



International Heritage Fair: Eco-responsibility in tourism and sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

The Regulations of the « Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe » underline the importance of sustainability for their implementation: *“the theme must permit the development of initiatives and exemplary and innovative projects in the field of cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development”* (List of eligibility criteria for themes) or in the List of priority fields of action: *“concern themselves, in the field of cultural tourism, with raising public awareness, drawing decision makers' attention to the necessity of protecting heritage as part of sustainable development of the territory and seek to diversify both supply and demand, with a view to fostering the development of quality tourism with a European dimension.”*

The European Route of Historic Thermal Towns is particularly aware of these demands, inasmuch as the **quality of the water** has, since the origins of thermal activity in the times of the Celts and the Romans, constituted not only a demand for, but also a symbol of, purity, health, well-being and even spirituality. This objective of quality is obviously linked to the protection of the environment in **which the sources are born**. Making thermal water available thus constitutes an essential aspect of **water's veritable Odyssey through the planet**. The sharing of natural resources, the sense of common responsibility towards health, as well as the promotion of values such as well-being, but also all the values associated with promoting historical heritage and with the spirit of dialogue: **all these became traditions when modern spa activities, linked to the birth of modern tourism, was created**. It is therefore not surprising that a notion such as **“integrated conservation”**, promoted by the Council of Europe, would be a natural part of the policies of thermal towns in the continuation of the “Orientations for legislation development and system management for cultural heritage” defined by the same institution.

The sustainable development of a thermal town is these days in fact based on several major complimentary principles of economic development:

- **Social equity** in the frame of the implementation of an inclusive well-being policy as much for visitors as inhabitants,
- **Protection of the environment** (which incorporates natural and cultural heritage) in a perspective of responsibility and partnership between the public and private sectors of thermal activity and tourism,
- The promotion of **cultural tourism** integrating the **development and enhancement of a considerable and diversified tangible heritage and an intangible heritage** which takes benefit for its comprehension of new approaches and interpretation techniques via transmedia.

In this way, essential advances, such as the **European Landscape Convention** and the **Faro Framework Convention on Heritage and Society**, have become indispensable tools in helping thermal town administrations to follow a policy recommended during major meetings of European towns on sustainability. It was the Brundtland Report of 1987 that outlined that “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”, or even the Resolutions of the Aalborg Charter in 1994, Aalborg +10, then that of Leipzig 2007. Furthermore, we are searching, through a networking policy, to find our points in common, knowing that “As each city is different, we have to find our individual ways towards sustainability.” **The political and ethical dimension of environmental issues is fundamental**, even if the criteria of economic efficiency, without being predominant, must not be absent from mediations in decision-making processes. To economic indicators, which are only partial testimonies of well-being, must be added social and environmental indicators. The thermal towns are, due to their characteristics and medical economic activity, among those best placed to try to integrate as harmoniously possible the various components of sustainable development, and to resolve its apparent contradictions.

STAGES

Thermae Europae

In a first phase between 2006 and 2009, a network of European towns and regions worked on these fundamental questions, in the framework of the Culture Programme entitled “Thermae Europae”. It entailed exploring in detail, not only the nature of heritage itself and telling of their diversity, but researching their common European foundations. This work has led to numerous publications which have constituted a basis for the following stages.

EHTTA

The European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA) is a network that was created in Brussels in 2009, gathering together 25 thermal towns (including Evian – France, Baden Baden – Germany, Bath – United Kingdom, Ourense – Spain, Acqui Terme and Montecatini Terme – Italy, as well as Budapest – Hungary, Daruvar – Croatia and Techirghiol – Romania) situated in 10 European countries. These towns possess an iconic architectural heritage, and the curative properties of their mineral water are recognised across Europe.

The objectives of this European network consist of **obtaining recognition of the innovative and cultural specificities of European thermal towns from the European Union**, with a view to developing their tourist activity in the framework of a new plan encouraging the cross-border tourism of “**Destination Europe**”. The EHTTA encourages the development and economic restructuring of thermal towns and the protection of their heritage and culture through the **exchange of experiences and best practices of eco-tourism on a European level**.

