



VAL DE LOIRE
PATRIMOINE MONDIAL



UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Europe – A Network for Cultural Dialogue and Cultural Tourism »
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« UNESCO World Heritage Sites and Cultural Dialogue in Europe »

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am speaking to you today in different capacities: as special world heritage advisor for UNESCO, as a member of a management force for a vast French world heritage site – the Val de Loire, and also, and above all, as an elected representative. In the latter capacity, I have worked for many years towards bringing together people and cultures, and militating in favour of international solidarity.

It is on the basis of these different experiences and responsibilities that I will attempt to answer the question you have asked me to deal with today – world heritage sites and cultural dialogue in Europe.

What brings us together is first and foremost that we are all part of world heritage. But to what extent can world heritage be the trigger for intercultural and cross-border dialogue, the basis of an enlarged Europe? How can we build a more united Europe, respectful of what underlies the wealth of both our individual differences and our common values? How can we build on the assets which have earned us the recognition of UNESCO and use them as a lever for shared action.



A COMMON HERITAGE VISION, SHARED ISSUES

To achieve dialogue, we must above all understand each other. While we do not share the same language, nor the same history, we do nonetheless share the same vision of heritage – the one upheld by UNESCO.

For several years now I have been involved in the development of world heritage as special advisor to the World Heritage Centre director, and more recently as member of the French national committee of world heritage property. This privileged position has enabled me to confirm and direct a trend that I had already observed, namely the significant change in the nature of the listed sites.

If we look at the actual words of UNESCO, “Heritage is the legacy of the past from which we benefit today and which we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration (...)” What makes the world heritage concept remarkable is its universal application, because the world heritage sites belong to all the peoples of the world, regardless of where they are located. However, this very notion of world heritage has changed significantly in the last few years.

I believe that this change is linked to a number of factors. First of all, in 1994, following the observation that 20 years after the 1972 Convention was adopted the world heritage list showed an imbalance regarding the types of property and geographic regions represented, the world heritage committee worked towards ensuring that the cultural and natural diversity of property of outstanding universal value was respected¹. But more generally, changes in society and the uncertain environment in which we live made it necessary to extend the definition of world heritage. Going beyond the narrow framework of heritage definitions, this new definition aims to recognize and protect sites which provide outstanding evidence of the coexistence of human beings and the land, of interactions between human beings, of cultural coexistence, of spirituality, and of creative expression. In this way, we have moved from the inscription of outstanding monuments to that of urban areas and cultural landscapes.

This movement is clearly visible in France where priority for inscription was originally given to sites such as Chartres Cathedral in 1979 and the Cistercian Abbey of Fontenay in 1981, and then to sites such as the banks of the Seine in Paris in 1991, Mont Perdu in 1997, the historic town centre of Lyon and the jurisdiction of Saint Emilion in 1999, and the Val de Loire in 2000 (...). Inscriptions have followed the same trend in Germany and Great Britain.

Based on the UNESCO criteria and faced with the same changes in society, I believe that we now share the same vision of heritage, moving away from that of monuments, which I venture to qualify as backward-looking, towards a more global and dynamic perception. We have gradually come to consider the property within its environment as part of a greater whole and with which it constantly interacts. In addition to the patrimonial aspect of a site, we now need to emphasize the link between people and their physical, cultural, economic and social environment.

Once heritage acquires a regional scale, we are faced with the same issues. It then becomes relevant, if not essential, to see the listed properties not in isolation but rather as part of a vast network. And just as today we are creating a network of French world heritage sites, so too we can think of creating a network of our sites on a European scale.

The main directions of this shared work remain to be defined. We need to identify common concerns to discuss and work on together.



EXPERIENCES TO BE ENHANCED: THE EXAMPLE OF THE VAL DE LOIRE

I will not presume to give you “instructions” about how to set up a network of world heritage sites. But I think it can be useful to take an empirical approach, by looking at a specific world heritage site with its own development and protection problems, and examining those which would merit being extended to a European level.

So, it is now as a member of the management and development force of the Val de Loire that I will speak. I will not of course give you an overview of all the projects we are currently working on, but focus on a number of actions covering the topics which I think are relevant to us all.

THE VAL DE LOIRE: A LIVING CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The Val de Loire was listed as a UNESCO world heritage site on 30th November 2000 as a living cultural landscape. It is the largest listed site in France, stretching 280 kms from Sully-

¹ Global strategy for a balanced, representative and credible world heritage list - 1994

sur-Loire in the Centre region to Chalonnes-sur-Loire in the Pays de la Loire region. It covers two regions, four departments, one regional natural park, 161 communes, and has a population of more than a million inhabitants.

