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TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SUSTAINABLE CITY

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Abstract

This contribution is about the enhancement of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage and acknowledgement of environmental sustainability principles. It deals with the relationship between new ways of conceiving urban environments and new strategies for urban regeneration in northern and southern Mediterranean cities. Our main research hypothesis will show how the cultural heritage is now the force for change in Mediterranean cities, and involves stakeholders, craftsmen, local inhabitants and consumers. The case studies of Tunis and Marseille will help to address the issue of the enhancement of historic city centres and the redevelopment of abandoned industrial areas. In Tunis we will be examining two works by the *Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina de Tunis* (ASM): the first is a development project of an urban trail connecting public spaces with the architectural Heritage of Medina (2008), from the great *Mosque Zitouna* to *Zaouina of Sidi Ibrahim Riahi*. The second is a plan for urban refurbishment and development of public spaces and monuments in two important axes of the city: *Avenue Bourguiba* and *Avenue de France* (1999). In Marseille we have studied the *Euroméditerranée* project (1995-2030), promoted by the *Etablissement Public d'Aménagement Méditerranée*, an important project for socio-economic and urban renewal that will render the former port area more attractive. This major project is a good example of the refurbishment and urban renewal of abandoned industrial heritage, which is part of the intangible heritage of the city. The aim of these urban interventions is to enhance the heritage of the city and to sensitize and involve the local population, since they can provide a significant response to the new requirements of architectural heritage and public space, through integrated actions, taking into account social, economic, cultural and environmental aspects.

INTRODUCTION

With reference to the concept of urban heritage, conceived as an *urban globality*, it is important to remember that the concept was understood differently in Europe than in the Maghreb. Although this definition was coined in Europe at the beginning of XX century,¹ in the Maghreb it has recently been understood. The developing southern Mediterranean countries preferred to invest in the idea of a "modern city" in opposition to the historical and architectural heritage, which is considered as an obstacle to escape from underdevelopment. [1] However, since the seventies, the Maghreb authorities have gradually instituted safeguarding policies for their heritage. In 1975, Tunisia and Morocco ratified the UNESCO *Convention concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural*

¹The Urban Planner Françoise Choay attributed to Gustavo Giovannoni the invention of the concept of urban heritage in his book *Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova* (1931). Cf., CHOAY F., *L'allégorie du patrimoine*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1988.

Heritage. Today there are many Medinas included in the *World Heritage list*.² Thanks to these heritage policies many southern Mediterranean cities now conceive heritage not as an abstract element from outer space, but as including the surrounding environment, revealing a dual, tangible and intangible nature. With regard to Mediterranean European cities, where the safeguard of the city centre is a consolidated practice, urban strategies regard the redevelopment of outdated areas, such as ports or former industrial sites, that have now become the new urban heritage of the contemporary city. These abandoned areas represent the production and commercial history of the city, an intangible heritage, and for this reason it is important to preserve and enhance them.



The Place du Tribunal, The Medina of Tunis.

In recent years, some southern and northern Mediterranean cities have launched new strategies of intervention for the city centre and former port and industrial areas. The cultural heritage is now the force for change in Mediterranean cities, involving stakeholder, craftsmen, local inhabitants and consumers. Heritage and sustainable development now appear as two consensual notions, used in conjunction by institutions and local leaders. The need to protect and transmit the heritage, the cultural inheritance defined as *common good*, is now a widely established reality. At the same time, the desire to develop sustainable development models defined as *«development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs»*,³ have started to be implemented and fit in perfectly with considerations regarding the heritage. In fact, heritage and sustainable development present certain similarities, expressing the same desire to better integrate the dimension of time: the past, the present and the future of society, in a logic of transmission and

² For the case of Tunisia we should mention the inclusion in the Word Heritage list of Tunis Medina (1979) and that of Sousse (1988) and for Morocco, the Medinas of Fez (1981), Marrakech (1985), Tetouan (1997) and Essaouira (2001).

³ Brundtland, 1987. The most widely used definition for sustainable development, coined by the Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland in his report entitled: *Our Common Future*, for the 42nd Planetary Session of the United Nations, 1987.

intergenerational solidarity. Thus heritage can be considered as a non-renewable resource, which needs to be preserved, enhanced and “economized”.

