and we were daydreaming. We were determined to do our part, to intervene, to contribute to creating a better world, and yet we were young, had limited experience at the time, and perhaps were not fully aware of how complicated the world was.

We were dreaming of changing the world, yet aware we couldn't possibly succeed. Still, we were convinced we could improve the lives of at least some of the poorest and most disadvantaged peoples, little by little, one mission at a time.

In 2023, the organization we created because of that dream and thanks to the passion, enthusiasm, and energy of a group of young people, turns 40. Such a relevant milestone inspires us to look at what has been done so far and pushes us to renew our mission and look at the future. In the past 40 years we, as CISP, have worked in over 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. We have learned, shared, and crossed the lives of thousands of people, and although we haven't changed the world, we have helped to change the lives of some, as Paolo Dieci – our friend, co-founder, and late President of CISP – used to say.

Today, we keep on dreaming and we are aware that to be effective we cannot dream alone. Instead, we must share our dream, visions, strategies, objectives, competencies and knowledge with public authorities, the private sector, civil society: in a word contributing to the “partnership for sustainable development”, which is also one of the ultimate goals of the 2030 Agenda.

That awareness, combined with the same passion, enthusiasm, and ambition CISP has cultivated for 40 years, led us, in 2017, to gather friends and colleagues from associations, cooperatives, institutions from Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine to work together to contribute to socio-economic sustainable development in the Mediterranean by setting up a sustainable tourism project. We then designed the CROSSDEV project – Cultural Routes for Sustainable Social and Economic Development in Mediterranean.

We all agreed to commit to improving the living conditions of people in areas affected by limited job opportunities, poverty, inequalities and yet so rich in untapped potential in terms of tourist attractiveness.

We are talking about areas permeated with invaluable environmental and cultural assets that were never used to become attractions for responsible tourists. We are talking about rural and isolated areas affected by progressive depopulation, emigration of young people, lack of job opportunities, and yet outstanding for their unique cultural and environmental heritage, which might turn on extraordinary economic opportunities for the locals but were at risk of disappearing.

We are talking about the huge Mediterranean area, lived in by different people facing common challenges of economic development and fight against inequalities, often devastated by long standing conflicts; people united by the common need for building dialogue, peaceful coexistence and, in a word, peace.

We are talking about small communities in need, often neglected and deprived of basic rights but with whom we share the very same willingness to create a more sustainable and better world.

As CISP, we have a long experience in international cooperation projects and, with the invaluable contribution of the six partners, have undertaken this adventure. We were also inspired by the examples of two successful Cultural Itineraries of the Council of Europe – Iter Vitis and the Phoenicians' Route – that were already working to turn cultural assets of lesser-known territories into an instrument to boost the economy and development while preserving traditions, history, architecture, culture, and the environment. Other actors such as institutions, local and national authorities, economic operators, and associations joined us along the whole path, giving true meaning to the word “cooperation”.

Today, we can proudly say that the constant cooperation with all the actors involved that took part in the project have helped us reach important goals in the last four years, and that through CROSSDEV the concept of ownership has become a standard practice, as people started feeling like and acting as key players, real protagonists for the socioeconomic growth and protection of the territories they live in. The idea of the Mediterranean as one, a whole area filled with history, culture and traditions that are shared by millions of people, with a common identity spreading over national borders became concrete. Such a wider Mediterranean dimension contributed to breaking many communities out of isolation.

All together, we have built a common view and understanding of the Mediterranean heritage, assets, and potentials, where the ultimate goals of sustainable growth, reduction of disparities, increase of opportunities for decent life and jobs are collaboratively shared and pursued.

CROSSDEV is a brilliant example of an inclusive and comprehensive Mediterranean Partnership for Development, which is the essential basis for any strategy for building an area of peace and stability in the Mediterranean, and for promoting dialogue and understanding for a peaceful coexistence.

Forty years ago, a dream to build a better world through the development of peoples led to the creation of CISP. Today, we are filled with joy realizing once again – also through the CROSSDEV project – that our commitment is having some impact and that our dream is still alive and shared by thousands of people and communities, institutions, and organizations in the Mediterranean and beyond.



CROSSDEV has improved, requalified, equipped 23 sites in Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine

**ITALY - VIA SELINUNTINA**

- Interpretation Centre of Palazzo Pignatelli (Menfi)
- Library of Sustainable Tourism and Cultural Routes of Palazzo Panitteri (Sambuca di Sicilia)

**LEBANON - JABAL MOUSSA BIOSPHERE RESERVE**

- Qornet el Deir
- Broqta
- Roman stairs

**JORDAN - AQABA**

- Byzantine church
- Islamic City of Ayla
- Aqaba Marine Reserve's Beaches
- Tell Al Khaleifa
- Aqaba Castle
- Cedar Pride Shipwreck
- Underwater Military Mesuem

**PALESTINE - HERITAGE TRAIL**

- Beit Mersim – Battir trail
- Husan – Battir trail
- Ain Jama Romanian pool (Battir)
- Ain Hawia Spring (Hussan)
- Maqam Abu Ubaidah Amer Ibn Al-Jarrah (Surif)
- Wadi al Qaf (Tarqumiya Forest Park)
- Jaba Park (Jaba)

**JORDAN - UMM QAIS**

- Gadara archeological site
- Yarmouk Forest Reserve
- Al-Hamma hot springs
- Rural landscape

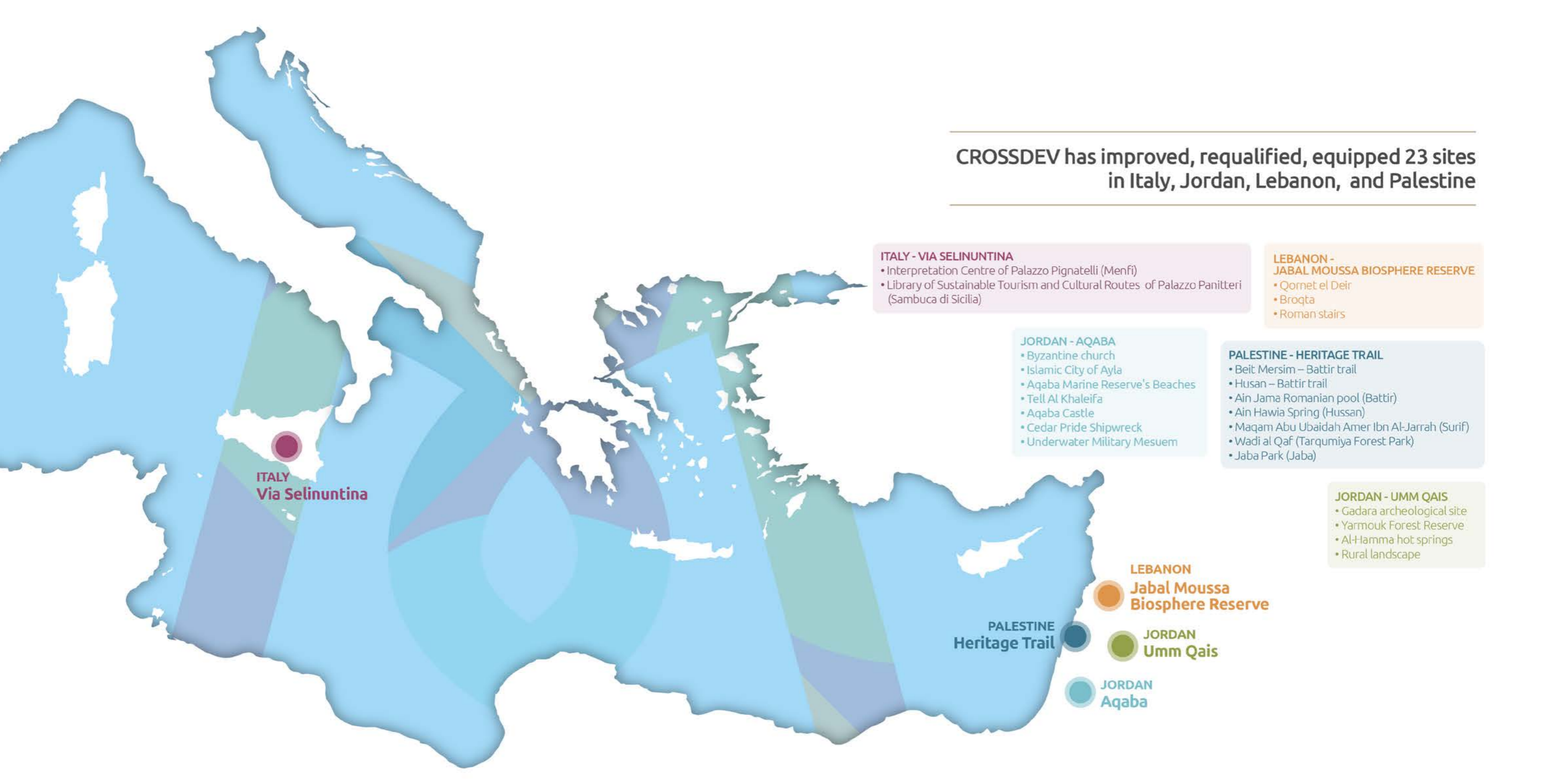
**LEBANON**  
**Jabal Moussa**  
**Biosphere Reserve**

**PALESTINE**  
**Heritage Trail**

**JORDAN**  
**Umm Qais**

**JORDAN**  
**Aqaba**

**ITALY**  
**Via Selinuntina**





## ***The CROSSDEV Project: Impact and Results***

***By Deborah Rezzoagli***

*CROSSDEV Project Coordinator, CISP*

The CROSSDEV project started in September 2019 by bringing together seven very different partners: the International Committee for the Development of Peoples (CISP), an international NGO based in Italy, as the project's lead; the Italian Ministry of Culture (MiC), the Italian social cooperative CoopCulture, the Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST), the Association for the Protection of Jabal Moussa (APJM), the Royal Marine Conservation Society of Jordan (JREDS) and the association Palestinian Heritage Trail (PHT).

Despite the different backgrounds and missions, the partners immediately identified with the project's objectives and in the strategic vision that CISP, as leading partner, has chosen and supported throughout the duration of the project.

Inspired by the best practices of the Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, CROSSDEV aimed at contributing to economic and social development in Mediterranean, strengthening and enhancing sustainable tourism practices, emphasizing common heritages and the resources of five lesser-known destinations and weaker areas: Via Selinuntina in Sicily (Italy), the Biosphere Reserve of Jabal Moussa in Lebanon, the Palestinian Heritage Trail in Palestine, the Umm Qais site and the ancient city of Ayla, Aqaba, in Jordan.

If the goal was already ambitious enough, the period during which the project has been implemented has definitely made the challenge harder and more demanding due to the unprecedented COVID-19 Pandemic emergency that affected the whole world.

Since March 2020 the world's social, cultural, economic, financial activities have been altered globally and isolation characterized the entire period of 2020 and 2021. As a result, the tourism sector was in shock and came to a complete standstill. Numerous tourist services shut down, satellite economies linked to tourism disappeared, and the entire sector suffered huge economic loss. National and international tourism policies changed.





In this scenario, CROSSDEV has been implemented based on contingency plans updated quarterly through frequent coordination meetings, by adapting the work methodologies, re-modulating, or completely altering the activities' calendar. The COVID pressure started easing in all countries in 2022.

Despite this particular, or rather unique situation, the CROSSDEV partnership strengthened and consolidated more and more, even beyond the best expectations. Bearing in mind the common objective, all the best capacities, professional's skills and technical competencies present at all the partner entities have been made available for the entire project team.

Through the agreed common methodological approach focused on the key concepts of proximity tourism, community-based tourism initiatives and local dimension strengthening, 13 sustainable tourist itineraries of community-based, cultural, food and wine, adventure, nature, sport and art tourism experiences have taken shape based on the site's peculiarities and common factors such as heritage, culture, archaeology, the Mediterranean, nature, hospitality, local products, community identity, youth, biodiversity.

Quality technical and financial assistance has been provided to service providers mainly comprising women and youth associations, successfully supporting them in creating and/or developing their own business in the hospitality, handcrafts and experiential tourism sectors and supporting five municipalities in Palestine, to requalify tourist assets in their own territories. Five new sustainable tourist products, two of which with a new trademark registered and recognized at national level – "Umm Qais" in Jordan and "the Adonis Route" in Lebanon – are today real and marketable.

On the one hand, the work done on tourism, on increasing the attractiveness of lesser-known destinations with the direct and active work of the local community members, women and youth associations, and local and national authority officers has proven to be a powerful tool to also contribute tangibly and innovatively to the sustainable socioeconomic development of the areas. On the other hand, it has contributed directly or indirectly to address more complex issues such as the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems, agricultural development, study and research, vocational training, but also to address social change, social inclusion, and the promotion of global citizenship. Besides the community-based and participatory approach, the other key ingredient of CROSSDEV project worthy of mention here is the quality of the considerable commitment of all the team in the communication, information, and promotional component of the project.

Widespread communication and information activity, which reached thousands of people, was carried out at local and cross-border level using digital tools and through fam and educational tours. It included campaigns such as the "magical mystery tour", promoted by colleagues from APJM in Lebanon, or "the best-recycled handicraft" competition or "Ramadan campaign" carried out by colleagues from JREDS in Jordan, "Baladna Ahla" the environmental and heritage protection campaign organized by PHT colleagues, in Palestine. Communication and information, together with the promotion campaign which began with the publication of the platform [www.hiddenmediterranean.net](http://www.hiddenmediterranean.net), with the publication of the film *I am the Mediterranean* and of the video pills on each destination, then continued with the organization of B2Bs with the participation of dozens of European tour operators and site inspections. It guaranteed visibility and great interest in the project and in its destinations from insiders and beyond.

Involving guides, small businesses, tourist services and cultural heritage managers, young entrepreneurs and students, women's associations, food producers, local and national institutional officers, and many others, in activities aimed at reflecting on the richness of the territories, at revealing the secret of local culture and identity, and at showing their abilities, potential and aspirations, has made them more self-confident in preparing the ground for welcoming and hosting tourists from countries around the Mediterranean and beyond, and to build an enabling environment for the creation of economic opportunities in the sustainable tourism sector.

The short-term impact of the project is visible in its tangible results such as the development of new businesses and the growth of existing ones, and the increase in the economic value of the environmental, cultural and historical assets present in the area, but also in its intangible results that include the strengthening of resilience of local communities, the increase in solidarity and collaboration between multiple actors, the empowerment of women and social changes. The CROSSDEV project has been a good practice of cultural exchange and of spreading happiness and hope.



# PEOPLE

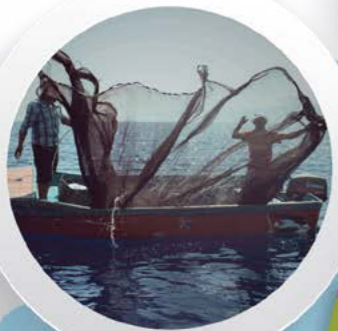
**400+**

## PEOPLE TECHNICALLY TRAINED

Guides, small business owners, tourist services, cultural heritage managers, young entrepreneurs, students, women associations, food producers

**3500+**

people actively involved in awareness campaigns and in awareness and sensitization activities



**24**

Grants awarded

**170**

Private actors/enterprises/SMEs involved

# TOURISM

**45.000+**

TOURISTS VISITING THE NEW DESTINATIONS IN THE LAST 4 YEARS

**13**

NEW SUSTAINABLE ITINERARIES CREATED

With experiences focused on culture, adventure, nature, sport, art, food & wine. All created with the local communities.

