

Faro free Applications



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Residents' cooperative

Brief description

■ A "residents co-operative" has been set up to derive economic benefits from the heritage through a varied range of goods and services offered for sale by local people, such as visitor accommodation (on a "guest house" basis), discovery tours, books and local products. The co-operative's action makes it possible to preserve the local heritage and raise its profile, while helping to improve the residents' quality of life and living conditions. Its activities include identifying the legal frameworks applicable to the accommodation offer (regulations, statutes, etc.), training residents in these matters via a "school for hosts", promoting the accommodation services through its own brand name and website, and marketing them in the form of a co-operative travel agency.

Tutor for the application

■ Prosper Wanner, manager of the residents' co-operative Hôtel du Nord [contact@hoteldunord.coop]

Reference sites

■ The northern neighbourhoods of Marseilles.

Background

■ Local elected representatives, associations, residents, artists and business people in Marseilles were already acquainted with the European principles laid down in the Faro Convention well before its adoption. They have been applying these principles in the city's northern neighbourhoods since 1995. Gathered together in "heritage communities", they have been working with public bodies so as to research their histories and their heritage environment. The results of this research regularly give rise to publications, classifications of sites and buildings by the central authorities, archiving of documents, artistic creations, heritage walks and so on. Since 2005, the European Heritage Days have constituted an annual rendezvous between these heritage communities and the public, with several thousand visitors per year.

■ In 2013, the year when Marseille-Provence was European Capital of Culture, the eight heritage communities based in

Marseilles, the local town hall and the Marseille-Provence 2013 campaign devised the visitor services offer "Hôtel du Nord", consisting in a network of 50 guest rooms, 50 hosts willing to acquaint visitors with each room's heritage environment and 50 heritage routes.

■ The same year the hosts living in these often stigmatised, scarcely frequented neighbourhoods received over 2 500 visitors.

Tutor's comments

■ The decision to develop a visitor services offer linked to the social-support economy in the northern parts of Marseilles, working with local residents and public subsidies, rapidly raised questions of governance – "Who takes which decisions?" – and the common good – "Who owns which property? Who decides the price of a room or a meal? Who decides that a book can use the "Hôtel du Nord" brand name? Who is entitled to use the co-operative's services? Ultimately, which decisions should be taken collectively? What is a matter of individual free choice? What falls under the head of 'equal rights for all'?"

■ Co-operative values,¹ historically present in the northern neighbourhoods, which for a century and a half were strongly working class, served as a basis for consideration of whether they could be adapted to the modern day context, with a view to a form of grassroots implementation of the spirit of the Faro Convention. These values, which came into being in Europe, proved to constitute an innovative, practical response to societal issues and challenges in a number of very different economic sectors: the artisan trades, farming, fishing, banking, production of goods, the food sector, and so on. The decision to adopt co-operative status made it possible to establish a collective entity with a democratic decision-making structure: the individuals concerned, whether beneficiaries or members of the co-operative, all have their own say in decisions which are binding on them.

1. In 1895 the International Co-operative Alliance established seven principles, which were updated in 2005. They are voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training and information; co-operation among co-operatives; and concern for community. (Co-operative identity, values & principles | ICA: International Co-operative Alliance)

■ The Faro Convention provided a “common reference framework” for clarifying the distribution of roles between what had to do with public responsibility, the democratic process and individual rights. The Convention stipulates that a heritage community wishes to operate “within the framework of public action” and accordingly gives preference to co-operation with institutions. The aim is not to take the place of public entities or to enter into opposition to them, but to contribute to their good functioning. For example, to identify and promote the goods and services proposed by the co-operative, we chose to adopt a “collective brand name” not a quality label. As a co-operative, Hôtel du Nord assumes its role as an economic player acting in its members’ interests. A “labelling process” is more a task for a public entity with no economic interest in the transaction, having the responsibility and the resources for performing ad hoc controls.

■ Where the ordinary law is at variance with the exercise of the right to cultural heritage, as laid down in the Faro Convention, the latter instrument offers a framework for co-operation between the co-operative’s members and members of parliament or ministerial officials. This was successfully exploited to obtain permission for the co-operative to market its visitor services offer without going through traditional travel agencies. This now enables it to control and take charge of the promotion of its own services offer, which tourism businesses all too often reduce to a mere hotel style service.