Today some urban projects for Mediterranean cities seem to be integrating this new paradigm, which is expressed in terms of transport, infrastructure, waste management, but, especially, sustainable urban intervention on the existing heritage. In Mediterranean cities this recent interest in the sustainable development concept, privileges a qualitative register despite a scientific or technical feature, as in northern Europe. In addition to technical and scientific aspects related to sustainability, Mediterranean cities attach great importance to the quality of life, public space, urban regeneration and the intangible heritage. Therefore, to work in accordance with environmental sustainability principles on urban heritage means rejecting the *tabula rasa* in favour of integration into the permanent reconstruction of the city. [2] To understand these new methods of intervention it is important to analyse two case studies in the north and south of the Mediterranean basin, Tunis and Marseille.



The Rue du Pacha, the Medina of Tunis. Picture by I. Marotta (2012).

THE CASES OF TUNIS AND MARSEILLE

The projects of Tunis and Marseille were chosen for their privileged contribution to the new demands of enhancement of the heritage, public space and a sustainable quality of life, through the integrated actions that take into account social, economic, cultural and environmental aspects. Through these projects, the cities have the ambition to increase their national and international attractiveness, to give a positive self-image, developing the economy and increasing cultural tourism. This analysis of selected case studies closely examines the issue of enhancement of the historic city centre and also the recovery and sustainable transformation of former industrial areas.

The Tunis city projects, realized by *Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina* (ASM), are: the intervention for enhancement of an urban path that connects public spaces and the architectural heritage of the Medina (2008), from the mosque *Zitouna* to the *Zaouina of Sidi Ibrahim Riahi* and the urban regeneration of two roads, *Avenue Bourguiba* and *Avenue de France* (1999), with the redevelopment of public spaces and monuments in this important area of the city.

In the sixties the Medina of Tunis was in a state of severe degradation: aging infrastructure, abandonment or overcrowded housing and impoverishment of the population. Also, demolition was carried out in order to facilitate traffic circulation and urban operations called "renewal" were implemented, consisting of the demolition and reconstruction of urban blocks, recalling the *haussmanian*

demolitions. In this context of "devastation" of the ancient city, the *Association de sauvegarde de la Médina de Tunis* (1967)⁴ was born. This organization, in these years, defended the Medina from demolition and neglect. The objective of the ASM is to preserve and to redevelop the Medina through innovative urban projects, abandoning the operations related exclusively to the restoration of historical monuments, in order to promote integrated intervention dealing equally with the conditions of housing, services and activities. [3] Due to the action of the ASM, the founding heart of the city has undergone little demolition, retaining its urban form and almost all its monuments, becoming one of the oldest and best preserved Arab-Muslim cities in the contemporary world. Today, the Medina houses around 110,000 inhabitants; there are more than 15,000 private homes and hundreds of monuments inside the characteristic urban fabric. The Medina is a source of undeniable patrimonial wealth; it is not only a statement from the past, but also a huge area in a state of evolution; its future is inseparable from the future of the city. [4]



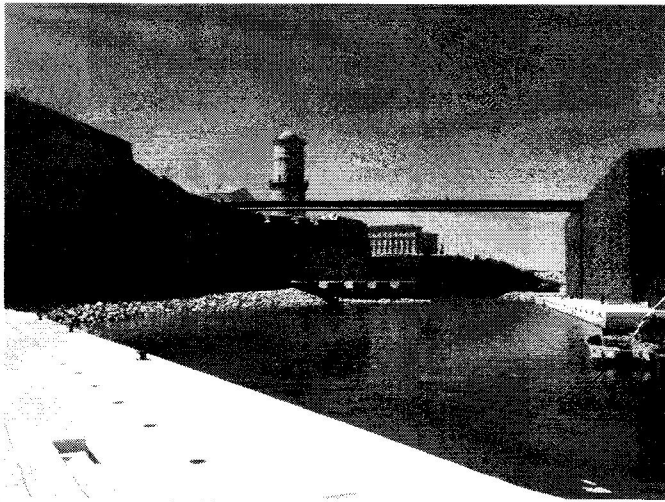
The Avenue Bourguiba, Tunis. Picture by I. Marotta (2012).