**5**

LOCAL ACTION PLANS

**23**

Cultural and historical sites improved, requalified, equipped

**70+**

VISIBILITY AND PROMOTIONAL INITIATIVES

Educational and press tours, international B2B meetings, tour operator site tests, exhibitions, awareness and clean-up campaigns, school trips

**250+**

INTEREST POINTS MAPPED

**56** attractions

**31** small towns and villages

**125** tourism services

**39** experiences

**11** events



## ***CROSSDEV and the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe***

***By Emanuela Panke***

*President of Iter Vitis - Cultural Route of the Council of Europe*

The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe is a program established in 1987 with the declaration of Santiago de Compostela: the Cultural Routes are networks set up to promote the principles underlying all the values and policies of the Council of Europe: human rights, cultural democracy, cultural diversity, mutual understanding, and cross-border exchanges. Today there are 48 certified Cultural Routes and they cross 50 countries. About 30 of them pass through Italy and two are based in Sicily: Iter Vitis and La Rotta dei Fenici.

The idea of CISP, to write a cooperation project based on the model of the Cultural Routes, and in particular on the two that originate from Sicily, has been remarkably farsighted and incredibly interesting for the involved territories from the beginning, not only from the point of view of the potential linked to the development of forms of sustainable tourism and the impact on the local economy, but for its value in terms of diplomacy and intercultural dialogue.

Indeed, the Council of Europe points out that – through a journey through space and time – the Cultural Routes demonstrate how the heritage of the different countries and different cultures of Europe contributes to creating a shared and living cultural heritage. In the case of CROSSDEV, this definition becomes more appropriate than ever, since the project uses the route in its virtual dimension, not a traced linear path, but an ideal path including various kinds of topics, as a virtuous tool for uniting the two shores of the Mediterranean.

The maritime routes of the Phoenicians and the journey of the vine in the Mediterranean become the starting point for seeking historical, landscape, archaeological and gastronomic affinities, stimulating dialogue, breaking down cultural and linguistic barriers and inviting reasoning on common policies and strategies aimed at building sustainable tourism products.



Once used as a passepartout, the Routes model is shaped and adapted according to the needs and nature of the project areas and becomes a magic box containing tourism packages, events, moments of visibility for all partners. The strength of a Route such as Iter Vitis, for example, counting 24 country members, is primarily that of guaranteeing visibility throughout the European continent (an area much larger than that of the European Union) and in a series of other countries with which it shares the tradition of wine production with all its members and with all the projects in which it is involved. By transferring this assumption to the CROSSDEV project, the idea was successful because it not only implied the simple application of the routes model for the creation of new tourist products but made it possible to use routes already established and affiliated to the project as an amplifier for all the project activities and for all the partner activities, inserting the partners in international circuits otherwise difficult to access.

From the international award to the tourism and archeology exhibitions, and the institutional meetings of the Council of Europe: CROSSDEV and its partners have been closely linked to the route for four years, optimizing visibility of the project results. On the other hand, being a part of CROSSDEV was also a success for the Cultural Routes program, not only for the prestige of having a project inspired by its management system, but also because it represented an opportunity to involve countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, where the presence of Routes is limited, with concrete actions in the field. CROSSDEV was therefore absolutely in line with the recent recommendation adopted by the European Parliament on 14 September 2022 in relation to the "Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighborhood" – a new agenda for the Mediterranean. Among its indications, the text highlights the opportunity to strengthen the presence and promotion of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe in which the countries of the southern shore participate, including Iter Vitis and the Phoenician's Route. The recommendation therefore represents further proof of the coherence of the project with the European sustainable development strategy, already anticipated and theorized by CROSSDEV well in advance at the time of its drafting in 2017.

## ***The Role of Culture and Cultural Heritage in Regenerating Marginal Territories and Lesser-Known Tourist Destinations***

***By Alessandra Lucchese***

*Official, General Secretariat, Italian Ministry of Culture*

The Cultural Itinerary of the Council of Europe is defined as "a route that crosses one or more countries or regions, and which is organized around themes of European historical, artistic or social interest, both by reason of the geographical layout of the itinerary and according to its content and meaning". Furthermore, Cultural Routes put into practice the values promoted by the Council of Europe: human rights, cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and mutual cross-border exchanges.

Considering the Cultural Itinerary as a tool for economic and social growth, for CROSSDEV project intended to create a system of good practices among partners to promote the cultural identity of the reference territories and ensure participatory local development. In this model, the local community becomes the holder, I would say, tutelary deity and ambassador of its material and immaterial traditions, cultural heritage, and of its conservation and sustainable valorization.

It is that heritage community referred to in the Faro Convention, ratified by Italy in 2020, that recognizes the value of the cultural heritage defined and safeguarded by the same community and that therefore must be fully involved in the territorial governance processes.

In this way, thanks to this collective involvement of people who live and feed the places, it is possible to create a highly experiential cultural tourism offer, capable – with a coherent and non-mediated narration – of transferring to tourists the most identifying characteristics of destinations. This allows tourists to understand the value of the traditions and cultural heritage, making it easier to preserve the ecosystem with greater awareness. The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe also offer a model of cultural cooperation through the cross-border exchange of people, ideas, and heritage and above all through participation.

With this perspective, the Italian Ministry of Culture, a member of the Partial Agreement on Cultural Itineraries and partner of the CROSSDEV project, shared its experiences that in past years have led to the adoption of the National Strategy on Sustainable Tourism, developed with a strongly participatory, bottom-up approach. Furthermore, initiatives aimed at supporting, for example, villages, local products, unexplored routes, and slow tourism. It was a valuable opportunity for exchanging and reflecting within the partnership on how cultural policies for promoting cultural itineraries, as supported by the Council of Europe, can represent a local development method, for tourist resorts on the margins of international circuits, that places communities at the centre of change to generate wealth, job opportunities and social inclusion. In fact, the cultural itinerary acts as a catalyst for the economic, social, and cultural growth of lesser-known territories that could benefit from their own natural, historical, archaeological, and anthropological resources.

The Italian Ministry of Culture supported partners in each area in developing local action plans elaborated through an analysis of the specificities, from the point of view of the tourist offer and the available cultural and natural resources. This to transform the identified itineraries, which touch little-known locations compared to the major tourist attractions or international circuits, into new tourist products for the international market to offer through the digital platform "Hidden Mediterranean" created by the project. To crown this result, the Ministry of Culture promoted initiatives to share common values and recognize the cultural heritage as a tool for promoting Mediterranean tourist destinations and strengthening cooperation between countries to exchange knowledge and good practices, while promoting quality tourism services and sustainability principles in cultural tourism.

The CROSSDEV project has fully suffered the effects of the pandemic, which on the one hand at least partially prevented direct knowledge of the tourist destinations involved in the initiative, while on the other it legitimized greater cohesion of methodologies, good practices and experiences among partners, beyond physical and geographical distances.

In this particular context, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage has made its experience and technical skills available to guarantee partners moments of reflection and insights on issues such as the involvement of communities in sustainable tourism initiatives adhering to the development objectives of the 2030 Agenda, the theme of accessibility in places of culture for an inclusive tourist offer, also thanks to the use of technologies.



The adaptation of tourist services and operators' skills to the new needs of society, in particular in Europe, is affected by demographic devolution and aging. In 2050, over 33% of the world's population, equal to one and a half billion people, will be over 65, and this will also have implications for tourism supply and demand in terms of the competencies and skills of the employees of the sectors involved. From a transnational cooperation point of view, the Italian Ministry of Culture has shared the political guidelines expressed over the years with cultural diplomacy in order to strengthen the principle of the Mediterranean as a space of dialogue, peace, and development throughout culture, cultural heritage, and creative sectors, as drivers for growth and intercultural dialogue between the two shores. The Mediterranean basin is an important area in which many cultures, traditions, and cultural heritages have met together over all the centuries, although today it has become an area of fragility and crises, especially after the pandemic.

For this reason, in December 2021, the Ministry of Culture integrated the project activities by proposing an international online workshop entitled "European design experiences on the cultural itineraries of the Council of Europe. Comparisons and perspectives". It put together different project experiences, financed by various European Programs, that started from the Cultural Itineraries, as defined by the Council of Europe, to experiment with activities and policies for tourism promotion, enhancement of cultural and natural resources, analysis and study, exchanges, good practices, training and tools for the cultural promotion of the destinations. All experiences presented at the meeting are connected to an idea of tourism in which culture and cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, are the engine of development that must be talked about with the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean in order to find and share new cultural management models for a sustainable future. And from this point of view, the cultural itinerary represents the right tool for sharing "values as a common heritage that goes beyond national borders" (the ICOMOS Charter on cultural routes, 2008).

In the field of cultural diplomacy, the Ministry of Culture promoted the CROSSDEV project at the First Conference of Culture Ministers of the Euro-Mediterranean Region/EU Southern Partnership. With this Conference, held in Naples on 16-17 June 2022, Italy gave impetus to the new European Agenda for the Mediterranean. In the session dedicated to "Migration and mobility. Fostering the mobility, upskill and reskill of artists and culture professionals in the Euro Mediterranean region", the CROSSDEV project was presented as the experience that – through cultural itineraries – involves local communities even in difficult areas at an international level such as in Palestine, providing expectations of economic and social development.

From the southern Mediterranean came the request to strengthen cultural cooperation between the two shores, to create networks for an exchange of expertise, to support training and enhancement courses of excellence on the management and protection of cultural heritage.

In conclusion, the participation of the Italian Ministry of Culture in the CROSSDEV project has shown two important pieces of evidence. The first is that culture and cultural heritage are effective levers for sustainable development even for marginal, rural territories, such as the ones identified by the partners, but that are endowed with wealth and ancient tangible and intangible heritages, that with their diversity and peculiarities can feed the tourist offer also thanks to the support of local communities. The cultural itineraries promoted by CROSSDEV differ from each other in terms of cultural heritage but are linked by the fact that each of them represents the thread of connection between the various riches of the territories they cross. They are shaped by the centuries-old contributions of the communities that preserve natural, cultural heritages reflected in them, and that feed their places to be discovered and re-evaluated.

The second is how it is necessary, mostly through cultural diplomacy, to build spaces for common discussion at an international level, to identify shared paths of growth between the two shores of the Mediterranean that can find the fourth pillar of development in culture to face the important and pressing challenges we are experiencing on a global scale. It requires the construction of a constant, permanent, and constructive dialogue capable of appreciating and respecting the diversities that are rooted in cultural heritage linked to different territories and traditions as an intrinsic value for the development of humanity.



## PALESTINE | *Strengthening Sustainable and Diversified Rural Economy*

*By Raed Saade, Community Based Tourism expert  
and Ghaida Rahil, Project Manager, PH Trail*

### Methodology and Concepts

Interpretive methods follow a process of conveying a message that relies on touching the senses in order for the idea to find itself in the hearts of those involved. Once this happens, a base is formed to unite people around a certain conceptual vision, which in turn guarantees a more lasting effect and genuine sustainability on one hand, but also entices innovation and creativity on the other. This approach helps determine the dos and don'ts that decision makers need to be aware of in order to protect and build upon the core values that promote and enhance their competitiveness and individuality. The Palestinian Heritage Trail (PHT) organized its intervention in this endeavor based on this spirit, as it embarked on extending the trail from Beit Mersim to Battir.

Along the route, there are tremendous richness and diversity of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, ready to be discovered, explored, interpreted and titled in order to emphasize the values of beauty and inherent civilization that exist in each corner of the Palestinian landscape, and among each space that has belonged to the Palestinian presence throughout history. This richness provides the platform based on which a variety of tourism programs can be woven. These programs may be categorized and organized through the eyes and overview of the local community, and in particular the stakeholders that are part of the tourism value chain of the projected development. This is vital in order to disseminate and promote a number of engaging and interactive programs for discerning visitors. Based on interpretation, searching for such uniqueness starts in the hearts of the local residents, the true owners of their potential, history, heritage and individualistic identities. Indeed, the potential for tourism development does not only depend on the number of sites and attractiveness of the landscape, but also on the presence of sincere and active community leaders in the cultural heritage realm. Hence, the Palestinian Heritage Trail policy is first and foremost to ensure the acceptance and approval of the targeted local communities to engage in the development of the trail as planned. This blessing is key for the next steps to take place and it is a prerequisite for the examination of the trail.



This leads to the process of how self-esteem among the local residents of the various communities can develop towards a self-actualized sense of protection of the existing and of the potential cultural heritage. The purpose of the Palestinian Heritage Trail is ultimately to create the necessary conditions for a cultural heritage protection plan. Without protection, a prosperous tourism profile cannot be created in the targeted areas. Protection is also the basis of a tool for resilience and identity building for the various targeted communities. Hence the trail is more than a walking path, it is a way forward and a platform for resilience, protection and progress. The trail also connects the various villages and governorates together by packaging their resources, products and their services into synergized programs. Furthermore, this is ground material for fostering twinning agreements or for employing such agreements with towns, governorates and districts in selected countries all over the world. Based on this, the stakeholders should be carefully approached and training needs to be arranged and delivered to improve the communities' capacities in this respect.

### The Palestinian Heritage Trail Approach as Implemented in the CROSSDEV Project

The CROSSDEV project aims to extend the PHT from Beit Mersim to Battir. All of the targeted communities have been approached, the trail has been examined, the stakeholders have been engaged and their capacities have been improved in order to realize a number of vibrant segments of the trail that are able to convey their unique identities and provide the services that guests would need. Below, the PHT approach is described as it was implemented in this project.

### Needs Assessment and Development of the Local Action Plan

When investigating the tourism potential of a certain area, it is often the case to look for and collect data and make a survey of its sites, infrastructure, and businesses. Although this information is certainly needed, a more interpretive approach to exploring a certain area will contribute towards a focused vision that is value based and that can be presented in the simplest possible form, in order to make it available for all sectors of society, including young children at school.

The first step which PHT took to develop community-based tourism (CBT) in the new area was to introduce the concepts of community-based tourism to the municipalities and village councils, as well as a number of stakeholders and identified cultural heritage leaders. Their approval of the trail passing through their villages and their readiness to engage in the trails endeavor are prerequisites for moving on towards the next step.

The next step was conducting the needs assessment. This process used different data collection tools such as questionnaires, focus groups, observations and interviews. It engaged the stakeholders in discussions to highlight their views and to investigate their awareness of their touristic components, products and potential opportunities as well as risks in their regions. A comprehensive community-based tourism action plan was developed based on the needs assessment findings. The plan linked together all the socio-economic and cultural fabric of the society. This included how tourism will weave its relationship with the commercial sector, the community-based organizations and schools, as well as its relationship with the various tourism services. The plan reflected what to do, when, where and how, in order to produce a complete tourism product. The plan built on the strengths, resources and opportunities of each community, at the same time building capacities to overcome the weaknesses and minimizing the impacts of the threats.

### Newly developed Local Tourism Committees and Clusters

The very first thing to establish when a village or a cluster of villages decides to move forward with a cultural heritage and a tourism development plan is to establish specialized governance. In order to have the local communities along the new segment come together to think and act as a unit and be able to implement the developed action plan, PHT took the initiative to work with the local communities on forming "Local Tourism Committees" (LTCs) that included representatives from each local authority, service providers and other main stakeholders and CBOs, such as women's centres, youth centres and active individuals. Each LTC had 4-9 members depending on the size of the community. Each LTC elected a representative to become a member of the "Cluster Tourism Committee" (CTC), These LTCs and CTCs are meant to work together to develop CBT experiences in areas.





## Walking Trails Developed in the New Area between Beit Mersim to Battir

The walking trails have proven to be resilient to the political and security situation. They can also bring income and job opportunities to rural communities. The development of these walking trails has been supported by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA). In 2017, MOTA released a national strategy that aims at “promoting the national image as an independent, safe, and distinguished destination, supporting a high-quality tourist product, rich in religious, cultural, historical and natural resources”.

