

The Importance of Heritage Days for the Care of Monuments

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Introduction

Many countries have to contend with lack of financial resources and insufficient interest when allocating sufficient priority to the maintenance of their cultural heritage. Cultural tourism can however be an instrument for bringing about change, due to its economic importance. Although, when the motives are too heavily based towards economic gain, this may signal a threat to the cultural heritage itself. It is thus of great strategic importance that maintenance of a country's cultural heritage can gain support from a sufficiently broad social base.

A number of years ago a new weapon was launched in Europe – the European Heritage Days. This is a specific form of cultural tourism, which is primarily aimed at the country's own inhabitants, and then only once a year. This paper will demonstrate the direct and indirect influences of this event for the care of monuments. It will also show which specific role ICOMOS can play in this context.

What are the European Heritage Days?

The European Heritage Days is an event in which most of the countries of Europe now participate. Each country, or region, chooses one day or weekend in the second or third weekend of September for its own Heritage Day. A feature of this is that on this day monuments which are normally or never accessible are opened to the public, preferably for free. In the buildings open to the public guided tours are organized, sometimes in or around the monuments, as well as exhibitions, concerts, special activities for young people and suchlike. The European Heritage Days take place under the auspices of the Council of Europe and is

coordinated by a project office in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The Commission of European Municipal Councils also supports the project. Common points are agreements in dates, a common logo and various forms of cooperation in border areas and between individual cities.

The European Heritage Days began in France in 1985. The Netherlands and Sweden followed in 1987, Belgium in 1988 and now 21 European countries take part in the event. Every year the official European Opening is held in one of the participating countries. In 1991 this was the Netherlands, 1992 Czechoslovakia, 1993 Belgium and in 1994 it will take place in Portugal.

The European Heritage Days is well thought of, and in many countries it is a huge success. The question is, however, what its importance is for the preservation of the cultural heritage? The project does not provide direct funds. On the contrary, it costs the organizational bodies money as well as the guardians of the monuments, as they are asked to open their property free of charge on this day, and the large stream of visitors can also generate extra costs. Before these questions are gone into, a number of other problems in the preservation of monuments will first be looked at.

Problems in the preservation of monuments

It is a fact that all over the world monuments are being neglected, which threatens their survival. Lack of financial resources is usually presumed to be the direct cause. But this is only partly true. Many countries, also the so-called more prosperous ones, are experiencing bad economic times. Many

countries have poverty, hunger and high debts to contend with. It may then of course be necessary that other interests have precedence, which is however a question of priorities. But even in poor countries, finance can usually be obtained for costly prestigious projects which contribute anything to the economy. There is also the question of political choices, which determine how the available financial resources are used. It is often not a lack of money but a lack of political will for making maintenance funds available. This can arise from ignorance, unwillingness or lack of concern. In most democratic countries however politicians and government authorities will often react to signals from the people on whom they are dependent for their political existence.

One can try to convince the appropriate politicians that maintaining the cultural heritage is of great importance, but managing to do this depends on the person to which one addresses oneself. One can put forward the case that the care of monuments serves a number of economic and social interests, and point to the economic interests of cultural tourism. However, there is also a danger. If the sole reason for cultural tourism is given as the earning of money, then one can ask whether the cultural heritage is served in the long term. We all know such examples as Venice, Versailles and Bruges, where tourism has been so successful that the monuments have become more of a threat than an advantage.

Of more fundamental importance to the preservation of the cultural heritage is the creation for a sufficiently broad social base for preservation of the monuments. Experts and politicians can be convinced of the importance of maintaining monuments, but if this does not find a response among the population it will be difficult to realize a positive monument policy.

On the contrary, what is important to the public sooner or later receives political importance too. Heritage Days

are therefore seen as a good instrument in a number of countries.

Those involved in conservation must therefore not only be aimed at the authorities, but also at the people. Concern for the heritage in schools and in the media is then essential within this framework.

Spin-off effect of the Heritage Days

Although the Heritage Days, within the framework of the European Heritage Days, are concerned with only one day of the year, the spin-off effect can be enormous. This is outlined here, based on experiences in the Netherlands, but easily comparable with a number of other countries.

Organization of the Heritage Days started in the Netherlands at a moment when the care of monuments was being decentralized from being preponderantly a task of central government to being a task of local government: the town councils. A number of organizations considered it important to bring the people more in contact with the monuments, in order to create a broader base for their care. Thus it was decided that the initiative and the actual organization should, as much as possible, be on a local level. All the local councils and private organizations were requested to form local committees. This worked wonderfully. Immediately after the first year, local committees were formed in 300 localities and the number rose rapidly in the following years to 440 (from 646 local councils).