In 2008, the ASM realized a project for the restoration and enhancement of the urban itinerary, which is 1 km long, inside one of the oldest parts of the Medina, from the *Zitouna* mosque to the koranic school *Zaouina* of *Sidi Ibrahim Riahi*. The project has the objective of redeveloping buildings of historical and architectural interest and to promote and enhance the urban heritage, respecting the principles of environmental sustainability. The project also aims to raise public awareness of the value of its local habitat. This urban strategy is trying to provide an alternative to mass tourism, with the intention of enhancing the local economy. The urban itinerary chosen for the intervention is located in the heart of the monumental area of the ancient city.⁵ The buildings along this road were in a

⁴ The ASM, the first in Tunisia and in the Arab world, was created in 1967 on the initiative of the Mayor of Tunis, M. Hassib Ben Ammar, with the collaboration of M. Chedly Klibi, Secretary of State for Cultural Affairs. The ASM was able to raise awareness of the cultural values of the Medina and its importance in the process of urban planning. This organization has drawn up a development plan specific for the Medina, which has the merit of being able to preserve the urban lay-out, its road network and the continuous character of its buildings. Later, the ASM team drafted several operational projects for the preservation and the enhancement of the city heritage of Tunis.

⁵ The *Souk El-Attarine*; the *Souk des Ettoffes*; the *Médersa Bir El Hajjar*, has today become a cultural centre; the *Dar Ben Achour*, a library of the city; the *Club Taha Haddad*; *Dar Lasram*, where there is the ASM; the *Palais Kheireddine*, Museum of the city and the *Dar El Jaziri* or *Maison du Poète*.

considerable state of degradation; the public spaces had no urban facilities and the public lighting was now obsolete.



The *Fort Saint Jean* connected with the MuCEM by a walkway, Marseille. Picture by I. Marotta (2013).

Studying the history of the Medina it is easy to observe that it was built in perfect harmony with its natural environment. The old urban fabric has had, since its beginnings, a large number of individual wells and cisterns, which allow each family to use the water, of the unconfined aquifer. Also, seasonal rainwater was collected on the roofs of the houses; over the years these practices have been abandoned. Since the end of the XIX century, another example of the abandonment of techniques and knowledge has been the exchange of traditional building materials such as stone, brick and lime, with industrial materials such as cement and steel. The project, carried out by the ASM, is trying to recover the techniques and knowledge of the past, representing a part of the intangible heritage of the Medina. These materials and techniques are certainly more appropriate in this context, when compared to expensive new technology related to sustainability. The ASM divided this urban project into two work phases, the first being carried out between 2008 and 2010, and involving the redevelopment of buildings and public spaces along the urban itinerary, e.g. the recovery of the ancient mosque *Zitouna*, the *Souk El Attarine* and the *Souk des Eltoffes*; it focused on the advanced state of degradation and renovation of three squares that intersect the itinerary.⁶ In this first part of the work, there are interventions related to issues of environmental sustainability, such as the enhancement of the historic urban layout and the quality of its traditional way of life; the development and enhancement of a diversity of functions; the prohibition of vehicular traffic along the itinerary and the introduction of local plants in public spaces. The second phase of the work, which has not yet started, because of the unstable political situation, is based more on environmental sustainability practices: the progressive pedestrianization of the entire Medina, the installation of photovoltaic panels for public lighting; the differentiated collection of waste, the rehabilitation of wells and cisterns in public and private buildings. At the end of these works, we might see the birth of an "eco-district in the Medina". It is certain that, through these

⁶ The *Place du Tribunal*, thanks to the intervention of the ASM (2010), has become a place for many cultural events, including the *Festival of the Medina*.

projects aiming to respect environment, the Medina of Tunis will begin a new phase in the process of preservation, that of urban sustainability.



The Silo d'Arenes, Marseille. Picture by I. Marotta (2013).

The second urban project realized in the city of Tunis is the redevelopment of *Avenue Bourguiba* and *Avenue de France*, in the *Bab B'Har* district. At the end of the nineteenth century, during the French protectorate (1881), Tunis changed its face, in accordance with the rules of haussmannian planning. [5] The extension project was realized through the construction of the *Bab B'Har*, which occupies the area between the lake and the Medina. This area, also called the *Ville Nouvelle* and *hypercentre*, is characterized by a strict chessboard lay-out and by elegant buildings.⁷ The main element of the *Ville Nouvelle* is the impressive boulevard of *Avenue de la Marina*, named *Avenue Habib Bourguiba* after independence, and called *Avenue de France* in the stretch near the Medina.