PHT identified and generally defined the new segment between Beit Mersim and Battir on maps. The new segment is around 60 km long, it crosses 16 communities and contains 4 sections, one of which is suitable for disabled people. The trail was then waymarked in order to lead visitors and guests along its routes. Notes were collected and added to the maps to provide discerning visitors with the information needed to find their way at intersections and historic sites. A segment dedicated to disabled people was also finalized in order to engage people with special needs in the development of the trail.

### Identified and Engaged Stakeholders

The PH trail is more than just a hiking trail. It is a means of meeting and making connections with local Palestinians and hikers from all over the world. The Path does not only invite hikers to experience nature but also to expand their horizons towards the shared common values that they would share with the local community and the friendships they would create along the way. Hence the stakeholders need to be properly identified and engaged. The new segment of the trail crosses 16 villages and about 60 km of route. There are a number of service providers, but which are not up to the desired standards of a tourism offer. Some families along the trail are living below the poverty line. However, the trail can entice people to prepare and engage in creating services for potential visitors such as homestays, guest houses, local guides, tour agents, restaurants, civil society organizations, local producer groups and others.

43 stakeholders were identified based on their vested interest in and connection to the trail and the cultural heritage that exists along its path. Stakeholders at this stage included women’s centres, homestays, small and medium enterprises, as well as licensed and local guides. Stakeholders are then made more aware about the trail and the community-based tourism development, concepts and methodology. Stakeholders received technical training in this respect. And some of them were provided with small grants and financial support to prepare and improve their services. 237 people, including the participation of 46 organizations were part of 11 training sessions and workshops.



## 21 Identified and Trained Local Guides

The guides are local. They are usually young men and women from each village who have interest in their own cultural heritage, history, environment and production. The program is not licensed, so these young guides are often called non-guide guides, because they know their town very well and they know its daily dynamics, but they need further training to be licensed by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. The most important role of these guides is to convert the visitor into a guest.

## Established Accommodation Facilities

When tourists stay overnight, their spending increases. People are encouraged to provide further services, products and activities to engage them. Tourist services would include folklore shows, cooking classes, biking, traditional and heritage games, films, bonfires, star gazing, inner town trails, retreat facilities etc. Four accommodation facilities have been identified by PHT in the new segment.

## Established Cooperative and Women's Centre Businesses

The presence of several agricultural cooperatives and women's centres in the targeted villages opens up the opportunity to organize and invest in business projects linked to the cooperatives' and centres' activities. These can include restaurants or kitchens providing traditional food, gift shops, cooking classes, cooperative embroidery and seasonal agricultural products etc.

## Unique Handcraft Designs Produced by PHT Service Providers

The unique quality about handcraft design is the memorabilia that guests would like to take home with them to remember their visits and experiences. Hence, it is only logical to design local handcrafts that do just that. These handcrafts should be inspired by the local values and competencies, reflect the stories transcended from one generation to another and portray the most distinctive images of the local communities along the new segment.





### Organized Community Events

Part of the PHT strategy to attract visitors and guests to explore local attractions and buy local products is to organize one or two community events or festivals each year. These events will promote the local skills and cultural heritage identities and are representative of the iconic cultural heritage identities in the targeted villages, hence it should be carefully designed to maintain uniqueness and competitiveness. PHT and the “Cluster Tourism Committee” (CTC) have identified two annual iconic events which will be implemented by the local communities every year.

### Enhanced Heritage Sites – Protected Historic and Natural Sites

Villages who are still maintaining some of their architectural heritage, should rezone their remaining sites and define them as historic centres. PHT invests in protecting and improving the value and infrastructure of the various identified sites. A number of grants were provided to the local authorities to protect the cultural and historical sites and provide services near them. Seven cultural and natural sites were improved, such as springs, inter-community trails, Maqams, natural sites and public parks.

### Documented Tangible and Intangible Heritage

Based on its strategy to realize the planned development and on its understanding of community-based tourism methods and approach, PHT invests in improving the necessary skills of the local community. Needless to say, tangible and intangible heritage and storytelling were collected and documented. A number of activities were organized to enhance and raise the awareness of the local communities as well as actors involved in the existing cultural heritage. The material was approved by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and there are plans to produce a book of all the material that was collected.

## Fostered Environmental Awareness and Cultural Protection

PHT strategy promotes environmental awareness and fosters community responsibility in its preservation of the historical and natural sites. PHT organized awareness campaign where more than 774 students, representatives from the village's councils, women's centres, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Youth, and volunteers participated in different activities, such as cleaning-up sessions along the trail and the historical and natural sites connected to it. Social media campaigns, training, information panels and other tools were organized and installed to contribute to the preservation of the historical and natural sites.

## Increased Visibility and Promotional Activities

After the products and services along the trail had been properly packaged, a marketing plan and a number of tools and methods were employed and put together to promote the various designed tours and excursions. A promotional walk for journalists was organized and a number of films were produced. A map and a brochure to promote service providers, products and itineraries were developed. Further ahead a number of "fam trips", promotional walks, local festivals and a thru-walk are planned.



## NEXT STEPS

### Create a Brand

The specific identities that were identified for each village should provide the basis for the destination branding. The brand is not only a logo, but more importantly a story to be told and remembered. It is also a souvenir to be bought by visitors and a handcraft to be designed and produced by the local artisans. The brand is the reputation and the perception that the local leadership needs to generate. In order to do that, it should be persistently and deliberately nourished, so that it grows slowly and becomes well known for the discerning visitor. Hence, each of the villages involved should create a title for its distinctive values based on an interpretive analysis of its unique tangible and intangible heritage as well as capacities.

### Create Marketing Digital Tools

Information and access to information is the name of the game. As the world's digital platforms are expanding and as information is only the press of a button away, the local destination needs to build its own digital tools. Each village can create its own websites, Facebook and Instagram pages, and can find its way on TripAdvisor, Booking.com and other similar platforms. What is vital is how to create an impact and be well heard and known. The Palestinian Heritage Trail is already one of the Hidden Mediterranean destinations developed by the CROSSDEV project. Find out more in the following platform: [www.hiddenmediterranean.net](http://www.hiddenmediterranean.net).

**a. The Platform:** Designing an interactive website, a mobile application, a logo, some short promotional videos and other promotional materials and tools is a vital tool for promotion as well as increase in awareness. Building such a PLATFORM requires more than technical and artistic design, it is wise to suggest and recommend a strategy of networking with other platforms that are involved in similar endeavors in the area or beyond. This will help provide maintenance, added promotions and references to lobby and advocate for such interesting and lesser-known destinations. Such networking should not be limited to local and national organizations but should attempt to mobilize international platforms as well, in order to foster a bottom up networking effort. Connecting to NEPTO, the Network for Experiential Palestinian Tourism Organizations, is recommended.

**b. User-friendly interface:** Building a platform is not only a technical matter, indeed, the attractiveness and ease of use should be reviewed carefully, as this is a tool that aims at attracting people most of whom probably do not have much time to search. It should create a balance between information and attractiveness. It also should intuitively and creatively be interactive and fun to use. It should be ready to interface with other databases when necessary and should have a database designed to enhance exchange of information and to foster synergies.

### Establish an Interpretation Centre

The interpretation centre is an interactive local narrative centre that aims to preserve, protect and promote the local heritage and identities. The director of the centre can be the same director of the DMO (the destination management organization, regardless of its form of governance) whose office can also be located in the centre.

### Networks and Partnerships

One of the first things that can be done is to consolidate the efforts of all the CTCs existing all over Palestine. The purpose is to create a strong lobbying power to achieve their aspirations. This can be immediately fostered by joining NEPTO, the Network of Experiential Palestinian Tourism Organizations which is already advocating for such ideals.

### Encourage Investment from the Private Sector

Any investor is welcome to establish any visitor attraction or/and tourism private services such as restaurants, hotels, transportation, pools and shops, preferably encompassing the core values and identities of the villages and abiding by the set of rules and regulations in terms of building codes and maintaining and protecting the local character and culture.



## ITALY | *Enhancing Lesser-Known Tourist Destinations Using Smart Ways as a Virtuous Model. The Example of the Ancient Via Selinuntina*

*By Antonio Barone and Sara Ferrari*

*Director and Executive Secretary*

*The Phoenicians' Route - Cultural Route of the Council of Europe*

A journey that starts from the huge park of antiquity that is Sicily, in Italy. The largest island in the Mediterranean offers an invaluable endowment of areas that conceal heritages and histories of a fascinating past. Alongside the largest and most famous globally, there are also many areas that are still undiscovered or not so well known.

A valuable heritage, strategic for the development of cultural tourism, which, when enriched with encounters with local communities, can offer travelers a unique experience, in contact with a thousand-year-old history and tradition.

### **Community Engagement along the Ancient Via Selinuntina**

As a result of the pandemic, world tourism scenarios have changed. We speak of regenerative tourism, which is different from sustainable tourism. Not only are the effects on the environment considered, but also aspects such as the impact on the economy, identity, inhabitants and culture of the areas visited. Regenerative tourism is rooted in regenerative development and design. While sustainable travel aims to offset the negative impacts associated with travel, regenerative tourism is about actively improving the social and environmental conditions of host communities.

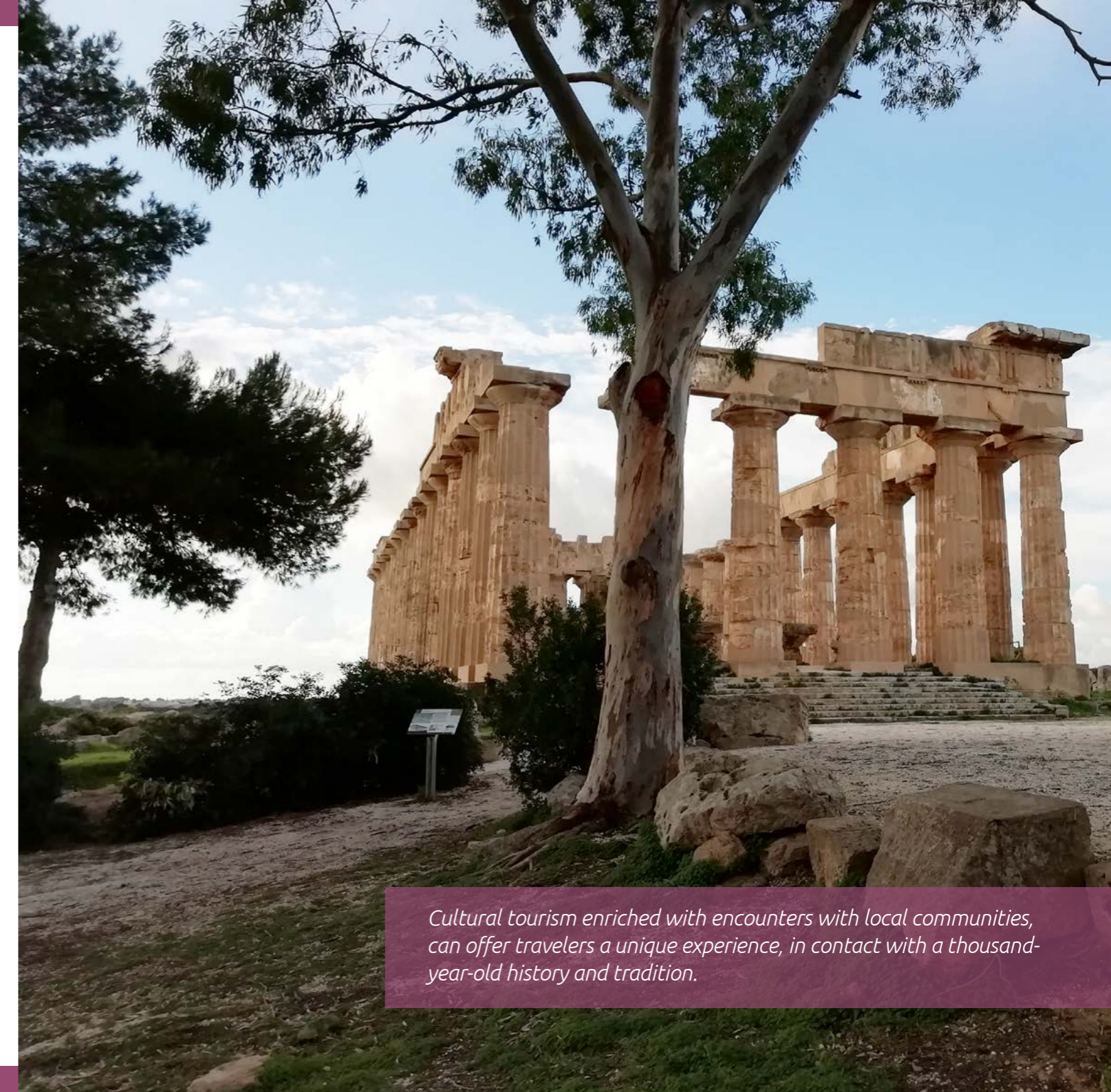
Thanks to the CROSSDEV project, with the collaboration of two Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe based in Sicily, the Phoenician's Route and Iter Vitis, in Selinunte and Sambuca di Sicilia respectively, important actions have been carried out aimed at cultural and tourist operators in an area along the Ancient Selinuntina Way, to help territories enhance their resources and propose creative and sustainable tourism experiences.

The result is that many existing experiences have been networked. Others were born as a result of the Capacity Building meetings: all this allows visitors to come into contact with local communities in an innovative way, while also bringing positive economic spin-offs to the territories.

All this translates into the Smart Way concept, a methodology of the Phoenicians' Route also applied in the CROSSDEV project. The Ancient Via Selinuntina is a Smart Way, a path of excellence based on the identification of cultural and tourism attractors in the concerned areas, networking activities and creating a sustainable integrated supply chain where the chosen "Smart Way" acts as a collector of heritages, communities and individual services, developing a territorial quality brand.

The territories chosen for the Smart Ways are areas that lend themselves to the development of a territorial circuit aimed at creating greater integration between the "territory" and "attractions", not only elements of "high" culture, but also the landscape values, the values of the local community, the crafts, folklore, food and wine, the atmosphere. The development of the road theme is understood as a route to follow by stages with its own and original characteristics, a new mode over which are structured pathways based on slow, sustainable, creative, experiential, social and responsible tourism. A circuit between different realities, aimed at increasing the visits of sites and areas with lower affluence.

At the centre of the Smart Ways model and its implementation, there are the Local Communities, a variegated set of public and private bodies and associations that, taking advantage of the Faro Convention Forums experience and good practices, take up the challenge of innovation, focusing on a vision of creative and sustainable tourism development, which translates into concrete social, environmental and economic benefits for the area, through a strategy of full exploitation of the cultural and natural heritage.



*Cultural tourism enriched with encounters with local communities, can offer travelers a unique experience, in contact with a thousand-year-old history and tradition.*



## **Area of Intervention in Sicily of the CROSSDEV Project, Results Achieved through the Involvement of Two Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe**

The chosen area covers the so-called “Valle del Belice”, which has a geography spanning three provinces (Trapani-Palermo-Agrigento), touching the southern coast of Sicily; with inland areas that have both Castelvetrano (Trapani) and Sciacca (Agrigento) as their first-level polarization centres, but also includes some municipalities in the province of Palermo, in the upper reaches of the Belice river. This is an area that, since the earthquake of 1968, has seen the number of residents halved. The loss of residents has been accompanied by other indicators of socio-demographic malaise, from the progressive ageing of the population to employment difficulties, especially for the young and female categories of the workforce. From the point of view of economic activities, the Belice Valley area is characterized by a strong agricultural vocation, centred on viticulture and olive growing to such an extent that we can speak of a bi-crop agriculture. This is evidenced by the presence of protection consortia for the wine and olive production (both oil and table olives), numerous certified denominations of origin products and the recognition of dedicated districts. The industrial sector plays a fairly residual role in the Belice economy and is geared mainly to the processing of agricultural products (mainly wine, oil and cheese). The development of the tourism sector in the area is mostly limited to the coastal areas and still very much linked to the beach tourism offer.