In all these places committees were formed which also included representatives of the local council, people from monument organizations, industry, tourist organizations, education, the owners of monuments and various other groups of the population. These committees are responsible for contact with the owners of the monuments, the local programme, and activities organized in and around the open monuments. This effort was very worthwhile. In 1992, 650,000 people visited the 3,000 monuments opened to the public. Furthermore, on the day

more than 2,000 press articles were devoted to the events. This success had a stimulating effect on the committees, and the members got to know each other better, and after the day were very soon making plans for the coming year. As well as such questions as: Which officials do we invite to open the day? Shall we make an inventory of all the monuments in the region? Shall we hold an exhibition or publish a special book? Can the start sign be given on the day for restoring a monument or completing restoration of an important monument?

The European Heritage Days is an event where the public, the owners of monuments, members of local committees and local councils are very enthusiastic, and this all has a stimulating effect on the development of the local monument policy. Most local councils in the Netherlands have meanwhile actively taken up the care of monuments as a local policy, which would have been unthinkable without the Heritage Day.

How should the European Heritage Days develop further?

It is expected that European countries which do not yet participate in the Heritage Days will join in the event in the coming years. In a number of countries Heritage Days are still organized on a modest scale, and limit themselves to only a few towns or cities. An intensifying of the event is expected here. The most important development in the coming years will hopefully be the rise in cooperating in projects. The network of thousands of local committees which have arisen all over Europe within the framework of the European Heritage Days, offers great

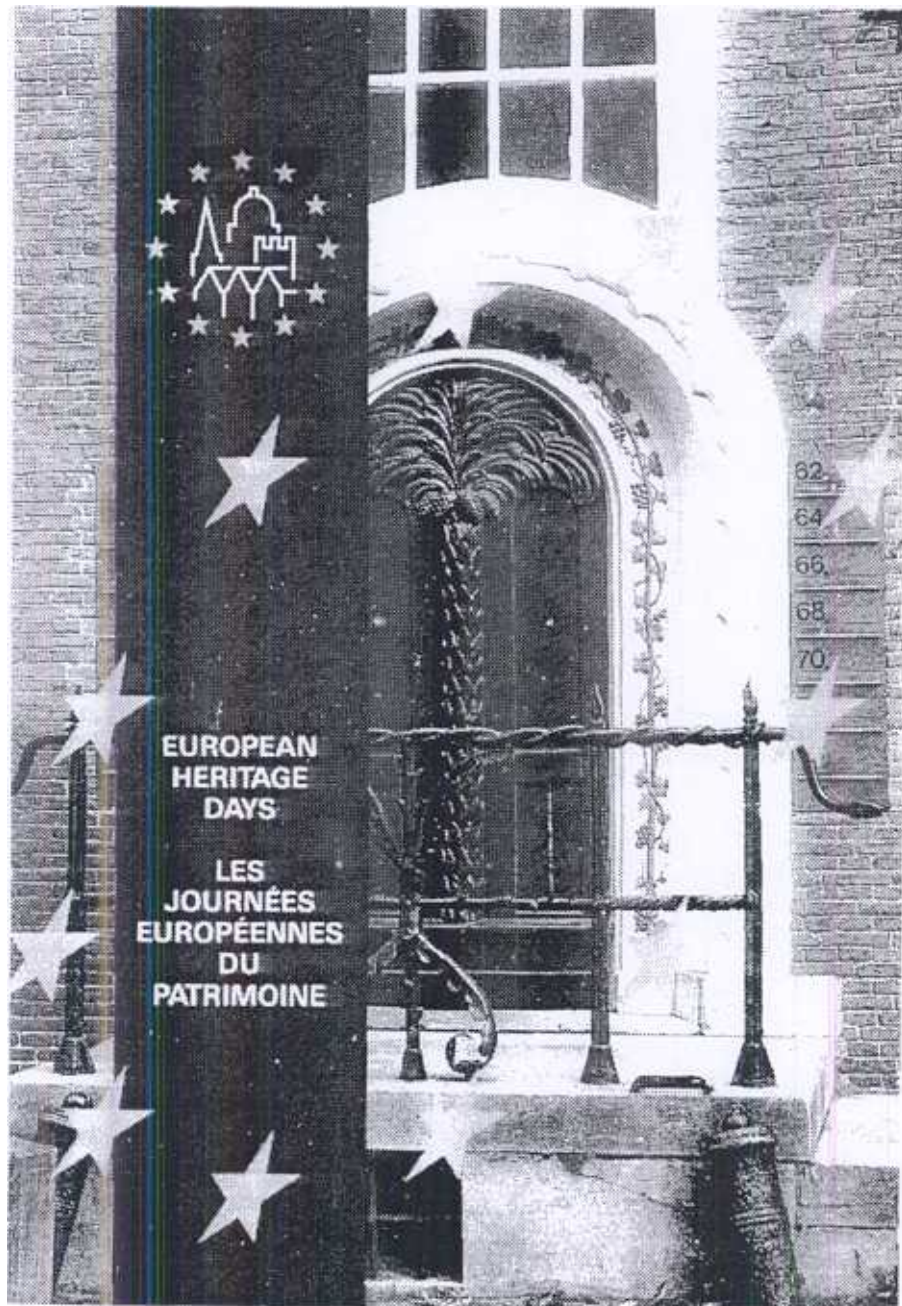
possibilities for cooperation between local councils and regions; for example, within the framework of twinning, but also in border areas and for thematic projects. This network of groups interested in local monuments is an important infrastructure, which can also be involved in other areas of monuments care. For the social base for the monument care this is an interesting development.