In the nineties, the municipality began a project for the sustainable revitalization of the architectural heritage of the late XIX and early XX century. The ASM carried out a study of this architecture and the implementation of restoration work (1999-2007). The project involved the redevelopment of the *Place du 7 Novembre 1987*, the *Avenue Bourguiba*, the *Place de l'Indépendance*, the *Avenue de France* and the *Place de la Victoire*, a part of the city neglected for a long time. These public spaces were enhanced and the monuments along the route were restored. This project was aimed at improving the quality of life of local citizens, thanks to the improvement of public spaces and the preservation of buildings of architectural and historical interest. The project involved the urban design of public spaces over a surface of 60,000 mq. Work on the facades of buildings and the renovation of shops and stores were also carried out by the private owners, thanks to a public contribution, through a very rigorous program of work, drawn up by the ASM. [6] The residents were consulted by the ASM throughout the urban design process to ensure that existing commercial activities would benefit from the on-going regeneration process. The project involved the training of local artisans for the restoration work. Also in this case ancient construction techniques and traditional materials were used for the redevelopment work. The ASM finally restored some of the most exemplary monuments in this area of the city; four of

⁷ Young French architects design most of this architecture. These architects, away from their European academic dictates, had the opportunity to experiment with new architecture that combines architectural elements belonging to the North African tradition with European architectural language.

these are located in the *Avenue Bourguiba*.⁸ The ASM obtained, in 2010, the *Architecture Prix Aga Khan* for this urban project. The accuracy and the ambition of these operations show how the Maghreb is also able to execute influential and innovative strategies in the conservation and enhancement of heritage.

The case of Marseille is different from that of Tunis in the scale of intervention and the budget invested. However, from the point of view of the redevelopment of abandoned urban heritage it is possible to see similar methods of intervention between the two cases studies.



The Friche la Belle de Mai, Marseille. Picture by www.lafriche.org.

At the end of the twentieth century, Marseille suffered a severe crisis caused by the decline in industrial and port activity, on which the city's economy was based. Since the seventies, the port has suffered a significant loss of activity, which has led to the gradual deterioration of the surrounding districts.⁹ [7] Like many industrial and port cities, Marseille was divided into two distinct parts: the southern city with its tertiary and administrative activities, important metropolitan services and middle class residents, and the northern city, which, in the past, was characterized by working class districts, nineteenth-century commercial and industrial areas, and which today is inhabited by the poorer classes and by a high a percentage of immigrants.

Since the war, the *cit  phoc enne* has forgotten its past, without understanding its potential with regard to preservation and enhancement of urban heritage. During the mid-twentieth century, the city centre was subject to several aggressive interventions, including the construction of the A7 motorway that knocked down a part of the city centre, and the construction of architecture that does not mesh with the urban lay-out. The city council also abandoned the former port areas and districts behind them. [8] Industrial architecture, which illustrated the history of production and which constituted a source of intangible cultural heritage for the city, was in a state of degradation. Also, the northern part of the waterfront,

⁸ The Municipal Theatre (1902); The Italian Theater, in *art nouveau* style, designed by the architect Jean Emile Resplandy; the ex Politeama Rossini (1902), now Cinema Palace, in *art nouveau*, by the French architect Paul Baron.

⁹ Between 1975 and 1990, the city lost more than 100,000 inhabitants and 58,000 jobs, tripling its unemployment rate, from 7.1% to 23.3%. Whereas in the sixties Marseille was the second largest port in Europe, after Rotterdam, in 2010 the city was relegated to fourth place, after Antwerp, Hamburg and Amsterdam. Today, the Port autonome de Marseille (PAM), renamed in 2007 Grand Port Maritime de Marseille (GPM), has difficulty compensating for the continuing loss of its market share to other ports in northern Europe and in the Mediterranean.

owned by the *Grand Port Maritime de Marseille* (GPMM), was made inaccessible to the public, due to the closure of the port area and to the construction of the A55 motorway viaduct. It was therefore necessary to work on these areas of the city, which are crucial from a geographical point of view, but which are extremely marginal from an economic and social viewpoint.