From a historical and cultural point of view, the territory is characterized, like much of Sicilian territory, by the presence of numerous historical stratifications, evidenced by the numerous archaeological areas from the Neolithic period (Contrada Stretto in Partanna, Monte Polizo in Salemi), from the Elymian (Entella), as well as testimonies from the Greek-Punic period (e.g. Monte Adranone in Sambuca di Sicilia), often linked to the nearby Selinunte (of which the Belice is the hinterland). In more recent times, both Arab and later dominations have left numerous traces that can be found both in the ancient villages dotted around the Belice (Salemi, Sambuca di Sicilia, Partanna, Caltabellotta) and in the management of agriculture (including the management of water for irrigation). The earthquake of 1968, in addition to destroying a large part of the Belice towns, would also cover that story of social redemption for many years, which in recent years, however, has again been rediscovered and valorized as a founding cultural element of the modern Belice community. And Gibellina, despite many difficulties, represents its spearhead.



Since its design, the CROSSDEV project has involved two historical Cultural Routes recognized by the Council of Europe: the Phoenicians' Route and Iter Vitis. The Phoenicians' Route refers to the connection of the major nautical routes which were used by the Phoenicians and other great ancient civilizations such as the Greeks, Romans, Etruscans and Iberians since the twelfth century BC as essential routes for trade and cultural communication in the Mediterranean. Using these routes, the Phoenicians – genial sailors and merchants – gave origin to a great civilization, in some way still little known, that asserted itself through an expansion towards the West, producing an intense exchange of manufactured articles, people and ideas and contributing in ancient times to the creation of a *koinè*, a Mediterranean cultural community and to the circulation of this culture.

The Iter Vitis Route tells of the culture of the vine, winemaking and viticultural landscapes as an important part of European and Mediterranean food culture. Since the domestication of the vine, several thousand years ago, its evolution and spread has been considered a great human achievement, which has shaped Europe's landscapes, both in terms of its territory and its people.

Thanks to a series of public training, awareness and information events on sustainable tourism issues, important results have been achieved for the territory: the creation of a Working Group of volunteers to build a database of information for the promotion of the territory; the training of a group of students, tourist and cultural operators coming from numerous territories of the Belice area on the issue of experiential, responsible and community-based tourism; a thorough analysis of the capacity of cultural sites to promote microenterprises so as to attract new travelers along the Smart Way "Via Selinuntina". This synergic action has not only increased the skills of the operators working in the area, but also enhanced certain areas (such as the creation of an interpretation centre for the CROSSDEV project in Menfi, which is to all intents and purposes a hub for presenting the area and its proposals) and given rise to innovative products that have been on the market since 2022 and are yielding good results. It was not just an end in itself but a wide-ranging strategy that will continue to be applied and grow in its positive effects thanks to the fact that the two Cultural Routes are permanent networks and will continue to operate in that specific territory.

If prior to the CROSSDEV project only a few famous landmarks, such as the archaeological park of Selinunte, were known, now an entire area is beginning to be better known, giving voice to places that are no lesser in terms of material and immaterial cultural heritage.



*Regenerative tourism is about actively improving the social and environmental conditions of host communities.*



### **Food and Wine Tour Experience in Menfi**

In the heart of “Menfishire”, one of the most important winegrowing districts in Sicily, stands the new Mandrarossa Winery: 700 square meters constructed on several levels, almost entirely hidden beneath the natural slope of the land, accommodating the new barrel cellar, two tasting rooms, a wine shop and a terrace overlooking the wild nature and the pristine sea of Menfi, awarded with a Blue Flag for 22 years. A frontier that is perfectly integrated with the surrounding landscape, at about 90 m a.s.l., the new winery is found amidst an enchanting scenery, in absolute harmony with the land. Its architectural design combines the identity of its location and the history of a territory shaped by man, the Menfi countryside, covered with vineyards sloping towards the sea and stretches of olive groves. The Mandrarossa winery is a landmark of an unexpected Sicily, an unconventional territory. For who wants to explore the winery, drink good wine and taste the local food, surrounded by vineyards and the sea.

### **Olive Oil Experience in Castelvetro**

The adventure begins with a guided tour of the Centonze farm, with a short walk through the olive groves, during which all the information about the methods used on the farm for growing olives and citrus fruits will be provided. During the harvesting period, in October and November, the visit ends at the oil mill, where visitors witness the milling of the freshly harvested olives at close quarters.

The tour ends with a tasting session, served inside the Baglio, where the absolute protagonist will be the Extra Virgin Olive Oil, with its special flavor due to the olive trees having their roots in the old Latomie, where the stone used to build the temples of Selinunte was quarried, accompanied by the famous Castelvetro black bread.

### **Attending the Fish Auction in Selinunte**

Every morning, in Selinunte, a small crowd gathers to see – and buy – what fishermen have brought back from their night of work. It's the traditional fish auction: people have to judge what is offered only by the look of it (the fish are not weighed). The initial price is called and then it drops until someone nods or slightly waves his hand. Then it goes back up as long as better offers are made.

**Experience ArcheoTrekking** in the Foce del Fiume Belice Oriented Nature Reserve and within the Selinunte and Cave di Cusa Archaeological Park with the Heritage Storytellers of the Phoenicians' Route – Cultural Route of the Council of Europe.

### Art Experience in Gibellina

Every year, the Museum of Mediterranean Wefts in Gibellina hosts artists from all over the Mediterranean who produce their works on site, involving the local community. Participating in these art workshops is therefore a unique experience of intercultural dialogue.





## **Ancient Via Selinuntina: History**

The Greeks of the Western world built an arterial road along the Sicilian coast, so as to connect the colonies of Akrai and Kasmenai, going on to Camarina, Gela and Agrigento, then as far as Selinunte. The Via Selinuntina is named after it. Afterward, the Romans extended the route to Lilibeo (today's Marsala) and Erice. The 115 state road re-traces this route as heir of the Ancient Via Selinuntina and two Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe: The Phoenicians' Route and Iter Vitis Route offer it as a Sicilian original tour of archaeological sites, UNESCO sites, art cities, and areas of environmental and landscape value. The journey begins from Syracuse, the most important city of Greek Sicily. Its centre is Ortygia, located on the island of the same name and extraordinarily rich in monuments: among them, the Temple of Apollo and, overlooking one of the most evocative squares of Italy, the Cathedral of Syracuse, with its Baroque and Rococo exterior, built incorporating the Temple of Athena in the current church. Nearby is the Fountain of Arethusa, a body of water that flows into the Grand Port of Syracuse and that takes its name from the myth of the nymph Arethusa and her lover Alpheus.

Ortygia, along with the Neapolis Archaeological Park, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which contains most of the remains of ancient Syracuse. Among them, the Theater, the Temple of Apollo, the Altar of Hieron, the Roman amphitheater, the Latomìe del Paradiso and di Santa Venera, ancient stone quarries surrounded by orange and secular trees enclosing suggestive caves such as the Grotta dei Cordari, Grotta del Salnitro and the Ear of Dionysius. Mighty walls converged from the sea to the hinterland in the Euryalus Fortress, located in Belvedere hamlet, a masterpiece of military architecture built between 402 and 397 BC.

From Syracuse, we can imagine a detour along the Via Elorina, heading south, to visit Helorus, near Noto, with its Baroque palaces, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Helorus' archaeology presents a large sacred area, numerous temples and the Koreion, a sanctuary dedicated to Demeter and Kore. Following the Via Selinuntina, instead, we move inland towards the modern Palazzolo Acreide, where Akrai rose, founded by the Syracusans in 664 BC. Here we find the theater, the bouleuterion and the acropolis, with the foundation stones of the Temple of Aphrodite and also the Santoni, a rocky sanctuary consecrated to the cult of the goddess Cybele. There are also the remains of Porta Selinuntina, a tangible sign of the road that connected to Kasmenai and Camarina.

The next step of the Way leads us to the western coast, to Gela, the ancient Geloi, one of the largest Greek colonies in Sicily. The city developed on the hill whose eastern end, today called Molino a Vento, was the seat of the acropolis. Next to it, Gela Archaeological Museum provides documentary evidence of the ancient history of the area, from prehistory to the medieval age. Driving alongside the sea towards the north, Akragas, the medieval Girgenti and modern Agrigento: one of the most important Mediterranean poleis. The Archaeological Park Valle dei Templi – one of the most visited cultural sites in Italy – is divided into several areas. A walk connects the Temple of Juno to the Temple of Concordia and the Temple of Heracles. The Temple of Concordia, the best-preserved Doric temple, was converted into a Christian basilica in the 6th century and dedicated to the apostles Peter and Paul. The Temple of the Olympian Zeus and the Temple of the Dioscuri follow, together with the sacred area consecrated to the cult of the Chthonic deities (Demeter and Kore); at the end, the Colimbetra and the Temple of Hephaestus (Vulcan). The Temple of Olympian Zeus is characterized by its colossal size and a sequence of huge sculptures (the Telamones) on the external wall, in between the columns. After the Archaeological site of Heraclea Minoa, with its evocative Theatre, the next stop is Menfi.

A Punic-Roman wreck has been found in the nearby seaboard of Porto Palo, now housed in Palazzo Pignatelli, where there is also an Interpretation Centre of the Phoenicians' Route/Iter Vitis Route. Sambuca di Sicilia awaits us about twenty kilometers inland, one of the "Italy's Most Beautiful Villages", with its Saracen district and the archaeological site of Monte Adranone; the archaeological museum set up in the seventeenth-century Palazzo Panitteri is worth a visit, and here you can also find another Interpretation Centre of the Phoenicians' Route and Iter Vitis Route.

Selinunte is another great Mediterranean city of antiquity and owes its name to selinon, a wild parsley growing near the mouth of the river Modione. Thanks to its position, it developed fruitful trade, especially with the Punics living in the western part of Sicily and in nearby Carthage. Involved in the hostilities among the Greeks, and between the Greeks and the Punics, it was destroyed by the Carthaginians in 409 BC. The city was reduced to its Acropolis, protected by walls inspired by the Euryalus Fortress of Syracuse, and became an important Punic commercial port. The dimension of the Archaeological Park of Selinunte, Cave di Cusa and Pantelleria, its urban structure and the numerous temples, testify to the lost grandeur. The Temples on the Acropolis, the ones on the Eastern Hill, including Temple E rebuilt in 1956 and the unfinished Temple G – one of the largest in the ancient world – are worth a visit.



At about twelve kilometers, there are the Cave di Cusa, a unique example of open-air quarries abandoned during processing: a succession of capitals, columns and pieces extracted from the calcarenite bench and abandoned in the various stages of processing and transport.

Going from one beach to another, two detours are worthwhile: one to Castelvetrano to discover the Baroque church of San Domenico, with its grandiose iconographic apparatus of stucco, paintings and statues, created more than four centuries ago by a workshop of plaster chisellers who had already worked on the cathedral in Palermo. The other route leads to Gibellina Vecchia (a tip: Go there at sunset) where you will be thrilled by the sight of the ruins of the town, destroyed by the earthquake of 1968. It is possible to walk inside Alberto Burri's Cretto, a gigantic work of land art and, at the same time, an immense maze, which covers the streets and alleys of the town centre devastated by the earthquake like a shroud. Gibellina Nuova is a concentration of contemporary works of art (Consagra, Pomodoro, etc.) scattered through the streets and squares or preserved in the Museum of Mediterranean Wefts. The Baglio di Stefano in Gibellina, which houses the Orestyadi Foundation, contains the "Museum of Mediterranean Wefts" in the baronial house. The museum has costumes, jewels, artistic fabrics, ceramics and manufactured articles of the material culture of the peoples and cultures of the Mediterranean area: Sicily, Egypt, Tunisia, Palestine, Morocco, Albania and so on. The museum/workshop is the outcome of years of research, meetings, debates, studies and seminars promoted by the Orestyadi Foundation, but it is still an in-progress idea, whose strength lies in its processual, interdisciplinary, cross-border character. It seems to us that, today, the present-day situation, characterized by profound migrations, could have similar characteristics; Sicily and Italy can go back to being a place of meetings, of passage of peoples, of sedimentation of elements coming from different cultures other than our own. Besides, what artistic elements have peoples had, do they have or can they have if, while being lapped by the same sea, seem to be culturally different? Through comparisons of art objects realized in these places, we have sought the characteristics that unite these people, the common elements more than the differences, at a historical moment in which the west seems to reject contributions from and understanding of Middle East or North African cultures. Achille Bonito Oliva writes: "The Museum of Mediterranean Wefts in Gibellina represents a correct and open interpretation of Mediterranean history that flows from Spain, France through Italy through the Arabic countries. This museum presents together traces of high culture and others of material culture, somewhere between individual imagination and daily collective living ... the space in front of the

Di Stefano Houses becomes a container of signs of a cultural anthropology outside all hegemonic logic and logic of supremacy of the west over the east or of the north over the south".

The Via Selinuntina ends in Marsala (from the Arab Mars Allah, "God's harbor"), known worldwide for its fortified wine that can be tasted at Palazzo Fici, home of the Marsala Doc Wine Route. Ancient Lilybaeum was founded by the Phoenicians. Its history is illustrated in the Baglio Anselmi Archaeological Museum, where the wreckage of a Punic warship can be visited. Here is the westernmost tip of Sicily: Capo Boeo or Lilibeo. From here, you can see the splendid Island of Mozia in the centre of the Stagnone Lagoon. It is the only Phoenician city preserved to this day, which can be reached by boat from the historic pier. Walking along the paths of the island is a journey back in time between ancient buildings and places: the Cothon, the Tophet, the Sanctuaries and the North Gate; the Whitaker Museum as well, with the statue of the Mozia Charioteer (or young man from Mozia), dating back to the 5th century BC. The white salt pans surrounding the island and extending up to Trapani dominate the landscape, recounting the ancient tradition of salt extraction from sea water: an evocative environment that is home to rare species such as the pink flamingo. A timeless landscape dominated by Mount San Giuliano and the medieval town of Erice, another important Phoenician centre, as evidenced by the remains of ancient Elymian and Phoenician walls and the Temple of Astarte, on whose ruins the Norman castle stands. To understand the treasure chest of handicrafts that welcomes us, you just have to wander around its narrow streets: there is everything from ceramics to rugs and exquisite conventual pastry.

## JORDAN | *Strategies Employed in Support of Umm Qais Sustainable Economic Development*

**By Ismaiel Abuamoud** Associate Professor, Department of Tourism Management, University of Jordan, and

**Ahmed Freewan** Associate Professor, College of Architecture and Design, Jordan University of Science and Technology.

### Background

Umm Qais, located on a hill about 360 meters above sea level, sits approximately 100 km north of the Jordan capital, Amman. The site carries historical significance, given its location along ancient trade routes with Palestine. Once known as Gadara, Umm Qais is one of the Roman Decapolis Union and was planned according to Roman standards, containing amphitheatres, tombs, gates and paved roads. Later during the Christian period, churches were also constructed in the city. The area likewise holds religious importance, as it is home to the cave of Jesus. Known as the city of wise men and philosophers, Umm Qais during this era was also famed by the poets.

Umm Qais retained its importance throughout Roman and Byzantine history and maintained its status in Islamic history through the Ottoman Empire. At this time, the city played a role in establishing the modern Jordanian state through the so-called Umm Qais Agreement in the early 20th century.

Despite Umm Qais's impressive historical and natural attractions, there are a large number of development opportunities currently being missed due to a lack of attention for the area, particularly in terms of promotion, marketing and helping the local community avail of the social and economic benefits of tourism.

Umm Qais enjoys a population of around 5,000 people, 49% of which is female and 51% is male. The area has a relatively youthful population, with about 47% of residents under the age of 30, and 34% under the age of 20. Historically, the community of Umm Qais has relied on agricultural activity as a major source of income for decades. As development and education spread through the country, economic activity shifted towards professions in trades and the public sector, contributing to a subsequent decline in agriculture.