Its inscription recognizes it as a “monument of nature and culture”: more than its castles, its gardens, its troglodyte hillsides, its ports and towns, the Val de Loire bears witness to the continuation of a river culture, the constant adaptation of human activity, and an art of living related to the river.

The inscription was the starting point of an exemplary approach to the sustainable development of the site. To meet UNESCO’s requirements, the State and local authorities set up a management force based on a territorial conference, composed of representatives of the local authorities involved, and chaired by the Préfet who also coordinated the “Loire Grandeur Nature” Plan, a development committee bringing together once a year members of civil society and an operational mission. The Mission Val de Loire was created by the Centre and Pays de la Loire regions as an organizational and coordination instrument. In particular, it manages the UNESCO label by authority of the State. It carries out information and awareness-raising actions for local players, and promotes the image of the Val de Loire at a national and international level. It boosts and fosters the development of innovative actions aimed at developing the site.

The Val de Loire inscription involves a whole region, linking remarkable and ordinary landscapes, reasonably populated urban areas, and peri-urban areas devoted to agriculture and/or leisure activities. The aim is to use the UNESCO label to define the conditions of regional management of this large site, based on its cultural identity. This experiment involves adapting existing tools and procedures in a resolutely innovative approach of sustainable development.

A UNIFYING ISSUE: TERRITORIAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

This issue of sustainable development, which is at the centre of our development procedure for the site, finds concrete form in the implementation of experimental and innovative actions covering three areas:

- Landscape and enhancement of spaces
- Cultural practices and proposals
- Providing and promoting tourist activities

➔ Landscape management

The Val de Loire inscription has introduced a new level of knowledge and action, that of its landscape and its architectural, natural and river heritage. The Val de Loire has thus embarked on an exemplary approach combining protection and enhancement of its landscapes.

Public players – the State and local authorities – have a specific responsibility in this procedure, to develop a true landscape culture with the local inhabitants. Appropriation of this culture is a major element of the inscription.

Acting on the landscape requires a true project culture based on knowledge-building, capitalising on experience and informing inhabitants. The keys to this policy are the exchange and capitalisation of experiences at an international level. The objective is to maintain a search for excellence and innovation in all development decisions in order to qualify this living environment and preserve its uniqueness which has been recognized as a universal value by the international community.

The actions carried out in the Val de Loire consist of information and awareness-raising missions, building on good practices, mutualisation of engineering means, and support of innovative operations.

They are carried out in partnership with State departments and are based on the objectives of the European landscape convention. They are organized around four points:

- Knowledge of the landscapes and how they have evolved
- Protection and restoration of landscape qualities
- Adaptation of the Loire-side space and landscape revival
- Giving coherence to public actions

Among the projects implemented last year, I can mention the following:

- Signing the charter of excellence for outdoor advertising and implementation of two pilot actions (one of the approaches to Saumur (49), and one of the approaches to the urban district of Orléans (45) at La Chappelle Saint Mesmin – Saint Jean de la Ruelle).
- Distribution of the reference document “Vivre et faire vivre les paysages du Val de Loire “. This document was produced by the Mission Val de Loire in partnership with people involved in regional management, and gives a selection of about 30 “good practices” in terms of knowledge, protection, restoration, orientation, development and renewal of the reference landscapes of the site. This brochure presents the issues of the inscription and provides an inventory of public policy and reference actions. It shows the reality of considering the landscape from the perspective of a quality procedure which can be applied to everyone and that it is possible to make the landscape a real project culture in the Val de Loire.
- Launching and implementing an innovative project for maintaining and enhancing natural areas and the banks of the Loire, in partnership with the Caisse d’Epargne Centre Val de Loire (banking institution).

➔ An example of international outlook: the world heritage vineyard network

On the initiative of the Val de Loire wine producers and Mission Val de Loire, the European wine-growing sites on the world heritage list decided to form a common base in order to strengthen their means of action in favour of sustainable landscape management and cultural wine tourism. The aim of this project is to create new development benchmarks for a harmonised development, combining optimal wine production and sustainable development of these landscapes. This would involve innovative forms of wine tourism combining landscape discovery and skills acquisition, and quality associated with authenticity of service in terms of welcome, accommodation and catering.

Vineyard landscapes are a unique form of heritage which testify the cultural link formed over the centuries between human beings and their physical, economic and social environment. Their inscription is a recognition of both their cultural uniqueness and the diversity of expression of wine-growing civilisations. In the context of the globalisation of production and the standardisation of taste, these inscriptions are not negligible!