Since the nineties, despite the severe economic crisis, Marseille has been able to react by pursuing new economic and urban strategies. Local authorities and the French State realized the importance of revitalizing the city through the development of the tertiary sector, in support of port activities and industry in the Marseille territory. It was also necessary to start a major urban regeneration project that would become the mobilizing vector of the economic, urban and social development of the city. In this context *Euroméditerranée* project (1995-2015) was born. A shared concern for the city's future led to the birth of the *Établissement Public D'aménagement Euroméditerranée* (EPAEM)¹⁰ to manage this ambitious project. The EPAEM is a public structure of the State and the Local Authorities. This project provided for the redevelopment of a former port area in the north of the city, with its slums and the railway station, and its surrounding districts. The objective of this intervention was the enhancement of the urban heritage, through the use of certain environmental sustainability principles. In 2007, this operation continued, with a second phase of intervention from *Euromed II* (2007-2030), which concerned the former industrial areas to the north of the *Euromed I* perimeter. In this case, in addition to the objective of the redevelopment of the urban heritage, the project aims to create an *eco-Mediterranean-city*, targeting a much more conscious and effective application of environmental sustainability regulations. To define these projects, the *Euroméditerranée* creators are talking of *rebuilding the city on the city*; therefore not to expand the territory but to work within the existing urban fabric, focusing on the idea of a *compact city*, with the enhancing of its long-forgotten urban heritage. [9]

The areas involved in the *Euroméditerranée* project are located throughout a very heterogeneous and contradictory territory, including a part of the port, old abandoned industrial complexes, a part of the historical centre, residential districts with Haussmanian buildings of great architectural value, low-interest buildings, major infrastructure networks, monuments and urban wasteland. This ambitious project extends over 310 ha (*Euromed I*, 1995) and 170 ha to the north (*Euromed II*, 2007). *Euroméditerranée I* carried out five separate operations: the new business *Joliette* district, the *Cité de la Méditerranée* with the *Arenc* district; the *Saint-Charles* pole, work on the *rue de la République* and the *Belle de Mai* redevelopment. Due to the variety of topics proposed by *Euroméditerranée I* for these multiple urban realities, we shall focus on the actions to enhance the tangible and intangible heritage and the sustainable rehabilitation of abandoned industrial complexes in districts surrounding the port.

The *Cité de la Méditerranée* (1995-2015) is an interesting example of urban heritage redevelopment. The project, by a group of architects directed by Ives Lyon, allowed the city to re-appropriate a part of the northern waterfront near the *Vieux-Port*. This project entailed the construction of a large public space, the

¹⁰ A *Établissement Public D'aménagement* (EPA) is a public institution that consists of an operating structure under the authority of the French State, which has the task of realizing planning operations and urban renewal for a public authority. The *Établissement* can be chosen to make the *Opération d'Intérêt National*. These operations are realized for the planning of a district (as in the *Défense* or *Ville de Paris* case in Paris), of a territory or of a region. In the case of Marseille, it is the first time that the French State has used this strategy to redevelop part of an existing city. The EPA is normally implemented to build new neighbourhoods or new territorial aggregations.

esplanade du J4, where there are new monuments arising from the city's transformation, i.e. the MuCEM, the *Fort Saint-Jean* and the *Villa Méditerranée* (2005-2013), all of which have been the subject of two international design competitions¹¹. This architecture has become part of the city's heritage, constituting landmarks for the event *Marseille Provence European Capital of Culture 2013*. In the *Cité de la Méditerranée* district, two new squares have also been constructed, the *Place de la Joliette* and the *Place de la Méditerranée*, connected to each other by a new road, the *Boulevard du littoral*, which replaced the A55 motorway viaduct, which in turn was replaced by a tunnel. The *boulevard du littoral* was built with the aim of reducing car traffic and facilitating pedestrian circulation. In a city where there are not many public spaces, the creation of new residential areas was very important for the improvement of the quality of life of the citizens. Lastly, the *Cathédrale de la Vieille Major*, one of the most important examples of the architectural heritage of the city, was enhanced through the creation of a new public space and a new point of access that will connect the church with the waterfront. As regards improvement in public space, *Euromed I* worked on the redevelopment of *rue de la République*, which links the *Vieux-Port* with the *Joliette* district. Haussmanian buildings of great value characterize this major nineteenth-century axis. The EPAEM carried out its work through the redesign of public spaces and the restoration of building facades. *Euromed I* provided for tunnel construction on the A7 motorway, freeing the surface from motorway traffic and the creating an urban park around the *Porte d'Aix* (1825).