Since the 1950s, foreign tourists have regarded Umm Qais as an important archaeological site. However, the local population has been largely uninvolved in any tourism-related commercial activity until recent years. Despite improvements in this area, local economic tourism revenue remains below the required level.



## The Local Community and the Tourism Sector in Umm Qais

The lack of a clear strategy to enhance the tourism sector as a lever for inclusive development that benefits the community and responds to the interests of the increasing numbers of tourists has left ample space for economic and commercial initiatives of individuals. While locals have initiated commercial and economic projects in the tourism sector, many lack the necessary technical knowledge and a suitable methodology.

Traditionally, it was uncommon for rural communities in Jordan to sell agricultural or handicraft products to others. Instead, these items were offered freely, as hospitality and respect for guests are deeply ingrained within the culture.

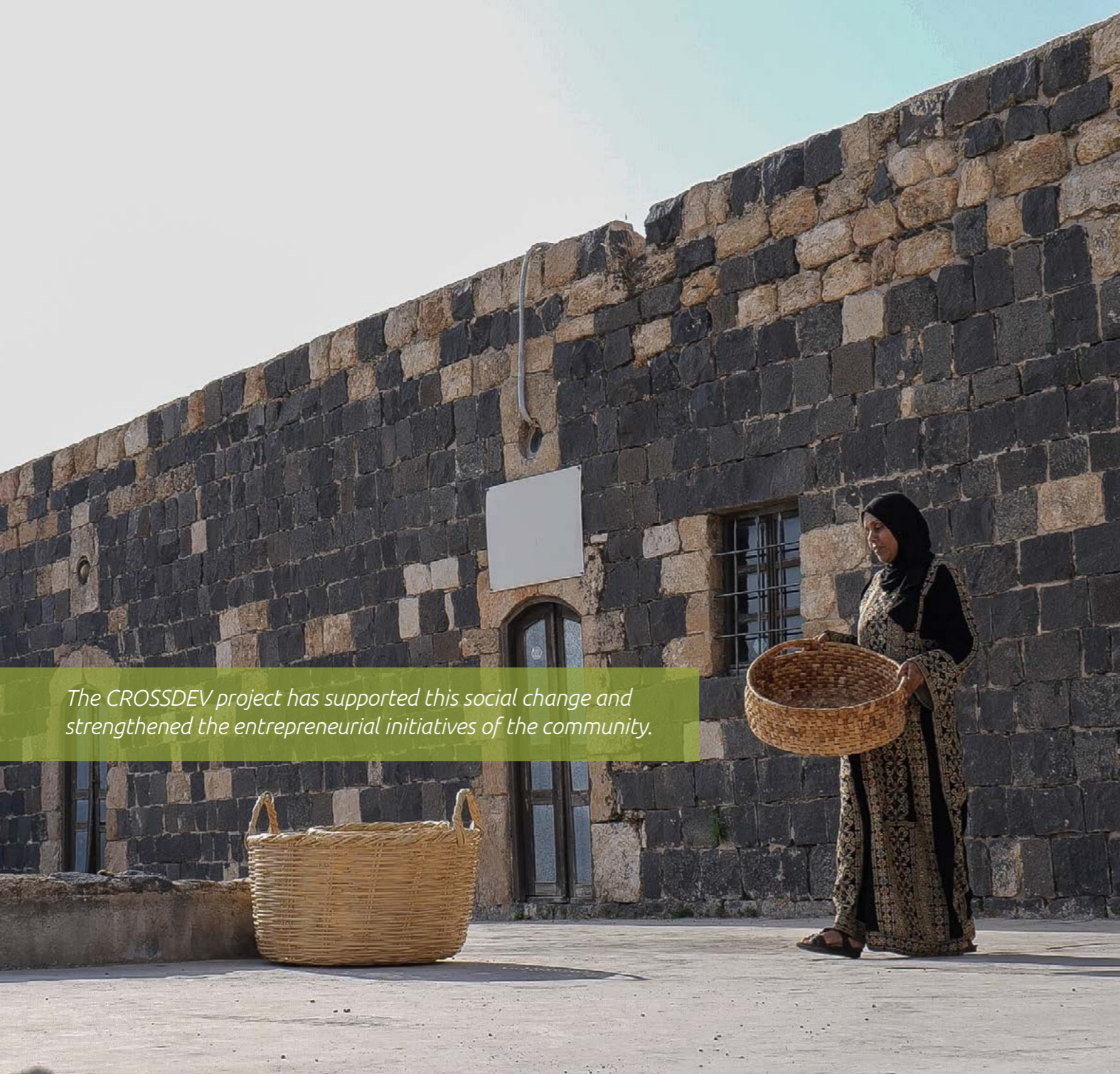
Due to economic and social changes, as well as cost of living increases in the late 1980s and 1990s, people began looking for new sources of income. At this time, the concept of producing and selling handmade products became increasingly common, although it was restricted to men to some extent.

At the beginning of the second millennium, some members of the local community started introducing new type of services, including accommodation, home catering services, and local tour guiding. With the escalation of the use of social media, the local community in Umm Qais became more familiar with the tourist sector.

After 2015, tourism services became more specialized. More importantly, the active involvement of women in Umm Qais's tourism sector has increased, helping create new sources of income for women - mainly related to handicrafts and catering services - and contributing to real change within the local community.

The CROSSDEV project has supported this social change and strengthened the entrepreneurial initiatives of the community. This initiative has been accompanied by training interventions and technical assistance, but also a greater awareness of the central role that the local community, both women and men, play in development strategies for inclusive and sustainable tourism in the area. Jordan University of Science and Technology has successfully contributed to the establishment of the Umm Qais Women's Association as an umbrella that brings together all women working in this field and improving the level of services provided to tourists. In collaboration with the Department of Antiquities, the Association has been given a space to exhibit its artisanal products and services directly to tourists, according to an agreement that will be reached between the Association and the Department of Antiquities.

Through the CROSSDEV project, all involved parties will be able to achieve sustainable success, even after the project's completion.



*The CROSSDEV project has supported this social change and strengthened the entrepreneurial initiatives of the community.*





*Umm Qais was one of the Roman Decapolis Union, and was at that time known as Gadara*

### Actors Involved in the Local Tourism Sector

Our stakeholders, in essence, are the local community and the respective supportive or influential agencies. The local community has several segments, namely the privately owned hospitality, accommodation, food and beverage (F&B) services/outlets, as well as handicraft and transportation businesses. These sectors are impacted by suppliers and supply chains, distributors, mediators, agents, and other factors. The public sector contains line ministries, regional and local authorities (namely local municipalities), and the Directorate of Antiquities (Ministry of Tourism), in addition to other public services such as transport, electricity, water and energy services, which heavily impact costs. Strong private-public partnerships are of the essence in terms of building, supporting, and leveraging impact. However, our most targeted stakeholders remain the key players in tourism development.

Tourism is heavily impacted by social and environmental factors that are in turn affected by developers, implementers, and other stakeholders. Therefore, it is crucial to determine the influencing/impacting parties, and conversely, the influenced/impacted stakeholders. Tourism is affected by local and global economic variables and its evident relationship with seasonality, in addition to interactions with other cultures from around the world, which leads to the transmission of positive ideas and practices, and a change in business management style that is in line with developments in the sector.

## Adopted Methodology and Approach

### 'Developers'

Through the CROSSDEV project, we have identified "developers" as national and local governorates, local communities, non-governmental organizations, and tour operators in particular. Given the competitive nature of small, local businesses including community tour operators, it is not always easy to gather all parties around one table. However, this does not have to be the case, especially when creating complementarity among the products and services, and mutual benefits, when and wherever possible. Failure to include all key and relevant stakeholders will most definitely have an adverse effect on the expected outcomes and results - not to mention the potential creation of conflict and the deepening of existing division. Ultimately, the entire tourism sector would be negatively affected, alongside its crosscutting dimensions with other key sectors that would also feel the effects.

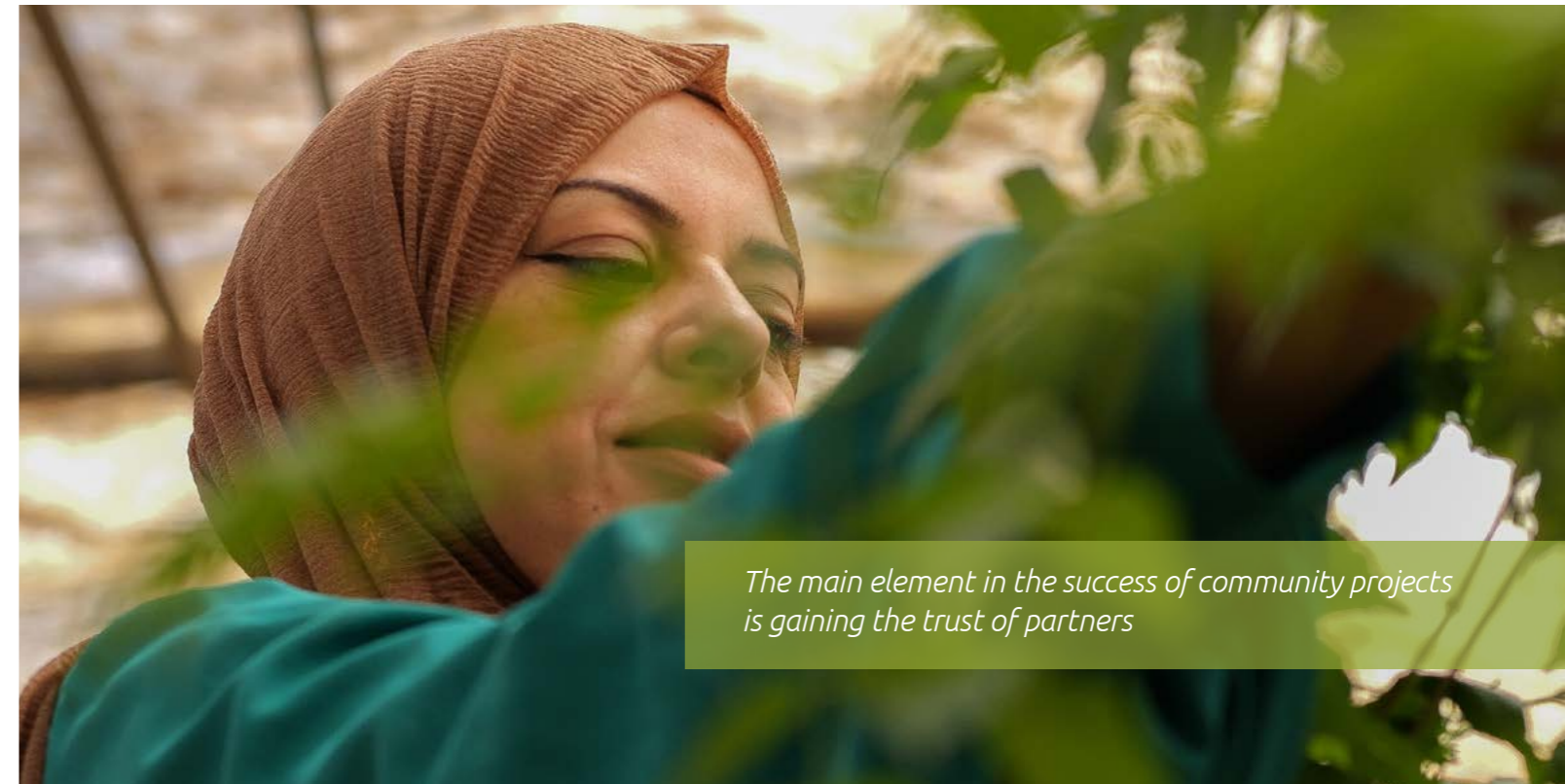
### Community Engagement, Ownership and Sustainability

In other destinations around the world, tourism has been developed without paying attention to those directly affected by it. The most effective methodology may not always be the easiest or the quickest, but it is most certainly the one that must be heeded to ensure that the needs of each stakeholder are considered by involving them in the planning process in a manner that protects the natural and social environment, fostering ownership and socio-economic sustainability. The most important factor in the success of community engagement is earning the trust of partners, the first of which being the local community, by informing them of the project's objectives and anticipated results without exaggerating expectations. It is also necessary to allow them to participate in the formation of the implementing methodology. This ownership over the process offers participants confidence in their abilities and transforms them into responsible partners, as well as enabling the sustainability of the project after the end of the supervision period.

Undoubtedly, the Umm Qais business community is persevering to secure income generation befitting their efforts, input, and utilized resources. In this endeavor, marketing the services and products on offer is an important tool for sustainability. This much needed facet of financial sustainability is continually echoed by the local community in common questions such as: "How can we market our economic activity? How can we gain customers? How can we get technical and financial support?"

To achieve a sustainable marketing strategy that is widely beneficial to the entire community, it is necessary to gain the trust of all stakeholders in Umm Qais and to build a network of trust among the different public, private, and civil sectors. Particularly, forming well-balanced relationships between rural communities and government entities - most of which are currently characterized by a lack of local organizational structure and dysfunctional relationships - is vital. In order for residents and service providers to inform government officials on project goals and outcomes, creating healthy ties between all parties is essential, especially when considering government contributions to the initiative's success.

To achieve this vision, economic development must be realized by building a plan centred around strong collaboration with community members, including all official and non-official parties. One of the most important elements of success in planning, developing and implementing programs is listening to those who are most knowledgeable of the area's needs, strengths, weaknesses, and challenges: members of the local community.



*The main element in the success of community projects is gaining the trust of partners*

## Lessons Learned & Key Resources

**Human resources** are the most important factor in the development equation. Economic development processes are implemented through the people and for the people, and it is therefore necessary to identify any existing gaps in skills before designing and delivering the training. Local communities are the foremost experts on their own needs and were thus included in the design and development process. Beyond human resources, culturally influenced practices, ethics, and values all play a key role in the project's implementation and are therefore respected and employed in the process in order to maximize the initiative's success.

**Natural resources** include all resources that can be processed and converted to commodities. The well-planned use of natural resources is a critical factor in ensuring sustainability and equity for coming generations. Growth occurs when a society acquires new resources, or when it learns to produce more, using existing resources. Interrelated factors within the economic system generate a sequence of changes in the social system, which can multiply in several dimensions.

**Financial resources** are predominantly found within the private and public sectors, with an important role played by NGOs. The financial component is central to small businesses, and allocating funds for economic development programs requires specific financial skills. As financial sustainability is among the primary obstacles when steering projects through sound economic development

learning to identify opportunities for funding and ways to construct successful business proposals is inherently useful for project beneficiaries.

**Technology** accentuates accumulated knowledge, tools, and skills, helping to achieve our goals toward economic development. Equipment, computers, telecommunication facilities, and other technical devices and programs can save time and effort during the development and implementation processes. It is necessary for experts in this field to help small businesses use technology to promote their businesses. Examples of the synergistic intersection of technology and small businesses could include building a website containing comprehensive information for tourists, developing mobile and web applications to make tourist destinations more visible, and using online resources to reach customers around the world.

**We can also use different techniques** to collect data about the community. Examples of such include conducting a survey for small projects to identify the challenges they face. The results of such a survey could help in designing training sessions in different areas including small projects, marketing, feasibility studies, and project management, all to include both theoretical and practical components. Visits to similar successful sites and projects can be organized, where participants can be briefed on the experiences and success stories of others. The training ultimately must be designed in consultation with partners from the local community so that they can play an active role in identifying and improving their needs, challenges, and weaknesses.