■ At present, the co-operative is pursuing this co-operation so as to secure the elimination of the clause prohibiting persons living in social housing from sub-letting guest rooms, even on an occasional basis.

Implementation process and conditions

Purpose: the co-operative has a social objective. It aims to derive economic benefits from the heritage communities’ heritage so as to preserve and enhance this heritage and improve residents’ quality of life and living conditions.

Principles: The principles of the Faro Convention have been combined with co-operative principles, so as to lay the co-operative’s foundations. The co-operative principles were established more than a hundred years ago by the International Co-operative Alliance and were updated in 1995 in the Statement on the Co-operative Identity.

- ▶ **Governance:** membership is voluntary and open to all, and authority is exercised democratically by the members under the rule “one member, one vote”. The co-operative is a democratic organisation controlled by its members, who actively participate in policy-making and in taking decisions. A Governing Board, elected from among the members, assists the manager and represents the co-operative in dealings with elected representatives and public bodies.
- ▶ **Participation:** under the co-operative’s statutes the “resident members” hold a majority share of the capital, doubtless a first within the co-operative movement. The manager has limited powers, and certain key decisions must be taken by a general meeting of members. Members exchange information via a private social network and regular meetings.
- ▶ **Common goods:** the co-operative’s ownership is collective, inter-generational and indivisible: if the co-operative is dissolved its reserves must be allocated to another co-operative or to public interest activities. The co-operative cannot be listed on the stock market.
- ▶ **Non-profit:** the capital subscribed may bring limited compensation. The economic benefits are in line with the concepts of the social, solidarity-based economy.
- ▶ **Independence:** the co-operative is a halfway house between the public and private sectors. It can enter

into agreements with other public or private organisations, provided these agreements safeguard the members’ democratic powers and preserve the co-operative’s independence.

Training: the “school for hosts”

- ▶ **Qualifications:** the hosts are trained, and qualified, to provide the different kinds of guest services in a context of pooling of knowledge within the “school for hosts”, with training sessions run by hosts, tourism business professionals or other parties.
- ▶ **Popular education:** to reinforce its independence, the co-operative attaches great importance to providing its members with educational opportunities, via its “school for hosts”, and with the knowledge and information they need to be able to play an effective role in the co-operative’s development.
- ▶ **Exchange of knowledge:** members of the co-operative can participate free of charge in the heritage walks proposed, so as to foster an exchange of knowledge concerning both the heritage content and the accommodation offer. Each guest room is equipped with a “heritage bookshelf” composed of works chosen by the members.

Promotion and marketing

- ▶ **Collective brand:** the accommodation services and heritage discovery products are promoted via a collective brand name – a trademark, label or symbol – serving as a guarantee that the hospitality is offered by and for the residents. “We produce what we sell, and we sell what we produce”. The brand name is collectively owned, and can be adapted according to the visitor services on offer; it can also be personalised by the host using terms such as “hosted by”, “discovered with” “written and produced by” and so on.
- ▶ **The website:** the co-operative promotes the visitor services available via a joint website, which lists the services by the type of hospitality offered, the host’s name or the heritage content.
- ▶ **The travel agency:** the co-operative markets the visitor services individually (a catalogue of walks is proposed) and in the form of packages sold via travel agencies and other operators.

Economic aspects

- ▶ **Sale of services:** the co-operative sells accommodation, walks and training sessions, primarily developed and implemented by its members.
- ▶ **The members’ economic contribution:** the members contribute to the co-operative’s capital and finance its operation via an annual membership fee, including a flat-rate payment and a variable payment depending on their direct income from the sale of overnight stays, products and so on. The amounts are determined by the general meeting of members.
- ▶ **Public subsidies:** a co-operative is a commercial undertaking which may receive limited public funding at the time of its launch in accordance with the European de minimis rule, which sets an annual ceiling.
- ▶ **Voluntary work:** most activities are carried out by the members on a voluntary basis, including visiting new rooms, managing product stocks and guiding walks.

The operators running the Faro application

Hôtel du Nord Co-operative (Marseilles, France): <http://hoteldunord.coop/>