With regard to work on the abandoned industrial heritage, it is important to mention the rehabilitation of *Silo d'Arenc* (1927), a former warehouse for the storage of cereals, located in the port area. In 2001, the municipality bought the building from GPMM, transforming the warehouse into a theatre (2011). Thanks to this project, in 2004, the *Silo* was awarded the "*Patrimoine du XXe siècle*" by the Minister of Culture. A few abandoned port buildings in the *Joliette* district were also rehabilitated; such as the *Chevalier Paul* Elementary School (2012), which preserved and integrated the facade of an old industrial building and the *M5 les Docks* (2008), a former industrial complex transformed into sustainable residential buildings.

Lastly, *Euromed I* implemented a rehabilitation project for the *Belle de Mai* district. On this site, there is the former industrial complex for the manufacture of tobacco products. Since 2004, this area has hosted the Media Pole, the Heritage Pole and the Arts Pole.¹² The latter was set up by *Friche de la Belle de Mai*, the most important place for creativity and experimentation in contemporary art in Marseille. Since 2007, the *Friche* has been subject to sustainable refurbishment activity. The project for this former industrial complex, designed by the ARM studio, tried to adapt industrial architecture to new uses, transforming it in accordance with its identity. The intervention, which complied with the principles of sustainable architecture, received, for its nursery project, acknowledgement as a sustainable building from the BDM pole.¹³ We might say in conclusion that the *Euroméditerranée* project is a most interesting and positive example of re-utilization of the former industrial and urban heritage of the city.

¹¹ The MuCEM (*Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée*), designed by the French architect Rudy Ricciotti, has the ambition of diffusing knowledge of Mediterranean cultural heritage. The *Fort Saint-Jean* is a XII century military complex, which was abandoned and forgotten by the city for a long time. Today The Fort exhibits a part of MuCEM collection. The *Villa Méditerranée*, designed by the Italian architect Stefano Boeri, is an international centre that aims to promote reflections on dialogue and exchanges in the Mediterranean area.

¹² The first of these houses the television and film studios. The second includes the Interregional Centre of heritage conservation and restoration and the Municipal Archives of Marseilles.

¹³ *Batiments durables méditerranéens*. <http://polebdm.eu>, consulted in May 2013.

CONCLUSIONS

The case of Tunis shows that rehabilitation of the heritage can bring together administrators, technicians and local citizens and can boost economic development and cultural tourism for the city. Unfortunately, in Tunisia, the "Arab Spring" and the current instable political reality have caused a shutdown in the developments planned for the urban heritage of the city. Furthermore, the maintenance work on the salvaged urban heritage, so important for its "survival", has been almost completely halted. The architects of the ASM continue to work on the planning of these projects, in the hope that, in the future, attention will be directed towards policies regarding the tangible and intangible heritage of the city. The *Euroméditerranée* project experience is an interesting and positive example of re-exploitation of the former industrial and urban heritage of the city. *Euromed* demonstrates that it is possible to give a new life to the obsolete industrial heritage through "recycling". However, we must remember that many private industrial buildings, within the perimeter of the *Euromed I*, have been demolished through real estate speculation. For this reason, in the *Euromed II* project, the EPAEM had previously purchased the private industrial buildings in question, to save them from demolition and give them a new function.

These cases studies are very different as regards the architectural and urban reality and economic and social aspects. At the same time, these projects have many points in common in terms of the regeneration strategies for the outdated urban heritage, which can here be understood as historical centres or neglected urban areas. These interventions aim to involve the local population, implement new strategies for the preservation of public spaces and housing, enhance the intangible cultural heritage, as a vehicle for economic development to create new sources of employment and for the promotion of cultural tourism, local crafts and trade. Therefore, we might affirm that in these examples the enhancement of tangible and intangible heritage has become a resource for the sustainable regeneration of the city.

With regard to the application of sustainable principles for the enhancement of the heritage it is interesting to note that these projects aim to implement unprecedented, sustainable, intervention methodology, which does not make allusion to the afore-mentioned examples in northern Europe, but focuses on the peculiarities of site and the Mediterranean climate. A further distinctive feature of these strategies is the desire to allude to urban Mediterranean vernacular architecture. This traditional architecture embodies the environmental sustainability rules and is certainly cheaper than new, high-tech, sustainable architecture.

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