The role of ICOMOS

Which role can ICOMOS play in respect of the European Heritage Days? National committees of ICOMOS in Europe could be brought in on these initiatives. It offers the chance to bring the monuments and their care to the attention of a larger group of the public. ICOMOS could give support in moral or organizational areas or bring in expertise.

A look should be taken at the relation between these European Heritage Days and the International Monument Day on 17 April. In many countries the ICOMOS International Day is particularly a day of congresses, exhibitions and presentations for professionals. This connects well to the character of ICOMOS as a scientific organization. In those countries where the International Day has taken on a more publicly oriented character perhaps a choice should be made for one of both days.

And for countries outside Europe? They should consider holding a similar day. In Canada an annual Open Day is organized. Perhaps a Global Heritage Day is an idea for the future. . . . ?



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A CHALLENGE
FOR
EACH EUROPEAN COUNTRY
TO PRESENT
ITS HERITAGE
TO THE
POPULATION



What is a Heritage Day?

It is one day in the year on which a country's cultural heritage is at the centre of attention. Many historic buildings are open to the public free of charge and special activities are often organised in and around the buildings. It is a unique opportunity to take a look behind the facades of old buildings which normally are closed or only partly open to the public.

Why a Heritage Day?

Care for historic buildings is everybody's responsibility and deserves everybody's attention. It goes beyond restoration and conservation. Care for these buildings can contribute to creating and enhancing the living environment in which the historic structure keeps its place in a natural way.

Every building has its own story and has much to tell of the history of a particular place or district. Revealing this knowledge and bringing it to the attention of a wider public can contribute to greater awareness of the individual's district or of another culture.

Why European Heritage Days?

The special thing about Europe is the wide diversity of cultures. This diversity is also expressed in the areas built up through history. When Europe becomes an economic unity in 1992 and national borders are abolished, cultural differences will remain. Knowledge of these differences and similarities can enhance respect for each other's culture and is therefore important for everybody.

Where will the Heritage Day be held?

The objective is for all European countries to take part in the initiative. The following countries are already organising such an event: France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Scotland, Malta, Ireland and parts of Germany and Turkey.

For whom will the day be organised?

The idea is to reach the widest possible audience. Experience teaches us that there is considerable interest in the individual's own town or district. Border areas are interested in the neighbouring country.

Which buildings will be opened?

Every country is free to adopt its own approach. They may opt for opening as many historic buildings as possible or a particular category. They may also consider illustrating a particular theme or special activities in the field of caring for these buildings.

Who are organising the day?

Every participating country has its own organisational structure. In most countries regional or local committees are in operation, in which the public sector and private organisations work together. The coordinating office for Europe is situated in the Netherlands.

UN DÉFI POUR CHAQUE PAYS EUROPÉEN DE PRESENTER SON PATRIMOINE HISTORIQUE A LA POPULATION

Qu'est ce que la Journée du Patrimoine?