The Val de Loire is one of 8 regions involved in this initiative: the former jurisdiction of Saint-Émilion (France), the Upper-Douro valley (Portugal), the Tokay region (Hungary), the national park of Cinque Terre (Italy), the upper valley of the middle Rhine (Germany), the Fertö-Neusiedlersee region and the Wachau region (Austria).

Six European countries are represented in this world heritage vineyard network. At a time when a Europe of 27 countries is being constructed, creating this network reaffirms that heritage and landscape identity can, and must, drive the strengthening and renewal of the attraction of these areas. These cultural landscapes are living: economic vitality is indispensable to maintain, develop and hand down to future generations this heritage and landscape capital and its inestimable know-how.

We now need to take advantage of this outstanding action to mobilise other European sites.

→ Cultural practices and proposals

In terms of cultural practices and proposals, the Mission's action aims notably at strengthening the use of themes in connection with the UNESCO inscription, thereby helping breathe life into the cultural identity of our site.

I would like to describe one example, namely the “Remontée de Sel”, an itinerant event celebrating the transport of salt up the river. It was first organized in 2005 and has just finished. This event involves traditional river boats and illustrates the historical and cultural heritage related to the river. At every stage of its journey, it brings life to the quaysides and jetties where the public are invited to watch artistic and cultural events and join in organized activities. It also has a teaching goal, helping young children to discover this rich, intangible heritage and encouraging them to participate in its renewal and survival. Here again, this is an area suitable for bringing together different cultures. This year we invited the river Niger to share its experience in this field, and hope to renew this experience with other rivers in the future.

→ Tourism provision and promotion

In terms of tourism, the UNESCO inscription is of course a powerful lever for renewing, developing and promoting what we have to offer. In this domain, we clearly have much to share and learn from each other. Here again, working in a network will be of great relevance.

Several projects on which we are working already have a European flavour. Among these, I will just mention “La Loire à Vélo”. This is a safe, signposted cycle route which will eventually link the Atlantic and Burgundy. At the moment, you can cycle from Angers to Tours, encountering world heritage along the way. It is part of the European river cycle route linking the Atlantic and the Danube.

I would also like to mention the “Grands sites du Val de Loire” process, establishing a shared diagnosis and action plan for the main heritage and tourist sites of the Val de Loire. This action involves 17 sites selected on the basis of tourist numbers, and in the short term it should result in an action plan for promotion, welcome, mediation and accessibility. While this action is local at the moment, it could easily be replicated in other European countries.

KNOWLEDGE AS A TOOL FOR MOBILIZATION AND BROADENING HORIZONS: THE INTERNATIONAL RIVER AND HERITAGE INSTITUTE

Another major topic on which we are working and which I believe is an essential vehicle for sharing is the spread of knowledge.

Chapter 5 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention states that:

In order to ensure protection and conservation as efficient as possible and enhancement as active as possible, the member States will strive to (...):

- ❖ Assign a function to heritage (...) in community life...
- ❖ Develop scientific studies and research and techniques ...
- ❖ Take appropriate legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures (...)
- ❖ Foster the creation or development of national or regional training centres (...) and encourage scientific research

In order to meet this requirement, and with the strong encouragement of UNESCO, the Val de Loire has created a tool for river-related information, research and expertise, in the form of the International rivers and heritage Institute.

→ Background

The higher education and research establishments of the Val de Loire, notably the universities of Angers, Nantes, Orléans and Tours, have acquired competence in the fields of the study, preservation, management and development of the natural and cultural heritage of river corridors. In collaboration with public or private organisations whose activities are linked to the river or its environment, they have set up specialized training courses in these domains, and their research teams can offer their expertise on the ground in France and abroad.

To coordinate and optimise these actions, the Centre and Pays de la Loire regions, together with the universities of the Val de Loire, and under the auspices of UNESCO, created a specific department of the Mission Val de Loire in 2005 called “*Institut international fleuves et patrimoine*”. The aim of this Institute is to make known and mobilize the competences and means of its partners, as well as fostering knowledge building and dissemination in the field of heritage linked to major rivers, in terms of scientific research, high-level training or technological expertise.

Through its outward-looking approach and its contacts at the local, national and international levels, the Institute is a means of creating opportunities and development for each of its partners. It is also an excellent tool for mobilising resources provided to project-holders in the framework of the global effort to protect and enhance heritage led notably by the World Heritage Centre.