The principal criteria that have been selected and which have been approved by the Council of Europe are:

1. To be an historic thermal town dating from at least the 19th Century.
2. To have an active mineral water operation in the form of a thermal establishment and/or wellbeing Centre. The commercial operation of bottled water is not an eligible criterion.
3. To possess an architectural heritage dating from at least the 19th Century, comprising one or more buildings linked to Thermal activities and registered as Historic Monuments.
4. To have infrastructures and a tradition of entertainment and cultural activities, such as: casino, theatre, bandstand, etc.
5. To offer quality accommodation (hotels of high quality, at least 3 stars) and to have a significant number of rooms adapted to the thermal and tourist function of the town.

It is on the basis of these criteria that analysis and action plan has been drafted.

DES CONCEPTS A LA PRATIQUE

Conceptual Work

In the framework of this encounter, we chose to put forth two axes of analysis led by the EHTTA:

The concept of ‘patrimonialisation’: for balanced tourism as well as harmonious development

Sustainable development has too often become a **refuge expression used for reassurance in the face of a global crisis**. The report, which is based on the protection / development / transmission trilogy, tends to rely too heavily on **the heritage cult concept**. This narcissistic attitude facing heritage denounced by Françoise Choay characterises the dangers of global “success” for heritage as a place for tourist or leisure investment. This reflection has thus led towns to insist upon the necessary balance between making architecture and architectural innovation a part of heritage, in close connection with the public and private sectors (medical or recreational thermal establishments and tourist services) as well as between making heritage more intangible via digitisation, and placing the visitor or mediator’s body in the living architecture of a cultural tourism that experts today tend to name multi-sensorial and participatory tourism. Heritage is, economically and symbolically, a non-renewable resource that must be protected, conserved and valued. Thermal tourist experience is in this sense particularly suited for making visitors perfectly aware of a patrimonial continuity connecting the environment, the cultural landscape, knowledge of the architecture or “Baukultur”, and the human dimension represented by all the historic figures who inaugurated the Grand Tour, cultural tourism’s predecessor. As such, it is about developing the liaison between the well-being of culture and the

culture of well-being. At the same time, the importance of “consumable” heritage, in terms of the knowledge of artisans linked to the historic importance of “souvenirs” offered to tourists (spa “jolités” – painted wooden boxes, Royat crystal jewelry, lithographic posters...) or of gastronomy, deserves reconsideration in the framework of a new regional tourism promoting local production.

European values: their interpretation and their incarnation

Working in the framework of a European towns network that has always been made up of meeting places and those of dialogue leads us to participate in an obvious and natural fashion in another aspect of sustainability: **openness towards other cultures and encouraging the active participation of visitors**, two concepts promoted by the cultural routes, coming through the presentation of heritage in European terms. Peter Wagner, in the work “Forward Planning: Functions of cultural heritage in a changing Europe” (2001) suggests: “That which potentially unites Europeans must clearly be sought in terms of the “absent” or “marginalized” values in European history. “Heritage” therefore can be defined as those “core values” which can be constructed as a Europeanised narrative of European history; a counter-narrative to the presently existing national (that is, nationalized) histories.” Kate Clark and Paul Drury, to whom was given the task of identifying the overall trends in terms of cultural heritage management (in the large sense), added to the traditional concept of interpretation – which emanated from specialists – the new concept of an interpretation emanating from the community. “Heritage is an opportunity to explore and to articulate a European narrative, in effect to Europeanise European history. Especially under present conditions, there is a need for a new reading of the past which tells the story of European heritage at a level that transcends national boundaries, and at the same time articulates the contributions of national, regional and local identities to the construction of a common European home”.

It is through this narration of the travels and encounters of a series of creators – painters, writers, musicians, scientists and political decision-makers – who frequented, and still frequent these thermal towns, and a call for the diary of today’s creators, that the thermal towns can respond as a cultural route to such wishes with intangible heritage specific to them.

