



Regional Forum
“Cultural Corridors in South-East Europe,
Common Past and Shared Heritage: a Key to Future Partnership”
Varna, Bulgaria, 20-21 May 2005

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK¹

1. INTRODUCTION

The Varna Forum is part of a series of meetings organized over the recent years at UNESCO's initiative or with the Organization's participation, including the High-Level conference on Strengthening Co-operation in South-East Europe (Paris, April 2002), the Regional Forum on Dialogue between Cultures and Civilization (Ohrid, August, 2003), the Conference of Culture Ministers at the inauguration of the Mostar Bridge (July, 2004) and the Regional Summit on Inter-Religious and Inter-Ethnic Dialogue in South-East Europe (Tirana, December, 2004).

By meeting in Varna, the Heads of State of the countries of South-East Europe once again demonstrate their resolve to consider this sub-region a space for encounters, exchanges and creating new ties of solidarity in which culture plays a pre-eminent role. In this way, they hope to send to Europe as well as the entire world an optimistic message based on the peaceful forces of culture through a unifying project of cooperation. More specifically, they hope to mobilize, for the benefit of the sub-region, the vital forces of heritage -- understood in the largest meaning of the term -- as a source of dialogue and development. Heritage is not limited to monuments and their environment; this notion encompasses ensembles, sites and cultural landscapes as well as live performances and expressions. In this way, heritage permeates cross-border cultural routes and itineraries.

Moreover, given that the day slated for the adoption of the Varna Declaration coincides with the World Day of Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development (21 May), it would be judicious to take advantage of this opportunity.

¹ Prepared by UNESCO as an intellectual contribution to the Forum – May 2005
<http://www.unesco.org/culture/>

2. OBJECTIVES

In this context, the Varna Forum constitutes a decisive step. The Forum will have to underline the need to promote understanding among peoples and communities of the sub-region avoiding withdrawing behind one's cultural identity via stereotypes and prejudices. In this spirit, the role of culture as a common component of identity, integration and stability in the sub-region must be enhanced. It will be important to define this positive role, and, from the outset, to denounce the instrumentalization of culture for partisan ends and the negative consequences that culture can engender in peacetime as well as in wartime.

More specifically, it will be necessary to emphasize the polysemantic nature of the term "cultural heritage" by underlining the particularly rich transformations and mingling in spaces of intense contact. Thus considered, heritage encompasses a wide range of concerns, namely the ways in which societies relate to and protect their environment, and express their solidarity or existence through literature, the arts and various other forms of creation. In this way, the sub-region's profuse creativity manifested by its exceptional cultural diversity will also be highlighted. The commitments made by the Heads of State should be expressed in the Declaration and its action plan, which will be complemented by a timetable for the plan's implementation.

3. STRATEGY

The work and projects on cultural corridors must benefit from UNESCO's experience in the **Routes of Dialogue** programmes, for it was in the framework of the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-97) that these intercultural projects were launched. The "Route" concept is based on the beneficial effects resulting from encounters among different peoples and cultures. It highlights the exchange, in terms of knowledge and expertise, of ideas, beliefs, performances, by integrating fundamental aspects of the cultural and natural heritage as well as the tangible and intangible heritage. It also recognizes the dynamics, which, in periods of prosperity and periods of crisis, have determined such interaction. This in turn enables us, by means of diachronic analysis, to evaluate more accurately the chances and means of achieving genuine intercultural dialogue in today's multi-cultural societies, without getting entangled in the debates of the past. These "Routes" offer not only a historic and geographic overview of intercultural dialogue over the centuries, but they also contribute to future debate: the encounters and interactions, which have been somewhat forgotten today, illustrate that intercultural processes predate the current debate on the subject.

From the outset, it will be necessary to clarify the concept of "cultural corridor", which has various meanings according to the authors who apply it to South-East Europe. In order to be operative, this concept must be understood unequivocally by all the participants of the Varna Forum. It must help to bring down the barriers of culture by placing it at the heart of current exchanges and the processes of development. It should be easy to eliminate restrictive and dangerous definitions: a corridor can be neither a dead end nor a narrow strip winding its way through hostile regions. Similarly, the intangible and multifarious nature of

these corridors should be taken into account to ensure that the concept of cultural corridors does not go astray by drifting towards "complete cultural and tourist products".

On one hand, the Forum must foster a common perception of this concept by highlighting its distinctiveness in relation to "Routes" and "cultural itineraries", and on the other hand, it must enhance the interaction between heritage and dialogue by placing them in perspective with regard to history and collective memory in order to create new spaces for communication and exchange. Consequently, these corridors should be spaces devoted to renewed dialogue not only between national and local authorities, or between artists, craftspeople, international media professionals and tourists, but also, and especially, between local and national communities within the same country. It goes without saying that the voices of these communities, whatever their common ties (ethnic, religious, linguistic...), must be heard and their common stakes taken into account. If this is not the case, these corridors could lead to new conflicts rather than enhanced dialogue.