## LEBANON

### ***Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve (2009–2022): Meeting the Twin Challenges of Conservation and Development***

**By Pierre Doumet**  
*President, APJM*

Launched in 1971 by UNESCO, the Man and Biosphere (MAB) Program recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. The MAB Program seems even more relevant today than when it was launched, as it confronts some of humanity's most serious challenges: biodiversity loss, climate change and sustainable development. Although less known than UNESCO's World Heritage Site Program, MAB is proving to be at least as meaningful, as it seeks to integrate harmoniously what could be viewed as two incompatible goals: nature conservation and socio-economic well-being, all the while protecting and showcasing human cultural heritage across the planet for future generations.

The number of UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserves has today reached 727. These precious receptacles of knowledge and diversity, of biology and culture, constitute a unique promise for the future of humanity. Jabal Moussa in Mount Lebanon was declared a Biosphere Reserve (BR) in 2009, the 446th BR at that time. Geological and botanical surveys quickly confirmed exceptional wealth: this easternmost Mediterranean forest, with pockets remaining from the Ice-Age, is home to over 726 flora species, at least 6 of which endemic to the sole Jabal, as well as what seems to be the oldest geological outcrop in Lebanon, from the Triassic Period. It was also declared a Global Important Bird Area (IBA), a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) and an Important Plant Area (IPA).

But a lesser-known aspect of the rich heritage of this "pristine" landscape, partially harboring the legendary Adonis Valley with its share of myth and mythology, has been the unexpected, age-old interaction between man and mountain. Famously characterized as "le coin le plus sauvage du Liban" by French Historian Ernest Renan in 1861, Jabal Moussa hasn't stopped delivering its share of surprises in the areas of archeology and history since our first preliminary archeology survey undertaken in 2009 by Dr. Claude Serhal. Countless late Roman pottery sherds found in the freshly ploughed fields of the village of Broqta, neighboring the Adonis Valley, provided the first indicators of what was to come. A subsequent visit around Qornet ed Deir revealed a significant quantity of medieval glazed sherds on a plot owned by the Maronite Patriarchate and rented by the Association for the Protection of Jabal Moussa (APJM), that manages the Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve.

A decade and several archeological missions later, a sophisticated LIDAR helicopter survey highlighted hundreds of unsuspected points of interest, beneath a thick vegetation cover, that are still to be explored.

The more biodiversity and archeological wealth are discovered and showcased, the better the chance of people realizing the need for preservation of the rich landscapes of Jabal Moussa.

In the meantime, APJM has barreled ahead with its two-pronged conservation and development mission, launching a far-reaching ecotourism program involving kilometers of nature trails, featuring sustainable job opportunities for guides, guards, and boosting many related activities such as bed-and-breakfast services and the traditional making of local "produits du terroir" catering to a growing number of enthusiasts. Reserve visitors (at BR entrances) and city-dwellers (through several city outlets) are increasingly purchasing Jabal Moussa natural products such as zaatar, forest honey, jams and many more local delicacies and artifacts. Since 2017, Jabal Moussa BR has been an enthusiastic member of the newly founded Mediterranean cluster of Biosphere Reserves (MedMAB) where it seeks to build on the common Mediterranean natural and cultural heritage through strong links with other BRs and prominent universities from the region.

Late in 2019, APJM became the Lebanese partner in an important cross-border EU project entitled "Cultural Routes for Sustainable Social and Economic Development in the Mediterranean", in short CROSSDEV. Including partners in Italy, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon, CROSSDEV promotes the creation of a common, cross-border, sustainable tourism framework focusing on less travelled destinations, encouraging job development opportunities while allowing local inhabitants to showcase their culture in enhanced cultural and historical sites and allowing a small number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to benefit significantly. A common digital platform entitled "Hidden Mediterranean" was created to spark interest and provide in-depth, attractive visitor information.

A key aim of the project is to link sites not only within the Hidden Mediterranean platform but also, in the case of Jabal Moussa, through other well-known Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe such as the Phoenicians' Route and Iter Vitis.

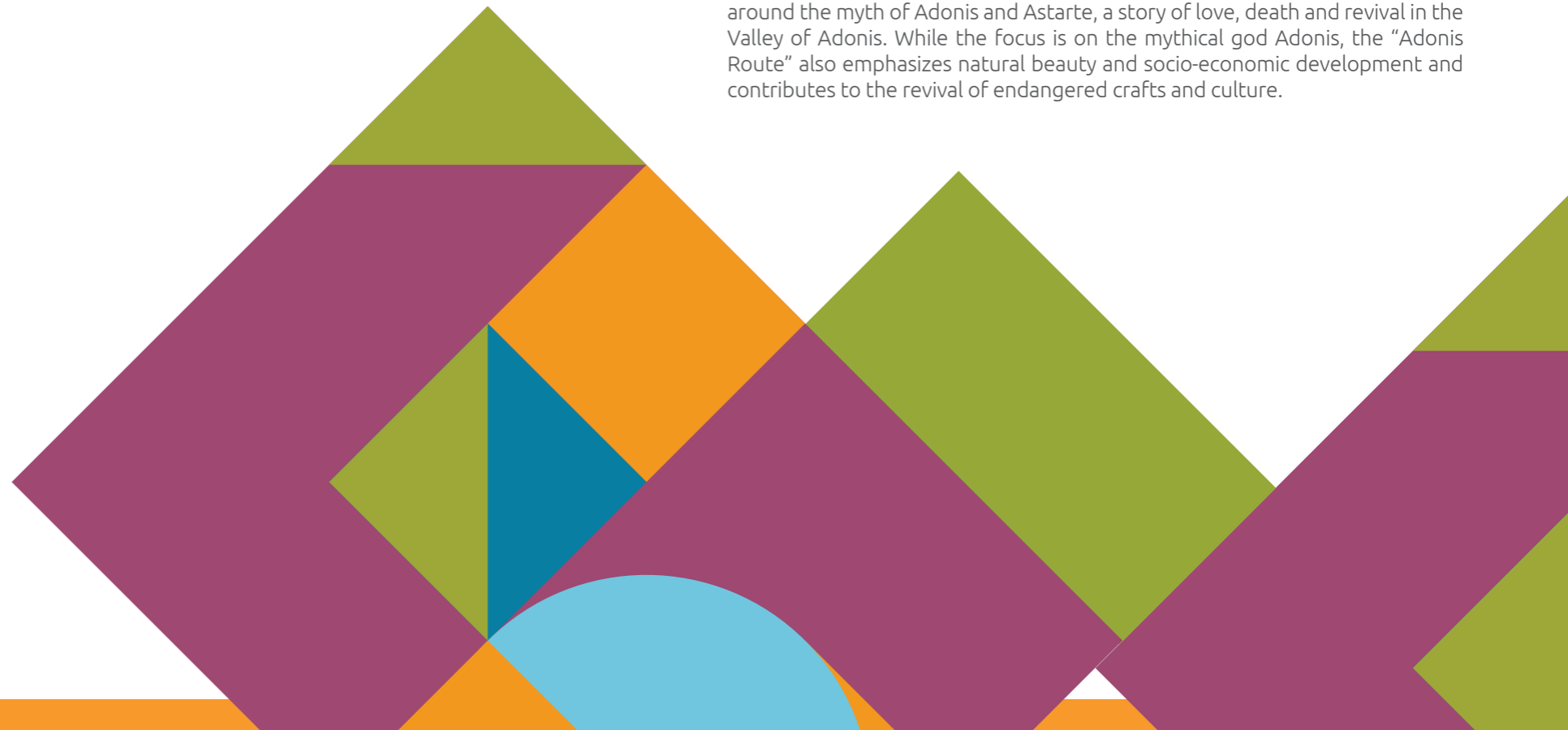
Despite their great potential in promoting rural and lesser-known destinations, Cultural Routes have limited application in the eastern and southern parts of the Mediterranean, Lebanon included. Within the CROSSDEV project, APJM was able to be part of the team spearheading the effort towards their wider application in Lebanon, alongside Prof Rachid Chamoun, Honorary President of

the Phoenicians' Route. Jabal Moussa was one of the first members to join the Phoenicians' Route and was the first member from Lebanon to join Iter Vitis in April 2022. Shortly after, APJM received the Best Archaeological Site Iter Vitis Award 2022 as a result of efforts made to revive the rich heritage linked to viticulture in Jabal Moussa, including the support of archaeological research linked to wine heritage in the Biosphere Reserve within the CROSSDEV project, and the promotion of the cultivation of native ancient grape varieties on restored old terraces.

Besides highlighting lesser-known rural destinations, the Cultural Routes are capable of meeting the new trend in tourism, where the modern traveler seeks enriching experiences through discovery, flexibility and contact with local people and traditions.

The visitors therefore are able to contribute to the viability of local traditions that are at risk of being lost.

To this end, a local Route was developed, the "Adonis Route", that revolves around the myth of Adonis and Astarte, a story of love, death and revival in the Valley of Adonis. While the focus is on the mythical god Adonis, the "Adonis Route" also emphasizes natural beauty and socio-economic development and contributes to the revival of endangered crafts and culture.





*Modern traveler seeks enriching experiences through discovery, flexibility and contact with local people and traditions.*

### **How To: Begin with a Survey to Immediately Involve the Locals**

The Route creation started with a survey targeting 130 local households, which resulted in valuable input and opinions about the local tourism initiative, and allowed APJM to identify traditional crafts and services to be integrated into the Route: the local “lebbedeh”, the Phoenician hat maker; the traditional “dabkeh” dancers; the champion of bell ringing; the arak spirit maker; the artisanal bakery; the improvised zajal poets...

Through CROSSDEV, these services and crafts were assessed by experts, and their tourism offer was drastically improved: a school of guides was organized for local aspirant and existing guides; local guesthouse owners received sub-grant awards and technical support to improve their premises and hospitality services; craftsmen and producers received in-kind support; food safety training was provided to agro-food producers.

Along with the tourism service enhancement, the hiking trails of Jabal Moussa were improved: paths were cleared, panels were installed, and mapping was carried out. A new trail, the Adonis Meditation trail, was cleared, offering a unique meditational experience and a spectacular view over the Valley of Adonis.

Besides the social and natural elements, the core elements that make the Adonis Route connected and scientifically coherent are its cultural sites. Pioneer studies were conducted within CROSSDEV in the archaeological sites of Broqta and Qornet el Deir, as well as in the rugged landscape of Jabal Moussa and the valley of Adonis. This resulted in thorough historical documentation to refer to for the route interpretation.

In terms of infrastructure, a center located at one of the main Biosphere Reserve entrances is being launched as part of the CROSSDEV project and will be the first High Mountain Phoenician Centre in Lebanon, serving the awareness objectives of the Phoenicians' route.

## ***Mountain Stories: the Archaeology and Cultural Heritage of Jabal Moussa, Lebanon***

***By Jennie Bradbury, Assistant Professor of Archaeology, Bryn Mawr College and Stephen McPhillips, Consultant in Landscape Archaeology***

Located in the high foothills of Mount Lebanon, between 700 and 1800 m altitude, Jabal Moussa and its surrounds are rich in culture and oral histories. Home to hundreds of sites and archaeological features, dating from the Palaeolithic through to the Ottoman periods, it has been manipulated and shaped by human activities over thousands of years. From myths and ritual through to agricultural and sylvicultural production and artisanal activities, despite its difficult terrain, Jabal Moussa has always played a significant role in the lives and traditions of local populations.

Archaeological studies (2018-2021) in the reserve have allowed us to map hundreds of archaeological and heritage features, and collect dateable material, including pottery and stone tools from these locations.

Rather than focusing on one site, our work has tried to consider the whole region, investigating the relationships between humans and the wider environment, and exploring the ways in which groups of people in the past adapted to, inhabited, and lived within this remarkable landscape. Although we have not been able to visit every single location within the reserve, by surveying a representative sample of different landscape types in the field and combining this with 'remote sensing' using topographical maps, aerial photographs, satellite imagery and LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) data, we have been able to map human occupation and activity across the region over time. The final piece of the puzzle has been the knowledge of local people; the real experts of the mountain, and it is from their experiences and stories, combined with our archaeological work, that we have begun to understand how and why humans inhabited this region over thousands of years.

Exploited from at least the Middle Palaeolithic, around 90,000 years ago, we can paint a picture of long-term continuity and human adaptation within this mountain landscape. Some periods are better represented than others, and human populations have not always occupied or inhabited the same areas within Jabal Moussa. Over time we can identify phases when we see an increase in activity, as well as periods when human occupation may have been much more limited or even largely absent. During the Bronze Age, for example, human populations seem to have occupied particularly favourable locations within the reserve and its surroundings, many of which are still occupied today, such as the modern village of Yahchouch. The next major period of

occupation and exploitation within the Jabal Moussa region is seen during the Roman-Byzantine period and here we have material from across Jabal Moussa, although particularly from the areas of Qornet ed-Deir and Broqta. This period is one of the most ceramically visible periods from the reserve, although activity is predominantly concentrated on and around the area of the spectacularly preserved Roman Road, which we have traced in sections from near Nahr el-Dahab to the Qehmez reserve entrance, rather than widely spread across the whole landscape.

It is not until the 12th century AD that we again see evidence of significant activity within the reserve. Glazed pottery collected from Qornet ed-Deir and inside the lands of the modern villages of Chouane, Qehmez and Yahchouch, provides evidence for Crusader and Mamluk occupation and, as in the Bronze Age, medieval activity and occupation was concentrated in the vicinity of the modern villages in the survey area. Ottoman and modern period occupation is unfortunately much more difficult to identify from pottery surface collections. Rather than searching for ceramic evidence, however, we can turn to the built features in the landscape and from a detailed survey of ruined structures and buildings, as well as field walls, terraces, and water systems it is clear that the late medieval through to modern period is one of the most archaeologically important phases represented in the Jabal Moussa reserve.

### **Harnessing the Mountains**

Literary sources often emphasize the inaccessibility and challenging nature of mountains whereas, in contrast, historical and archaeological research in these regions highlights their vibrancy, dynamism and often resource-rich nature. Jabal Moussa is no different. Throughout the mountain and the areas around it there is evidence of resource exploitation and management; the people of Jabal Moussa and its villages have long known how to harness the energy potential of their mountain landscape. Perhaps one of the most impressive testaments to this are the watermills dotted across this region, on side channels drawn from the Nahr Ibrahim in Chouane, in Qehmez and Yahchouch off the Nahr el Dahab, whilst traces of a ruined mill also exist in the village of Nahr el Dahab. These mills, using a simple gravity fed water supply, funnelled from the river in a separate channel to control the flow and speed, and then into a vertical droptower, converted water energy into hydraulic energy. From the channel, water was passed into a shoot, the shib, then dropped two floors before being propelled out of an opening onto the wooden water wheel in the chamber at the base of the building. This wheel then turned the grinding stone on the milling floor above by means of a simple axle and was used to grind different crops into flour and other products such as bulghur wheat, animal fodder and chickpeas.





Beyond the river valleys, the two main resources of Jabal Moussa, traceable through archaeological features in the more densely forested areas of the reserve, are wood and iron. Material evidence exists from at least the Roman period of the extraction of wood from this region of Mount Lebanon, although it is likely that this resource was exploited during earlier millennia, whether by local populations or those from more distant regions. This practice also continued into more recent periods, and during the 18th-19th centuries, if not earlier in the Medieval period, the trees of the Jabal Moussa region were harvested for a variety of different products. One of the most prolific and well documented features associated with the exploitation and use of wood resources are charcoal-burning platforms (baydar al-mashara).

Mostly semi-circular or circular, up to 12m in diameter, these platforms are integrated into networks of stone terraces and, in many cases, old trackways, which crisscross much of the mountain. Temporary shelters or camps can also often be found alongside or close to these structures, while those used more recently also show evidence of charcoal or burnt and ashy soil. During his studies in the 19th century, Renan described the steep, apparently uninhabited, western slopes of Jabal Moussa as being lit up at night. With this description in mind, we can envisage a highly active and busy landscape, even at night, one certainly at slight odds with the peace and quiet found within the mountains today.

