

PRESS RELEASE

CULTURE AGAINST DISASTERS

International conference, Ravello, 28 and 29 September 2018

Should we simply protect cultural heritage from disasters, or make heritage protection an active tool for preventing them? This is not a provocative question but the theme of the international conference Culture against Disasters organised by the European University Centre for Cultural Heritage on 28 and 29 September at the beautiful Villa Rufolo in Ravello.

The conference, supported by the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA), a Council of Europe programme that aims to reduce natural and man-made disasters, was based on both common and infrequent observations. Cultural landscapes – terrace farming together with traditional irrigation systems and farming techniques, and the knowledge these entail – are part of a territory's cultural heritage, but are also a record of "historical" transformations, only there today because they have successfully stood the test of dozens of extreme natural events. Protecting them therefore contributes to preventing locally recurring natural disasters.

However, the agricultural activities that shape cultural landscapes have generally become less profitable either because farms need a lot of manpower or because nearly all farms are reducing in size, which disqualifies them from many of the benefits of European Union agricultural policies. The decline in revenue leads to their abandonment and an increased risk of instabilities.

The Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies and Tourism, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities, the Civil Protection Department, the Agriculture Department of the Campania Region, experts from Greek and Algerian research centres and representatives from some of Italy's cultural landscapes (Cinque Terre, the Amalfi Coast) all participated in the conference, thereby permitting an intense debate that made it possible to identify actions in support of farms which, through their work, contribute to maintaining cultural heritage and therefore to preventing disasters.

The debate also highlighted the dual role played by the media in preventing disasters: publicising scientific observations on local risks and giving scientists and decision-makers access to local knowledge regarding traditional land management practices and the risks that currently exist. Those taking the floor included the director of "Corriere del Mezzogiorno", Enzo d'Errico, and journalists Stella Cervazio of "Repubblica Napoli" and Erminia Pellicchia of "Il Mattino".

The presence of local stakeholders – Mario Aceto, who grows *Sfusato Amalfitano* lemons; Lello Mansi, who described the painful experience of losing her daughter Francesca in the 2010 flood in Atrani; associations of engineers, agronomists and geologists from the province of

Salerno; and representatives of farm industry associations (CIA, Coldiretti, Confagricoltura) – gave tangible form to the Faro Convention requirement regarding the involvement of local communities in the conservation of cultural heritage and its sustainable use for human development and quality of life.

Following a presentation by Ferruccio Ferrigni, Scientific Co-ordinator of the Activities of the Ravello Centre and the instigator of the international conference, a welcome address was given by Alfonso Andria, President of the European University Centre for Cultural Heritage, which has its headquarters in Ravello. The conclusions were presented by Gianluca Silvestrini, Executive Secretary of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement of the Council of Europe.

Ambassador Francesco Caruso, Professor Maurizio di Stefano (President of ICOMOS Italy and of the Campania region's integrated system for the promotion of UNESCO heritage sites) and Council of Europe consultant Hakan Shearer Demir contributed to the wide-ranging, cogent debate.

The criteria and methods that can be used to make protection of cultural landscapes an effective tool for preventing natural disasters and for sustainable human development were thus reflected in the conference's final recommendations, based on the knowledge of local stakeholders and endorsed by the experts. These recommendations are to be addressed to decision-making bodies at local, national and European level.

In addition, with the aim of moving on from theory to practice, the participants asked the European University Centre to develop a transnational pilot project, which could involve Greece, Algeria, another country from the southern shore of the Mediterranean and, in Italy, the Amalfi Coast and Cinque Terre and which will make it possible to test the conclusions of the two-day conference. The Council of Europe, through the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement, has undertaken to help develop the project and publicise it among institutions that may be interested in supporting it.