



International Cooperation Project "Echoes"

The Project

The ECHOES project aims to promote cooperation among ecomuseums to enhance the ability of institutions to apply innovative models, strategies, and concrete actions for the conservation and enjoyment of intangible cultural heritage. This heritage is embodied in the very concept of the Ecomuseum, defined as "a dynamic way in which communities preserve, interpret, and manage their heritage for sustainable development" (Definition of Ecomuseums by the European Network, 2004).

The goal of the "Echoes" cooperation project is to highlight the components of a place's identity (territory, memory, heritage, and population) as key elements to be promoted for various products: educational, cultural, and touristic. Through the ecomuseum tool, the project seeks to unveil possible scenarios for creating future development through the values of the past. This enhancement aims to transmit heritage practices through the intergenerational exchange of traditional knowledge, so that they can also translate into educational and socio-economic opportunities for schools, younger generations, startups, and businesses.

Framework

The intangible forms of culture have been recognized and protected by UNESCO with the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of 2003, ratified by Italy in 2007. According to Article 2, intangible heritage is defined as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups, and in some cases individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history, providing them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity."

Therefore, intangible assets shape the territory, characterizing it in its vocation and representing the real and tangible potential of each community. They involve institutions, businesses, non-profit organizations, local communities, and individuals. In response to globalization, there is a growing interest among people to discover knowledge, traditions, customs, and artisanal crafts as elements expressing the distinctive identity of places, the Genius Loci of rural areas, that "talent of places" which risks being lost over time without proper protection.

In this context, the Ecomuseum plays a fundamental role not only in preserving the uses, customs, knowledge, and representations of the local community but also as a participatory activator of sustainable development for local communities. It makes cultural and landscape heritage an attractive factor from an educational, cultural, and touristic perspective, fostering a renewed Culture of Hospitality. Ecomuseums thus emerge as pathways for the cultural growth of local communities, creative and inclusive, based on the active participation of residents and the collaboration of entities and associations.

The workshops and laboratories conducted with educational institutions have highlighted methods and forms through which the knowledge preserved in the hands of local communities can be transmitted to new generations, providing guidance for new job opportunities and business creation.

Guidelines for a Plural and Homogeneous Ecomuseum System

The diversity of ecomuseums and the heterogeneity of the identity elements that emerged through study visits and educational workshops have generated a series of reflections and interesting key concepts that we wish to encapsulate here as an initial outline of "Guidelines":

Ecomuseum and Territory

- A territory exists to the extent that there are relationships, exchanges, and someone willing to give it Identity and Value. The Ecomuseum represents an ideal space and "tool" available to communities to preserve and transmit Identity Values to new generations.
- Traditional crafts are narrative elements of territorial identity. This implies and requires awareness (and knowledge) of one's own territory.
- The ecomuseum should also be understood as a space without walls and not necessarily homogeneous.
- The Territory is understood here as a "Common Good," thus expressing cooperative behaviors and collective participation, whether they are conscious, unconscious, or guided.

The Role of People

- “Relationship” is a fundamental element for driving evolutionary processes, and Cooperation is understood as a shared Value. ▪ Businesses and the cooperative world play a central role in social responsibility. Similarly, Volunteering plays a fundamental and indispensable subsidiary role.
- The values of environmental, social, and economic Sustainability (healthy, wholesome, authentic) are central to the quality of life of local communities. Each of us has the right and possibility to be concerned about preserving the environment, whether natural and/or cultural, in which we live.
- The participatory approach is a lever that characterizes the role of ecomuseums. In this sense, operators feel involved and part of a “Common Good.”
- The active role of farmers, local experts, and undergrowth products is of significant importance in preserving the rural landscape as a resource, including for tourism.
- “To valorize” means “to make usable.”

Youth and Ecomuseums

- The Ecomuseum also acts as a social development agent, particularly for inner areas, addressing the problem of depopulation and population aging. It represents a virtuous example of the ability to keep intergenerational relationships alive (and actively practiced).
- The transfer of knowledge and skills gratifies both the transmitter and the receiver in a mutual way.
- “Curiosity” is a positive lever for transmitting “knowledge” and “know-how.” ▪ The very act of transmitting one’s knowledge and skills generates innovation, created by the apprentice’s re-elaboration. The concept of the “workshop” regains the beauty of its original meaning.
- The knowledge and preservation of traditions enable young people to perceive the role of intangible assets as elements of continuity and distinction on which to develop their cultural identity. At the same time, involving new generations (starting with “digital natives”) encourages the adoption of new multimedia technologies, making ecomuseums dynamic and interactive systems.

The Role of Schools

- The educational system provides a fundamental contribution to the knowledge of both the local territory and traditional crafts as an occupational perspective, attributing to them a renewed value of dignified qualification.
- The laboratory formula and horizontal exchange are particularly functional for raising awareness among young people about the value of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and the role of the Ecomuseum as a space for expression and dialogue for communities.

Challenges/Opportunities

- It is necessary to consolidate the awareness among local communities of the role and value of the Ecomuseum.
- Addressing the issue of intangible heritage also means tackling the critical issue of depopulation in inner areas. There is a risk of insufficient generational renewal (and exchange).
- Maintenance and renewal of exhibits and technological systems are needed, along with information and communication campaigns to increase visitor numbers and especially encourage young people and families.
- Ensure accessibility for users with disabilities and those in socially fragile/marginalized conditions.
- There is growing interest in initiating collaboration aimed at establishing a Regional Ecomuseum Network that places local communities and the territory at the center of its activities as primary resources for sustainable development. Activating a Network plays a fundamental role in developing initiatives for the coordination and optimization of local and regional heritage resources. Moreover, an Ecomuseum Network, by creating an integrated offer, can act as a development lever and tourist attraction. Where possible, it will be advantageous to broaden the view and perspective, integrating the coastal tourist product with the cultural tourism offer of the hinterland, thus increasing the presence of international tourists (still considered limited).
- Ecomuseums represent a message of human-nature integration, they are spaces for experimentation with plants and medicinal herbs, and centers for environmental education.

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Possible Development Actions

- Organizing cultural events, conferences, and thematic seminars for adults and children.
- Workshops for all age groups.
- Guided tours.
- Gastronomic excursions and walks with typical products and recipes. ▪ Creating community maps and participatory design workshops (valuable tools for mapping tangible and intangible assets in various types: knowledge, colors, flavors, values).
- Live performances.
- Exhibitions, photographic contests, and temporary exhibitions to support the cultural activities of the territory.

Looking ahead

- Invest in new technologies.
- Involve the community more actively.
- Enhance educational activities and those related to the research/study of heritage.
- Activate audience profiling processes to conduct more targeted communication and marketing campaigns.