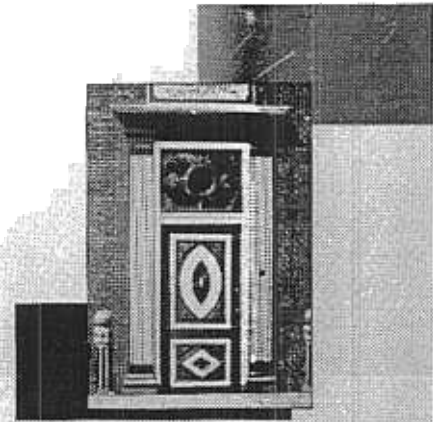
C'est une journée dans l'année où le patrimoine historique d'un pays est placé au centre de l'intérêt. De nombreux monuments sont alors ouverts gratuitement au public et souvent, des activités spéciales sont organisées à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur des bâtiments. C'est une occasion unique pour regarder derrière les murs d'anciens bâtiments, qui, habituellement, ne sont pas ouverts, ou que partiellement, au public.

Pourquoi une Journée du Patrimoine?

La sauvegarde des monuments est le souci de chacun et même donc l'intérêt de tous. Il s'agit plus que du simple fait de restaurer et de conserver. La sauvegarde des monuments peut contribuer à la création ou au développement d'un environnement habitable, où le monument conserve sa place de façon naturelle. Chaque bâtiment possède son propre passé et nous apprend beaucoup sur l'histoire d'un certain lieu ou d'une certaine région. Mettre en évidence ces connaissances et les porter à l'attention d'un public plus large peut favoriser une plus grande prise de conscience de sa propre région ou d'une autre culture.

Pourquoi les Journées européennes du Patrimoine?

La particularité de l'Europe est la grande diversité de cultures. Cette diversité s'exprime aussi à travers les bâtiments historiques. Lorsque, avec l'effacement des frontières, l'Europe devint en 1952 une unité économique, les différences culturelles subsistaient. Connaître ces différences et similitudes peut favoriser le respect de la culture de chacun et est donc dans notre intérêt à tous.



Où se tient la Journée du Patrimoine?

L'objectif est de faire participer tous les pays européens à cette initiative. Les pays suivants organisent déjà un tel événement: la France, les Pays-Bas, la Belgique, la Suisse, le Danemark, l'Écosse, Malte, l'Irlande et certaines régions d'Allemagne et de Turquie.

Pour qui est organisée cette journée?

On essaie d'attirer un public le plus large possible. L'expérience a montré qu'un très fort intérêt est accordé à la propre ville ou région. Dans les régions limitrophes, une grande attention est également prêtée au pays voisin.

Quels monuments sont ouverts?

Chaque pays est libre d'aborder cette journée à son gré. Ainsi, certains pays choisissent l'ouverture du maximum de monuments et d'autres s'orientent vers une certaine catégorie. On peut également penser à mettre en évidence un certain thème ou des activités particulières dans le domaine de la sauvegarde des monuments.

Qui organise cette journée?

Chaque pays participant possède sa propre structure d'organisation. Dans la plupart des pays, on travaille avec des comités régionaux ou locaux, au sein desquels coopèrent les autorités publiques et des organisations privées. Le bureau de coordination européen est établi aux Pays-Bas.



When will the European Heritage Days be held?

Every country may select a Saturday or Sunday in the second or third weekend of September.

European Heritage Days are under the auspices of the Council of Europe. The Commission of the European Community, Cultural Action, has provided financial assistance to make the European project possible.

Quand a lieu Les Journées Européennes du Patrimoine?

Chaque pays peut choisir entre un samedi et un dimanche du deuxième ou troisième week-end de septembre.

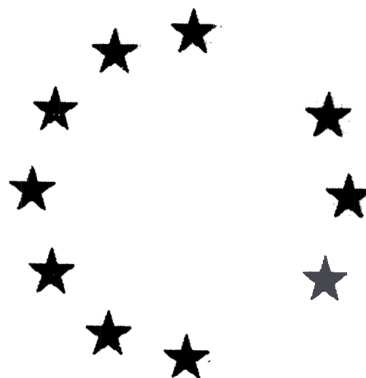
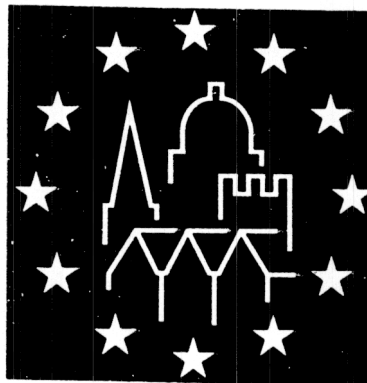
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