

Speech Henry von Blumenthal

Deputy Dean of the EIB Institute

5th anniversary conference of the 7 most Endangered Programme

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Minister Anastasiadou

Mr. Mayor

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Ladies and Gentlemen

My name is Henry von Blumenthal, Deputy Dean of the EIB Institute. The Institute is part of the European Investment Bank. It may be that the present company has not had much contact with the EIB, but just so that you know, were you to add together the balance sheets of the World Bank, the EBRD, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau and any other IFIs you can think of, between them they would barely match the balance sheet of the EIB.

I am particularly pleased to be here today in Nicosia for the fifth anniversary conference of the 7 Most Endangered programme.

I say “particularly” pleased because it is obvious to us at the European Investment Bank and at the EIB Institute that Europe’s cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is crucial to the social and economic fabric of European countries. The destruction of heritage can be viewed as a kind of genocide; so its preservation can be seen as a form of genocide-prevention.

Cultural heritage is a common good. It is our inheritance from previous generations of Europeans and our legacy for those to come. As such, cultural heritage plays a great role in defining a shared European identity. It binds us together not only geographically but across time.

Europeans take pride in cultural heritage. The first ever Eurobarometer on this topic, released in 2018 on the occasion of the first European Year of Cultural Heritage, showed that 84% of Europeans consider cultural heritage as personally important as well as important for the European Union.

They agree that cultural heritage can improve quality of life and a sense of belonging to Europe in its diversity because the diversity of European culture is what sets the Old Continent apart and gives it its particular value.

Now being a banker, I guess you also expect me to talk about the economic importance of cultural heritage and particularly of its importance for economic cohesion.

Cultural heritage counts for Europe in ways that you would expect but also in ways that one might not expect. Of course, it provides Europe's regions, cities, towns and rural areas with a strong basis to develop cultural tourism and attract investment. Europe is the world's no. 1 tourist destination and tourism is the third largest socioeconomic activity in the EU, contributing 415 billion Euros to the EU GDP and employing more than 15 million people.

Who can deny that cultural heritage plays a huge role in attracting tourists? For 68% of Europeans, heritage has an influence on their holiday destination. It is obvious that it is a key factor of Europe's attractiveness for tourists from other continents, as we all know when we visit Berlin, Rome, Paris, Athens or Nicosia and the list could have been extended by many more names.

Only slightly less obviously, cultural heritage also has a track-record of providing good return on investment and of being a catalyst for sustainable heritage-led regeneration for cities.

Now, I want to show you two extremely brief videos produced by the EIB's Communications Department. One relates directly to the EIB's work in heritage-led regeneration, and the other does not. Then I will draw your attention to an interesting fact about these two clips.

Video Malta.

Video Cyprus

So, clearly the one about Valletta is all about heritage. But did you notice that at least 50% of the images in the one about Cyprus, which is not in fact about heritage at all, consisted of heritage related images? What does that tell you? It tells you that one of the most brilliant communications teams in the banking world considers that an appeal to heritage is a way to get a banking message through to the public.

Interesting, no?

In fact, cultural heritage management is one of the investment priorities for the EU structural and investment funds notably through urban regeneration.

I was however intrigued to learn recently of a study by the university of IULM, the Free University of Language and Communication in Milan on the impact of cultural heritage on public health. It seems to be beyond dispute that adrenalin and stress levels are improved not only when a person enters a church or a museum, but specifically when that church or museum resonates with a person's own perception of his cultural background. This is not just confined to buildings but to other aspects of culture. Bafflingly, the only exception is poetry, which seems to make people more stressed and miserable than they were before they read it...

But in any case, academics are now calculating the potential saving to the national health budgets of the European member states resulting from a widening of the cultural budget.

It goes without saying however that heritage is also fragile and, importantly, non-renewable. It is vulnerable to over exploitation, under funding, pollution, mass tourism, neglect and even terrorism. In many places, both urban and rural, rich cultural assets have not been recognised for the potential they hold.

This means that more should be done to promote the innovative use of cultural heritage for economic growth and jobs, social cohesion and environmental sustainability.

We should use the lessons learned from creative approaches such as innovative financing, new forms of governance, unified landscape management, public private partnerships, crowd-sourced funding, philanthropy (and many others) to unlock the possibilities for growth and development that cultural heritage holds across Europe.

Europeans would agree. According to the Eurobarometer, 74% of them think public authorities both national and European should allocate more resources to Europe's cultural heritage.

As I said, the EU cohesion and rural development policies can be instrumental in promoting the restoration of cultural heritage, supporting cultural and creative industries and financing the training and upgrading of skills of cultural professionals. However, public funding is scarce.

So what else can be done?

I will underline three key areas. The first one is visibility.

This is what the EU is doing through this first European Year of Cultural Heritage - thanks to the efforts of Europa Nostra- or through the European Heritage Label.

This is also what Europa Nostra is doing through the 7Most Endangered competition of which the Institute has been a partner since 2013. We provide pro-bono experts – many of them are here today- to carry out on site missions and produce technical reports on the viability and phasing of the project recuperation as well as on the funding options available. Thus, this initiative increases both the visibility of the cultural importance of the sites and the credibility of the proposed restoration efforts helping to ensure their survival.

Examples that come to mind are the Manueline monastery in Setubal, the Bourla Theater in Antwerp (Belgium), the Art Nouveau synagogue in Subotica (Serbia), the Colbert swing bridge in Dieppe (France), the Citadel of Alessandria (Italy). We will hear more about them today.

The second area is partnership and coordination to safeguard cultural heritage and use it as a tool for social and economic cohesion. Again, this is what the 7 Most endangered Programme is all about. Guy will tell you more in a minute but let me say ensure you that we, the EIB Institute, are particularly pleased with the results of our five year collaboration.

But partnering with NGOs, European Institutions or local authorities is not enough. We need to involve the private sector more and discuss successful examples and not only the paradors in Spain or pousadas in Portugal.

If heritage is to cement social and economic cohesion in Europe then shouldn't we engage more with representatives of the tourism industry or representatives of companies established in revitalized neighbourhoods? An interesting example will be discussed later with a project to revitalize the 17th century fortifications in Briançon (France).

But more can be done. Hence the idea to organise next year in Luxembourg a pilot matchmaking event between Endangered sites in need of funding and private funders, possibly alongside public financiers.

It is only by uniting our efforts and those of many other partners that we will reach lasting results.

Thank you for your attention.