Strategic Work

Actions

These two main axes have been registered during the Bath General Assembly of the Network in March 2012. It was therefore decided that EHTTA must proactively respond to concepts of water cures and spa activities that are rapidly changing. It will rest even more in the future on the creation of a Europe without borders as much concerning the places of treatment that visitors will be able to choose from in the country they prefer, as in terms of tourism for a “Destination Europe” that the European Commission aims to develop as a quality commercial brand for the world’s premier tourist destination.

This has led us to progressively consider these two complimentary strategies in terms of health and tourism, by basing our common action on four major pillars:

- A diversification of wellbeing offers based on a dynamic vision of water cures and on a renewed approach of quality gastronomy;
- An interactive valorization of thermal heritage, of prestigious buildings, as well as the creators and intellectuals that frequented resorts and made popular resorts that were justly considered “Cafés of Europe”, meeting places of intellectuals and politicians preparing for the future in a spirit of dialogue, a state of mind that we find today thanks to our European network;
- A contemporary answer to cultural demands, including those of youngsters, who can link an understanding of the past to contemporary creation;
- The growing success of a cultural and multi-sensory tourism which shows a change in behaviour of tourists, based on unusual experiences and participatory events.

Cafés of Europe for a “Blue Print of Thermal Towns”

The EHTTA, basing itself on the vast experience of the “Route des Villes d’Eaux du Massif Central” in its contractual collaboration with the DATAR Massif (Massif regional planning), has mobilised the entirety of forces in the Network awarded by the Council of Europe, to define a preliminary course of action, the application for which has just been submitted to the Culture Programme under the name “**Sources of Culture: the Cafés of Europe**”.

This will be a series of high-level and highly publicised debates taking place in eight major spa towns around Europe—Enghien-les-Bains, Spa, Royat-Chamalières, Ourense, Baden-Baden, Fiuggi, Acqui Terme and Bath - and broadcast on Internet – to pay tribute to and to recreate the debate and creative and intellectual collaboration that took place in the 18th and 19th centuries in European spa towns, and to involve the creativity of citizens and visitors. It is envisaged that the Cafés will be the start of a permanent programme of debates, held at least once a year in a town in the network, and several times a year online. Themes on “The Digital field: between the past and the future of spa towns”, links between spa towns and pilgrim ways, birth of modern tourism and about movie and spas; travel literature and diarists, even on historic publications are among the most important

Sources of Inspiration and Creation: While “taking the cure”, people who came to spa towns needed entertainment and sustenance for the mind and soul as well as the body, which is why the tradition of organizing so many festivals, exhibitions and cultural events has developed. This strand of the project is based on sharing information about all the annual creative and artistic events which help to attract 20 million visitors to the towns each year. In celebrating the thermal water sources it also aims to involve as many of the towns in the EHTTA network as possible.

“Celebration@sources”: A day of “open spas” – similar to European Heritage Open Days, will be held each year on World Water Day (March 22nd) to embrace and celebrate water sources by encouraging residents and visitors alike to bathe in or drink the spa waters, particularly if they have never done so before.

The Interactive Novel - “Voyages aux Sources de l’Europe”: From the launch in Enghien-les-Bains and for the next two years, an interactive and trans-media novel will be developed, based on the virtual travel of four characters. They might be, for example: a writer, a musician, a doctor, a painter who will reinterpret and be the reincarnations of travelers of the past who, while visiting important thermal towns, meet contemporary and historic figures; people who will testify to a common history, creativity and culture.

“Festivals” is firstly an online directory, put on a specially created digital platform, of festivals and exhibitions.

“Centre des Sources” at Vichy – A European resource Centre of thermal heritage: “La Médiathèque Valery-Larbaud”, in Vichy has many scientific and medical works and information about Vichy and the surrounding region, as well as prints, posters and historic postcards, and is in the process of putting much of this collection online. The Médiathèque is proposing to set up a European centre of documentation on spa town heritage, and to centralise a number of resources.

Papers written about each café, and summarised together at the end of the project will be presented in a “blueprint” for the future of thermal spa towns in Europe. This **blueprint** will also contain contributions and scenarios for Europe 2020 and suggestions for Historical Thermal Cities as platforms and clusters for a spa dialogue of culture and a culture of creativity.

Short Bibliography

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