→ The Institute’s missions: Training, research, expertise

An original training course offered by the university network

The Institute’s training actions come under the domains likely to involve the functioning, preservation and development of river systems and their associated heritage. The “River and Heritage” courses are run by the Institute’s higher education establishment partners as part of their official teaching programme. These courses will gradually be developed, including the creation of new and interdisciplinary courses.

An ideal setting for fostering research

The Institute’s mission is to promote and support scientific action, notably academic or applied research carried out by the research departments or units of its partners in their domains of competence. To this end, it has set up a policy of support, which is shown by:

- ❖ Awarding doctoral and post-doctoral research grants for research carried out on the Institute’s topics in the partner establishments
- ❖ Funding visiting personalities or researchers of all nationalities who wish to carry out work in the Val de Loire

An on-line data base has been created to provide bibliographic resources on the Institute’s themes in the documentation centres and libraries of the various partner establishments.

Bringing together and developing scientific and technical competences

The Institute’s scientific position seems particularly relevant at the international level. The proven benefits of comparing and contrasting the heritage management of the planet’s river corridors provide an opportunity for developing the skills and know-how of the Val de Loire. The numerous scientific teams attached to higher education and research establishments, and the engineering departments of public or private industrial firms, the technical departments of regional authorities, and various

specialized non-profit-making organisations, all provide a reservoir of skills which can be mobilized for fundamental or applied studies and transposed in the framework of international projects. In this way, the Institute assists partners who express the wish to set up international projects. There are two types of project, either scientific cooperation or those aiding development co-financed by international backers (European Commission, UNESCO, etc.).

The following domains are concerned:

- ❖ Environment: civil engineering, hydrology and water management, aquatic and land ecosystem study, risk management
- ❖ Heritage: history, archaeology, sociology; study of cultural landscapes, and study, protection and development of different types of heritage
- ❖ Regional development and urbanism: regional management, law, architecture, drainage, modelling
- ❖ Sustainable tourism: infrastructure, sites, transport and communication

The Institute is thus involved in several international cooperation sites, including:

- ❖ the SPRECOMAH (“Seminars Preventive Conservation and Monitoring of the Architectural Heritage”) project for monitoring architectural heritage, a project financed by the European Commission (DG Research) carried out in partnership with the Catholic University of Louvain.
- ❖ the “Loire-Niger (Mali)” project, another European project (water facility programme) piloted by UNESCO with the objective of strengthening the governance of water by setting up a network of local riverside authorities and the appropriation of resources.
- ❖ Preparation of the Nam Khan Ecovalley programme in the province of Luang Prabang in Laos. The Institute helps draw up the files of applicants for UNESCO’s Man and Biosphere programme and identify a research programme including higher education establishments and research institutes in France and Laos.
- ❖ A decentralized cooperation project - river to river (Niger-Loire-Mekong), organized by the French Foreign Affairs Ministry.

Other partnership opportunities with institutions linked to the Congo, the Nile and the Saint-Laurent are currently being studied.

STRUCTURING A NATIONAL NETWORK OF FRENCH SITES

I will conclude my talk by informing you that the French world heritage sites are currently being structured. Next October will see the creation of an association of French world heritage sites, whose objectives are:

- ❖ To create the conditions for sharing and exchanging knowledge and experience at the national and international level in the domains of heritage conservation, protection, enhancement and management, based on a common document – the Site management plan.
- ❖ To be a source of proposals and thought in the above-mentioned domains for all the people involved in heritage in France.
- ❖ To promote sites on the world heritage list to the general public and tourist operators.



We are working on many other national and international development projects, too numerous to mention here. I apologize if I have spoken for rather a long time, but these examples provide a very concrete illustration that “World Heritage Sites and Cultural Dialogue in Europe” are not abstract concepts.

I believe that this dialogue is not only desirable but possible. I believe that we took the first step towards it when we turned to UNESCO and the international community for recognition of our heritage. Because we all undoubtedly wanted it to be recognized in all its wealth and uniqueness, but also as part of a whole: world heritage, the heritage of all.

All our sites share common values. These values need to be identified in their diversity (and UNESCO can help us in this), but it is through them, I am quite certain, that we can develop common policies and act to promote solidarity and mutual understanding. Because at the end of the day, that is what it is about: the mutualisation of our resources and our desire to react to the conflicts facing our society. Uprooting, forgetting, loss of memory, ecological imbalance, social fractures, confiscation of heritage to benefit a few, inequalities... so many ills which make us forget and doubt our ability to work together to define a means of development which respects people, their environment and their culture.

Let us work together, without delay, to create a European cultural policy, meeting the aims defended by UNESCO and which I am persuaded we all share.