In another way, too, the calm forests we see today on the mountain are deceptive. Most of the trees were not propagated naturally, but are in fact themselves anthropogenic, and in a way archaeological features. Some of the most common wild species on the mountain – the Turkey oak *Quercus cerris pseudocerris*, the evergreen oak *Quercus calliprinos*, the hop hornbeam *Ostrya carpinifolia*, and the wild pear *Pyrus syriaca* have been coppiced over generations to provide the raw materials needed for the charcoal burners. They often consist of multiple upright branches, springing from much wider but very low trunks, the result of careful harvesting in order to produce the ideal sized branches for charcoal burning.

The baydar al-mashara and their associated features provide evidence of substantial investment in this region, part of a wider network of built features designed to facilitate the exploitation, extraction, and transportation of forest resources on an industrial, yet sustainable, scale.

Charcoal-burning platforms are not the only evidence for resource exploitation in the reserve and in addition to wood, it is the very mountain itself, or at least the local limestone, that serves as another vital resource. Indeed, the combination of the local lithology and forest cover means that the necessary building and raw materials for lime production, used for sealing cisterns and coating the interiors and exteriors of buildings, are readily available in the reserve.

The limekilns mapped in Jabal Moussa would have burned their load over several days, consuming charcoal in great quantities. Such structures would not have only involved the production (and destruction) of resources, and it is likely that the limekilns at Qornet ed-Deir were purposefully located here to reuse/recycle some of the building stone from the ancient site.

Wood and limestone are not the only exploitable resources in the area, however, and during our first survey season what was particularly remarkable was the wealth of iron-rich material visible on the surface. Iron oxides are known to occur locally in the mountains and rich material is abundant on pathways and slopes, as well as in wadis. Whilst iron-rich material is found scattered across the reserve, the project was able to map several large slag scatters, by-products of metal production, attesting to localised iron production within the reserve.

### **Working, Living, and Dying in the Mountains**

Picturesque views of abandoned stone terraces characterise much of Mount Lebanon, standing in direct contrast to the massive newly bulldozed terraces of the 21st century. These relict features testify to the former extent of agricultural activities across the region, and Jabal Moussa is no exception. Many areas of the mountain and adjacent valleys are terraced or show traces of long-abandoned terracing, often in places which are now covered by trees or other vegetation. Likely dating from as early as the Roman period, these systems were hand built and acted as gravitational water infiltration systems and are only really sustainable when whole hillsides are managed with some degree of collective responsibility and task sharing.

In the area of the reserve, abandoned settlements and houses also incorporate water storage features, especially cisterns, whilst in the higher mountains we see the use of natural sedimented basins, with soil and water retention being facilitated through extensive terracing on the steep slopes and in the natural ravines. Storing water from the winter rains was essential when living on the limestone massif of the mountain, as unlike in the surrounding slopes and river valleys, no other sources of water were available – rainwater simply soaked away into the underlying rock.

The water channels around the site of Buyut, for example, fit into a wider landscape of field systems and terraces and we have been able to trace several channels from their intersection with a large cistern. Mulberry trees (*Morus alba*) are present in the surrounding area, where a group of old trees still grow, and two stone-lined pits/basins documented in this area may have been associated with silk production. The hatching process of silkworm eggs is a labour- and water-intensive process and potential evidence for this from Buyut again provides evidence of the sophisticated relationships between humans and their

surroundings that existed across the mountain. At exposed locations with a lot of wind, we also find circular threshing platforms or baydar al-qamh, built stone platforms with lips used to winnow grain (wheat) by throwing it into the air. On the northern slopes of Jabal Moussa, the project has mapped complex systems of stone terrace systems, trackways, cisterns, baydars, temporary shelters and at least four abandoned farmsteads. Apparently no longer planted, they are still used for the pasturing of sheep, goats and dairy cattle.

Perhaps the most remarkable series of agricultural features mapped by the project is a significant stone-built grain and/or olive processing complex from the late Roman-Byzantine era on the south bank of Wadi Broqta. Nestled amongst oak trees, at first glance this large stone building resembles a walled garden; however, the presence of Roman and Byzantine period pottery, as well as the remains of massive grinding stones and counterweights, attests to the antiquity and scale of this structure. Pottery collected from the south bank of Wadi Broqta by Claude Doumet-Serhal in 2009 indicated the presence of first to fifth century AD occupation, whilst more recent work by Agnès Vokaer at the site has confirmed this dating. A small number of medieval storage jar fragments also attest to a later Crusader period presence.

The inhabitants of Jabal Moussa have never been completely isolated from the outside world – this region has been connected to other places, both near and far, for thousands of years. The survey has mapped old roads and routeways across the hills and along the valleys, from the well-known and very important Roman stairway linking Mchati and Qehmez, to many other well-built pathways that criss-cross the hillsides. These formed routes to trade products from the area to the wider world, such as timber, which is referred to in the Roman Hadrianic inscriptions, but also formed parts of strategic networks linking the coast, mountains and the Beqaa valley. Material and architectural features dating to the Roman-Byzantine period documented from the north-eastern summit of the Broqta triangle, for example, testify to the strategic nature of this region, overlooking the entire upper basin of the Nahr Ibrahim, and possibly represents the remains of a military installation.

In Ottoman times up until the introduction of the motor vehicle in the twentieth century, mule tracks were also the main means of communication between villages and essential for exploiting the forestry, mineral, and stone resources of the mountain. The Mchati stairs continued to be maintained up to this time, while a series of well-built tracks with stone foundations and stairs twist up the hill between Aabri and Broqta, and others linked Yahchouch, Snaoubar and Chouane, continuing along the Nahr Ibrahim to the east or up the hill to Deir Mar Geryes. Crucial to the ability of these routes to carry people and animals throughout the year, even in winter and spring when the rivers are full, were





the stone bridges which crossed the Nahr Ibrahim in Chouane and the Nahr el Dahab in the Haï el Nahr neighbourhood of Yahchouch.

The tracks and routes present across the Jabal Moussa reserve are not, however, solely associated with agricultural or extractive activities. The productivity- and resource-rich nature of this mountain also goes hand in hand with its importance as a ritual or mythological landscape. Associations between the Nahr Ibrahim, Mount Lebanon and the famous Adonis myth are well known, and the account by the second-century author Lucian of the waters of the river being stained red every year is directly linked to the sediments that also facilitate the iron smelting that has been identified in Jabal Moussa. In addition to the numerous churches and monasteries on Mount Lebanon, many of which, such as Mar Geryes, have their origins in the medieval period and earlier, we have also documented tens of possible tombs and burial mounds (tumuli). Many of these have been found in association with pottery scatters and/or in prominent, although often difficult to reach, locations, whilst tracks around Qornet Broqta may have been built to facilitate access to these monuments. The location of these tombs allows us a glimpse into the beliefs of ancient societies and the role of the dead within this landscape. The stone cut sarcophagus at Qornet ed Deir, for example, sits majestically cut into a high rock in the middle of the Roman and Byzantine settlement, whilst other tumuli and tombs, now long robbed of their contents, appear to have been deliberately associated with the 'high places' at Qornet ed-Deir, as well as Qornet Mazaar and Qornet Broqta. Such rock cut tombs, usually set into natural crevices in the rock, with the addition of built stone walls, and large boulders used as capping stones, may also, in some cases, have been covered with mounds of stone rubble. By the use and adaptation of natural rock faces, and the construction of tumuli, the dead, just as much as the living, were an integral part of this landscape, their remains becoming part of the very mountain itself.

Throughout its past, Jabal Moussa has been a vibrant, active, and dynamic cultural and natural landscape. The challenging nature of its topography and heavy tree cover have not been a barrier to its essentially anthropic character, important economically, socially and symbolically in the past as it is today. An archaeological survey of the mountain starts to paint a complex picture of a landscape that, over the past few thousand years, has been carefully managed and exploited. From the extraction of raw materials and resources through to the transportation of these resources, both within and beyond the mountain, Jabal Moussa is a place of many possibilities. These aspects of Jabal Moussa, however, are just a very small part of a much larger and longer archaeological narrative, which ultimately seeks to understand and shine a light on the different groups, both living and dead, who have called these mountains home.

## JORDAN | *Education and Engagement to Inspire a Sustainable Impact*

*By Mohammad Al-Tawaha*  
*Executive Director, JREDS*

Two words can summarize the main action that JREDS – the Royal Marine Conservation Society of Jordan – have carried out in the Aqaba area as part of the CROSSDEV project: education and engagement.

In a tourist town well known for its beautiful marine reserve, and diving centers frequented by tourists from all over the world, JREDS saw the need for local people to become active and conscious agents of sustainable tourism development in their city. Active since 1993, and committed to developing a more comprehensive way of thinking about Marine Conservation, Outreach & Advocacy and Sustainable Development, JREDS could benefit from a high reputation and a capillary network in the area and planned, arranged, and managed a vast number of initiatives to involve the locals and show them how powerful they can be and how they can use their voice not only to protect the place they live in, but also to shape new more and responsible tourism products and policies.

In Aqaba, JREDS organized education campaigns to raise awareness about crucial topics. In just about three years, over 3500 students took part in lectures, field trips, competitions, and activities to learn about local history and archeology, ecology and nature, marine life and its preservation, and clean-up campaigns. Such initiatives were met with enthusiasm by the students, managers, small businesses, media and local associations while also being praised, participated in, and supported by local authorities and the general public. At the end of the activities, far too many students declared that they did not know much about, for instance, the Byzantine church site or of the Islamic City of Ayla archeological site located in their own neighborhood, While the youth's passion was surely much appreciated, the core goal of such actions relies on their long-term impact. Educated, informed, and active youths know how to raise their voice and how to act to build the clean, prosperous world they deserve to live in.



## Some numbers

JREDS carried out World Clean Up Campaigns gathering more than 8000 people during the project's life and setting an example for the other partners in organizing such events.

Moreover,

- 3500+ participants in the social media Ramadan Competitions
- 450+ students visiting Aqaba's archeological sites
- 50+ participants in the 2022 International Volunteers Day and World Heritage Day
- 70+ participants in cooking classes in 2021 and 2022
- 400+ people from the Sustainability Field Tour for School and Local Community

On the other hand, JREDS focused on engaging with small tourism business owners in the Aqaba area to encourage cooperation for mutual benefit. In a tourism market that is more and more interested in traditions and experiences, local actors can find a thriving environment to work in. Handicraft makers and local chefs have been supported to work together to offer visitors a wholesome experience. This is the case of House of Roses, a small women's center located on a quiet street off the Aqaba's beaten path. Here, a number of women created a formal association and built a space to gather all their products and offers for tourists and locals. In this lovely white and blue building, visitors can buy locally produced handicrafts, traditional and contemporary garments, or home decorations; they can taste delicious food and learn how to make it; they can listen to music or get henna tattoos while chatting with the ladies.

While providing tourists a real experience, House of Roses and the similar experiences supported by JREDS in the area have a crucial impact on people's lives. The women running this center help each other and can provide for their families while preserving local traditions and being more and more conscious about women's value in society. They are also daily in touch with people from all over the world, benefiting from that kind of experience exchange that makes life worth living. The advantages such kind of engagement provides to the locals and anyone else involved are countless.





## **Aqaba from Mass Tourism to Local Experiential Tourism**

*By Jehad Haron, Associate Director for Projects, ACOR  
Hussein Khirfan, Tourism Development Lead, SCHEP USAID  
and Giulio Muscella, MSc, University of Bologna*

### **Community Engagement in Aqaba**

The Aqaba community, like many port communities, is made up of different cultures from all over the Mediterranean and beyond and has produced that richness and cultural uniqueness that make the city a destination rich in tangible and intangible legacy and suitable for high-level cultural experiential tourism.

Since the 1980s, sustainable development has influenced tourism sectors and its strategies in planning policies, and the participation of residents in the decision-making process has become an essential issue. In the ensuing years, new models of tourism planning were developed with different degrees of community engagement.

Recently, when the CROSSDEV project was launched in Jordan, several players in the Gulf realized that tourism planning has to involve locals to be sustainable, so they began to change Aqaba's tourism product, proposing new experiences and an integration of the project's objectives and outputs with Aqaba's strategic and local plans. They also updated the destination planning model and adopted an empowerment model to enhance meaningful participation. In this model, public agencies have a genuine interest in involving the local population in decision making and training them to effectively promote the destination. Involving and training locals is crucial to narrating the heritage of a destination, because residents embody the history and legends of a place.

Thanks to this updating in destination planning, many initiatives and activities have been undertaken individually or collectively in order to hold events and activities based on engaging local communities through tourism activities. The goal is to establish small companies (micro-enterprises) that enhance the community's benefit from the tourism industry and at the same time the visitor can benefit from direct interaction with local communities, in order to live and experience Aqaba as a local.

### The Hidden Side of Aqaba

Aqaba, in Jordan, is a well-known tourist destination for leisure tourism. Majestic hotels and sandy beaches attract thousands of tourists every year from all over the world. Nevertheless, there is one side of Aqaba to discover that will amaze you. Being in contact with locals, experience the hidden city and learn about Aqaba's heritage, will enrich your journey and you will feel part of a community of people with a millennial history and tradition.

### Henna and Kohl Drawings Experience

Henna has a long history and is revered in the Middle East because of its usage in cosmetics for colouring hands, feet, and hair as well as for extracting the scent of its blooms.

In the Middle East, Kohl is one of the most traditional types of cosmetics. It is an illustration of the eyes' beautiful features for both sexes.

### Eco-Camping along the Coast

Wonder at the coast of Aqaba with its beautiful beaches and experience the environmental beach camping. For snorkelling, beaches are easily accessible and has ready-to-use amenities.

### Explore Aqaba from the Top: Hiking in the Mountains

Aqaba's mountains are one of the most beautiful places to hike in the Middle East. It is an interesting adventure that brings you a general view of Aqaba, Eilat, Taba of Egypt and the Red Sea.

### Taste Delicious Specialties Prepared by Locals

Local spices are the secret blends of local delicacies in Aqaba. Each recipe consists of at least 8 spices. Spices are used daily with rice and fish to create a delicious Aqabawi meals. Another specialty is date molasses. It is made in several easy stages, sticky and tasty, used in traditional food and popular sweets. The last typical dish is Hooh Sweets, a traditional sweet dish made up of nuts, Coconut, cinnamon and butter to create soft, appetizing layers that are easy to prepare and eat. Aqabawies make Hooh in holidays and events.





### Local Aqabawi Wedding

The experience of an Aqabawi wedding includes many activities related to women during the preparation of the wedding, including the application henna and kohl in the culture of Aqaba. The men celebrate, dance and sing folk songs in preparation for the groom.

### Fishing with a Local Fisherman

The Gulf of Aqaba has many distinctive fish that can be fished and eaten. The experience of fishing with a local fisherman is unforgettable and allows you to learn traditional fishing techniques and experience the real essence of Aqaba, since it was a fishing village for more than four centuries.

### Snorkelling for a Clean Sea

Aqaba beaches are facing many different tourist activities, which expose the sea and marine life to many dangers of pollution. The experience of snorkelling for cleaning the seafront is an experience of swimming with coloured fish and protecting it by picking up the waste accumulated among the coral reefs.

### Caring for Dogs in a Dog Shelter

Southern Jordan is famous for being home to an ancient species of dog well known for its interactive skills. The Aqaba population had found a shelter to protect them and keep them away from the urban areas. The experience focuses on interacting with them through an outreach program by taking part in a daily care programme. The experience helps to generate compassionate and conscientious behaviour towards nature and animals and to improve the relationship of the local community with the surrounding environment.



