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World Heritage and Tourism, managing the local and the global: the first international congress of the UNESCO/UNITWIN Network “Culture, Tourism, Development”

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The first international congress of the UNESCO/UNITWIN Network “Culture, Tourism, Development” (2-4 June 2010) has took place in Quebec City (Canada). As of 2010, more than 900 sites are registered on the UNESCO World Heritage list. For many sites inscription on the World Heritage List acts as a promotional device and the management challenge is one of protection, conservation and dealing with increased numbers of tourists. For other sites, designation has not brought anticipated expansion in tourist numbers and associated investments. What is clear is that tourism is now a central concern to the wide array of stakeholders involved with World Heritage Sites.

The aim of the conference was to explore a series of critical and fundamental questions being raised by the various ‘owners’, managers and local communities involved with World Heritage Sites in relation to tourism: Why do tourists visit some World Heritage Sites and not others? What is the tourist experience of such Sites? How successful are Sites in the management of tourists? What roles do local communities play in Site management? How can the ‘spirit of place’ be protected in the face of the sheer volume of tourists? How can some Sites maximize the potential of a sustainable tourism for the purposes of poverty alleviation and community cohesion? How effective are communication strategies in bringing stakeholders together? What management skills are needed to address the needs of different stakeholders, different sites and different cultures?

The event, jointly organized by the Laval University, by the Paris 1 – Panthéon Sorbonne University and by the Leeds Metropolitan University (Center for Tourism and Cultural Change), has hosted in more than 40 parallel sessions, 175 participants from 43 countries, exchanging opinions, expertise and practices about the most actual issues concerning the management of tourism in World Heritage Sites: monitoring indicators for management plans, control strategies of tourism flows, managing conflicts in the use of sites, the role of the local communities, NIT for discovering these emblems of our common heritage, application of sustainability principles, etc.

The scientific board of the conference, composed by twenty members of the Network’s partner Universities (among them three of the Alma Mater permanent staff: Fiorella Dallari, responsible for the UNITWIN Network at the Bologna University, Alessia Mariotti and Daniela

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AlmaTourism N. 2, 2010 : World Heritage and Tourism, managing the local and the global:
the first international congress of the UNESCO/UNITWIN Network “Culture, Tourism,
Development”

Calanca) has examined over 300 abstracts refusing nearly 40% of them. Considering the quality and quantity of the paper presented, the Network's members are evaluating the possibility of editing a book series and several volumes with an important international publisher.

This first congress has allowed the participants, both academics and professionals of tourism management in World Heritage Sites, to debate and exchange about different methodological and scientific approaches, overcoming languages, cultural or religious obstacles, according to the goals of the UNESCO/UNITWIN Network “Culture, Tourism, Development”: to support the cooperation between universities in the field of education, research, documentation and expertise in order to help knowledge transfer for poverty reduction through tourism sustainable development.

The interest raised by theories, methods and tools for tourism management in “heavy” heritage contexts, has decided the Network's members to multiply its meetings: there will be every two years one workshop and one international congress. The next meetings will be the workshops in Haifa (Israel, 1-3 June 2011) and in Soussa (Tunisia 4-6 June 2013) and the international congresses in Libreville (Gabon 29 -31 May 2012) and Barcelona (Spain, 3-5 June 2014).

The UNESCO/UNITWIN Network is also on Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/UNESCO-UNITWIN-Network-Culture-Tourism-and-Development/127070393979932?ref=mf>