It would therefore be advisable to:

- **Propose a broader approach to corridors and Routes**, in line with the recommendations of the expert meetings in Madrid (24-25 November 1994), the regional meeting on cultural landscapes in Eastern Europe (September – October 1999), and with the work undertaken by ICOMOS (Spain) and UNESCO concerning the intangible heritage.

- **Promote an integrated vision of cultural heritage under all its aspects**, as a bearer of history and identity to be conserved, a resource and motor for sustainable development, and a tool for intercultural dialogue.

- **Emphasize the role of creativity**, to illustrate the rich cultural diversity of the sub-region today, and to highlight both similarities and particularities.

- **Increase the spaces devoted to intercultural mediation, encounters, festivals, museums, interpretation centres, galleries and foundations** as spaces enabling the public to discover the entire range of the heritage and creativity of the sub-region. To achieve this goal, develop multi-media facilities and incorporate, in a more methodical matter, written and audiovisual media.

- **Promote innovative cultural tourism**, as a vehicle of exchange and a tool for heritage preservation and creative diversity, which can contribute to a better mutual understanding of the sub-region and to its sustainable development.

4. ORIENTATIONS TO GUIDE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION OF THE HEADS OF STATE

- **Suggestion for a concerted approach at the sub-regional level to proposals for inscription on the World Heritage List and on the future List of Intangible Heritage of Humanity** (cross-border sites, joint nominations of sites located in different countries within the same sub-region, enhancement of Routes and corridors etc). It will be necessary to consult reference documents and standard-setting instruments, such as the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970), the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), and reference documents of the Council of Europe, such as the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (1985) and the Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (1992).

- **Identification of spaces** (museums, theatres, cultural centres, parks, etc), of **themes** (co-publishing of anthologies of literary works by authors from the sub-region, co-production of music and film projects etc) and **events** (festivals, exhibitions, book fairs, art or crafts fairs etc.) and **live performances** and expressions related to cultural corridors that could contribute to creating a harmonious cultural scene.

In line with these objectives, one could:

- **Demonstrate, by means of an integrated approach, the heritage potential of the corridors and other spaces of contact**, previously redefined, taking care to avoid major discrepancies between examples of tangible and intangible heritage or discrimination between different categories of heritage (for example, there exists a project on "Monastery Route" but one could also propose a "Mosque Route"). Given the varying state of available documentation, it would certainly be worthwhile to explore the possibility of creating thematic databases beyond the national level to embrace the heritage of the entire region in all its diversity (sites, music, dance, arts, crafts, spiritual traditions, clothing and cooking traditions etc.) taking special care to include the heritage of minorities.

- **Make a diagnosis of the state of conservation** of cultural heritage sites, ensembles and monuments and define the priorities in terms of conservations of cultural landscapes by referring to the orientations of the World Heritage Centre; undertake inventories of the intangible cultural heritage found along the envisaged corridors and determine which elements require particular attention so that they can contribute to the enhancement these corridors.

- **List the most vulnerable forms of the intangible cultural heritage** in order to ensure its safeguarding and conservation for future generations. Encourage the states of South-East Europe to ratify the Convention of 2003 and to prepare candidatures for the lists of intangible heritage established by that instrument.

- **Establish, or link via a network, programmes devoted to heritage conservation and enhancement of heritage as well as awareness-raising** for all administrators, political and cultural actors by improving the relevant teaching materials. Adapt the training programmes for the actors and operators in the field of cultural tourism by defining cross-border thematic itineraries and by associating logos to these corridors with the assistance of the sub-regional coordination committees.

- **Identify or create poles of excellence with the assistance of UNESCO Chairs and establish network links** among research and teaching centres based on a series of themes to be selected (the role of contemporary creation as a tool for intercultural communication; the role of history in enhancing understanding of contemporary interaction; the role of the written and oral literary tradition in the awareness of a common heritage; religious and linguistic diversity etc.). In this context, it is advisable to produce a series of printed or audio-visual documents in the various national languages. This series should be designed for the entire sub-region, thereby avoiding a nationalist position. Clearly, it could be used in a formal or informal educational context.

- **Propose events related to the cultural corridors project in the framework of World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development (21 May)**, by defining unifying themes that will produce fruitful encounters between visitors and the local populations and reinforced cooperation between cities on the basis of common cultural policies. Encourage exchange programmes between young people from different countries, particularly through artist residencies, volunteer programmes for monument restoration or archaeological excavations in the framework of the "World Heritage in Young Hands" programme or "The Olive Tree Route" project.

- **Establish a timetable for launching some cultural corridors – in an integrated approach – devoted to the principal themes already mentioned:** archaeological zones, religious heritage, civil heritage, particularly vernacular and World Heritage Sites, with particular attention to their multifarious or intangible components and to their enhancement by a type of tourism that is respectful of the fragility of these ensembles. For symbolic reasons, it would be advisable to create a new itinerary based on the unifying theme of "bridges" – with the appropriate accompanying literature – given the richness of the region in this regard, from Antiquity through the Ottoman period down to the present day. Another suggestion: the creation of one or several regional corridors to highlight the components belonging to one or several aspects of the intangible cultural heritage that reflect the communities living along these corridors today.