## History of Aqaba

Aqaba is roughly 330 kilometres from Amman and 80 kilometres from Petra and due to its strategic location on the Red Sea, is at the crossroads of roadways connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe. Many civilizations have traded through its port throughout the centuries.

The current name is an acronym of Aqabat Ayla, the "pass of Ayla" across the mountains to the north. In Roman times it was occupied by a legion and it was the southern terminus of a trade route leading from Syria. In the early 4th century, under Byzantine rule, it became the seat of a bishopric and the city continued to be very active.

Aqaba became a crucial stop for Egyptian Muslims traveling to Mecca after the year 630. The Crusaders captured the city in the twelfth century and it returned to Islamic sovereignty in the year 1183, where the Mamluk sultans took care of it and built castles to protect it, such as Aqaba Castle, under the administration of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century. Its power declined and it remained a small fishing village for the next 400 years.

During World War I, the city was developed into a fortified Turkish bastion that was strategically important. It was shelled by the British and French navies before being taken by Arab irregulars.

After the foundation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1946, Aqaba's port became increasingly vital. From 1961, The Kingdom of Jordan started to consider Aqaba as an important tourist destination and work on planning strategies to develop that specific economic sector of the city. In the last twenty years, local governments have invested in order to transform Aqaba into a world class Red Sea business hub and a leisure destination for mass tourists.

## Aqaba's Heritage

The multicultural history creates a rare composition of a tolerant civilization and leaves a unique tradition which is transmitted by local population. In recent years, there has been a renovation of the Aqaba tourism product that allows a sustainable discovery of Aqaba's history, heritage and legends that have made this city a pearl of the Red Sea. Throughout this journey, you will visit one the oldest Christian churches ever built, explore its marine heritage – a flagship of the gulf – with more than 510 species of marine fish species, discover the first underwater military museum and taste traditional dishes prepared by the locals with your help. Among all the heritage sites that you can find in Aqaba, six of them are must-sees and represent the highlights of the city.





## Historical and Cultural Heritage

The first site is Tell Al-Khalifeh. Located 4km west of central Aqaba and right on the border of Jordan and the Palestinian Territories. According to recent studies, this archaeological site was discovered after the seventh century BC, when the region served economic and industrial purposes such as the Copper Desert and finding spots to stop commercial caravans. It is a vivid example of the millennial history of Aqaba since the researchers have distinguished five settlement periods in the archaeological site.

Ayla is an ancient Islamic city located northwest of the current centre of the city of Aqaba, and it is considered the first Islamic city to be established outside the Arabian Peninsula. The early Islamic site of Ayla was adjacent to an earlier Byzantine town. While no documentary evidence for dating this foundation is available, the period within the caliphate of Uthmān Ibn Affān, about A.D 650, is likely. It was once an important stopping place for Egyptian pilgrims on their way to Mecca. Today, it is a significant attraction for tourists and it is located right in the heart of Aqaba's seafront.

The third historical and heritage site is the ancient Aqaba Byzantine Church, located in the heart of the city. It is dated to the end of the third century A.D and is among the earliest known in the world, perhaps the oldest Christian church. Jordan saw a lot of construction effort during the Byzantine Empire. As the population of the region grew, all of the main Roman era cities continued to prosper. When Christianity was officially acknowledged in Jordan in the fourth century, churches were built all over Jordan. The Great Persecution resulted in the removal of several Christian buildings in the region, but this church has maintained a well-preserved status because of its peripheral location within the Roman Empire. Once abandoned, the ruined building was soon filled by wind-blown sand, which helped preserve its walls to a remarkable height.

The last historical heritage site is the Aqaba Castle. It is a fortress originally built by Crusaders in the 12th century and destroyed few years later, until it was rebuilt in the early 16th century under the Mamluk Sultan Al-Ashraf Qansuh Al-Ghuri. The fort was used and renovated during many historical dynasties by the Ottomans. In July 1917, it was the location of a victory of the Arab Revolt, when this heavily defended Turkish stronghold fell to an Arab camel charge. Situated on the coastline, it is located next to the Aqaba Flagpole, the world's second-highest free-standing flagpole. Adjacent to the fort, there is the Aqaba Archaeological Museum, which was once the Sharif Hussein's residence.

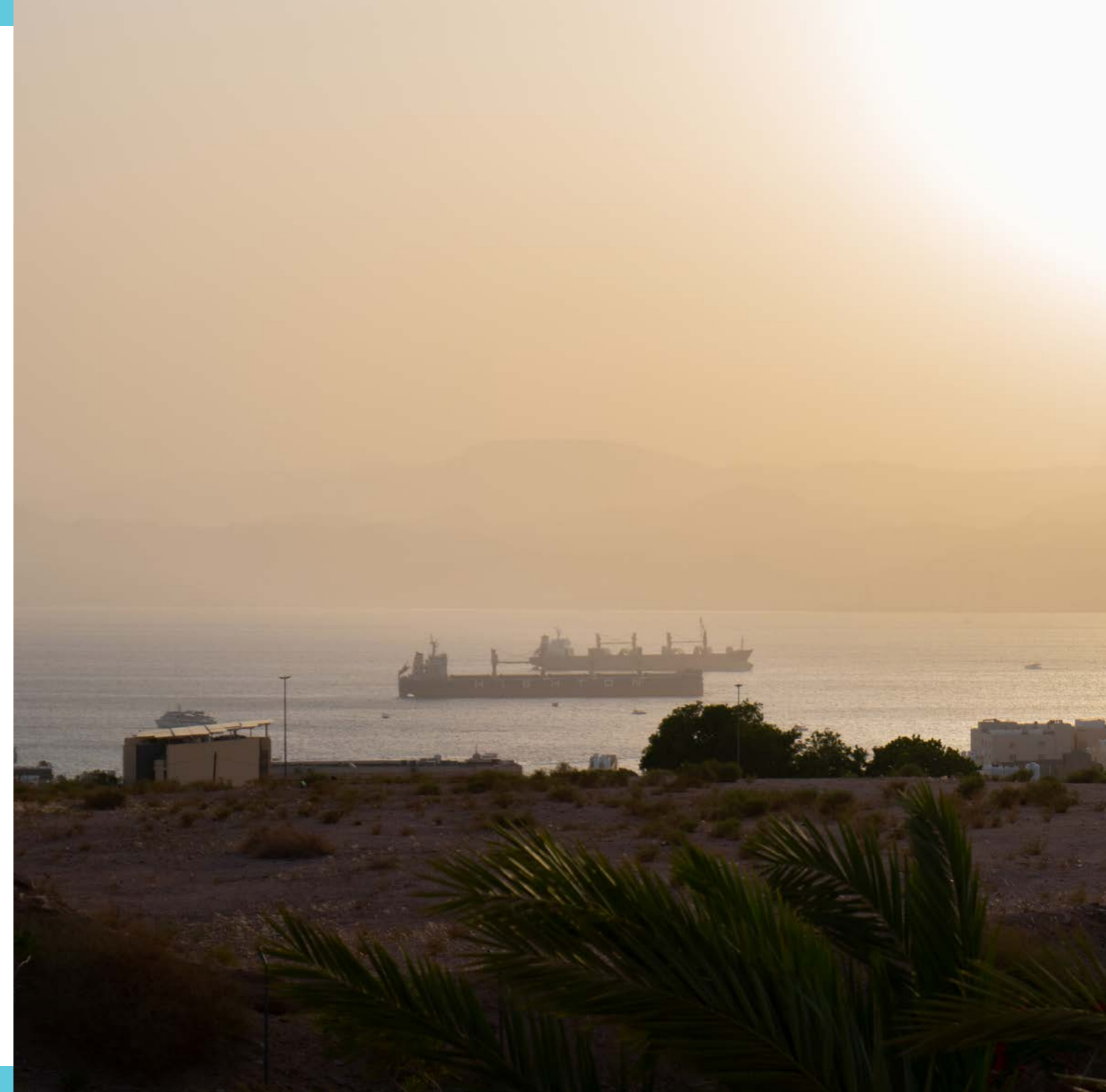
## Marine Heritage

The Jordan coastline covers about 27 km of the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, which extends for about 180 km from the Jordanian shore in the north to the Strait of Tiran in the south. It has an average width of 20 km and an average depth of 800 m. The Gulf of Aqaba consists of a series of embayments, each including comparatively similar communities such as a rocky shore, reef flat, reef face, fore reef, sandy shore, sandy bottom and seagrass ecosystems. There is a discontinuous series of coral reefs and reef flats, never more than 150 m wide, over a length of 13 km. The Gulf of Aqaba's global importance stems from its geographical location, as it is only inland connection between Africa and Eurasia.

To reduce the pressure on the natural coral reefs, the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA), in cooperation with several stakeholders, created different artificial sites located in the south part of the Gulf, approximately 12 km from Aqaba's city centre: the underwater military museum, which is considered the first underwater military museum in the world, the Cedar Pride Shipwreck, the Tank Dive Site, the Hercules C-130, the Tristar Wreck and other sites.

The underwater military museum was launched on July 25th, 2019, and is composed of nineteen pieces of hardware all in "battle formation" and includes tanks of different sizes, an ambulance, a military crane, a troop carrier, anti-aircraft guns and a combat helicopter. The machines were sunk to a depth range of 6 to 28 meters, meaning that visitors will be able to enjoy the attraction by snorkelling and glass-bottom boat tours, as well as scuba diving. This location is relatively poor in marine organisms and coral reefs and these things attract divers.

The second site is the Cedar Pride Shipwreck. She was in ballast at the port of Aqaba when, in 1982 a fire broke out and she sustained extensive damage to her engine room and accommodation. The vessel was declared a constructive total loss and abandoned. As a burned-out hulk she then remained in the port for over three years before her eventual fate was decided. In the end, it was decided to use the Shipwreck as a site for divers in November 1985.





## The Territorial Digital Platform: Combining Digital Innovation and Social Innovation

By Paola Autore

International projects, CoopCulture

When we speak in general about innovation, we always think that the innovative aspects are expressed by technology, whereas it is important to understand how all digital products must be built on a project that first of all envisages an integrated system in a network perspective: technologies, in fact, work and produce more significant impacts when they are able to host many contents and create connections and when they are not conceived as an end in itself.

Hidden Mediterranean, the territorial digital platform that CoopCulture has realised for the CROSSDEV project, is therefore and first and foremost a networking tool and a cooperative platform for a conscious and sustainable use of the diffuse material cultural heritage, nature trails, small villages and routes. As the focal point and hub of the system, the platform is intended as a territorial showcase for designing and redesigning the experience of travel and discovery, at the same time regenerating the territories. From this point of view, it becomes a tool for social innovation as it has been realised with the involvement of local stakeholders and actors through a mapping process involving them, allowing them to design their offer in a cross-border perspective, inspired by European cultural itineraries in which the common and shared theme crosses national borders.

Using their computer or smartphone, visitors and trip organisers can thus get to know the territory, personalize and plan their trip and get information by contacting local operators directly.

The digital infrastructure thus presents itself as a true ecosystem that integrates and aggregates content and information from various sources through a human-centred digitalisation process and a participatory governance model originating from the territories themselves.

### DISCOVER HIDDEN MEDITERRANEAN DESTINATIONS

FIVE DESTINATIONS, FOUR COUNTRIES ACROSS  
THE TWO SHORES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA.

- Italy, Via Selinuntina
- Jordan, Aqaba
- Jordan, Umm Qais
- Lebanon, Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve
- Palestine, Palestinian Heritage Trail

#### • PLAN YOUR TRIP

Find info about the five destinations, get in touch with local tourism businesses and arrange your trip. Accommodations, tour guides, artisans, home kitchens, museums, local associations, and much more: their services, tips and ideas will make your trip truly authentic.

#### • CHOOSE YOUR ITINERARIES

On Hidden Mediterranean you can build your trip by choosing between a broad range of itineraries and events related to crafts, food, art and spirituality. Local events are the best way to get to know cultures and peoples in depth.

#### • MEET PEOPLE

Meet the locals of the 30+ communities involved and enjoy a wide range of experiences with them. Be inspired by those who live in or have already travelled these wonderful Mediterranean destinations.



DISCOVER MORE  
[WWW.HIDDENMEDITERRANEAN.NET](http://WWW.HIDDENMEDITERRANEAN.NET)



Hidden Mediterranean is a creation of the project CROSSDEV – Cultural Routes for Sustainable Social and Economic Development in the Mediterranean – co-funded by the European Union through the ENI CBC MED Programme

Because of this, it is able to impact on the different dimensions of sustainability:

- with respect to the visitor/trip organiser, who can activate a relationship with communities and material and intangible cultural heritage
- with respect to the various actors involved, as a tool for sustainable and cooperative development and the common growth of skills
- with respect to the countries involved, as an instrument of networking and coexistence of different cultures

### The web interface

The online platform will offer tourists and site visitors the possibility of viewing proposals and initiatives organised in the area, accessing a calendar of routes and events of different types, duration or theme, which can be chosen according to one's expectations and preferences using a filter system.

For example, some thematic areas that can be covered are:

- information on places of cultural tourist interest such as museums, archaeological sites, monuments
- itineraries and routes built in the area
- practical information on facilities and utilities available in the area
- presentation of the territory's food and wine offers
- up-to-date information on opening hours and availability of museums, guided tours and other cultural offers such as shows, concerts, events
- information on services and products on sale
- information on tourist accommodation

All the information on the platform is organized into assets that are related to each other so as to allow the best user experience.







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## ***Afterword – Council of Europe***



*Office in Venice  
Bureau à Venise  
Ufficio di Venezia*

### **The European Cultural Routes, Ambassadors of European Culture**

Culture plays a crucial role in strengthening international partnerships. It is a powerful tool to build bridges between people and reinforce mutual understanding.

Through its standard-setting activity, policies, and initiatives the Council of Europe has highlighted, in the past seventy years, the importance of cultural heritage as a tool for delivering peace and intercultural dialogue.

Its Cultural Routes programme promotes participation, engagement, democratic approaches and enables European citizens to rediscover their common heritage and gain a better understanding of their shared history.

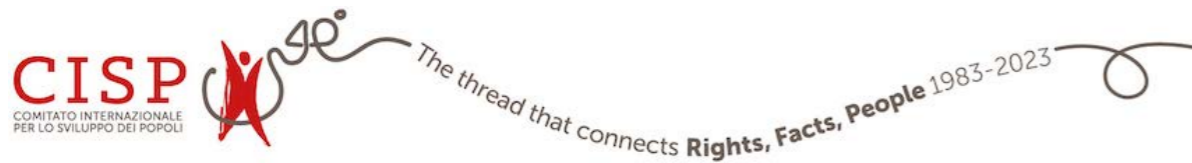
The cultural routes develop long-term relationships between countries, regions, and peoples. They counter stereotypes and prejudice by nurturing dialogue, open-mindedness, dignity, and mutual respect.

They thus facilitate peaceful co-existence by fostering trust and promoting cultural diversity.

Today more than ever, at a time where our societies face profound challenges and the very idea of Europe is being questioned by a new conflict on our continent, heritage must remain at the core of our policies and social models. By opening up channels of communication between people, involving grassroots stakeholders, citizens and institutions the Council of Europe cultural routes are truly ambassadors of European prestigious heritage, tradition, creativity and excellence on our continent and beyond.

***Luisella Pavan-Woolfe***

*Head of the Council of Europe Office in Venice*



The International Committee for the Development of Peoples (CISP) is a non-governmental organization of international cooperation, which has been operating since 1983 through development and humanitarian aid projects and programmes.

In addition to its headquarters in Rome, CISP maintains two regional offices in Italy and several field offices worldwide active in over 30 countries.

CISP operates starting from the real needs of the territories of intervention and thanks to a strong bond with local communities and partners. It works by placing people and communities at the core of its action, always from a human well being and sustainable development perspective.

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[www.cisp.ngo](http://www.cisp.ngo)







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