

## **HERO project Final Conference Report**

### **Heritage for a more sustainable and inclusive Europe**

#### *Heritage restoration as a true lever for training and reskilling in the times of the New European Bauhaus*

On 24 October 2024 participants gathered in Brussels for the final conference of the HERO project, organised by POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS. The event took place at the premises of SMART cooperative. The HERO project funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union focuses on the restoration of European heritage as a vector for professional, social, and environmental inclusion, and was implemented between December 2021 and October 2024. The Conference was an opportunity for various stakeholders including partners in the project, academia, representatives of NGOs, networks and federations, public administrations from European countries, including the European Commission, and members of the public to understand and exchange about the challenges and opportunities that heritage restoration sites can bring to modern renovation and construction sites in terms of transmission of traditional, ecological and sustainable building techniques and training, reskilling, employability and inclusion. Above all the Conference placed heritage restoration at the centre of cultural heritage, environmental and social policies and programmes at the European but also mediterranean levels. The project produced a policy document with a set of recommendations presented during the Conference.



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## Opening of the Conference (09:30)

The conference kickstarted with welcoming remarks and acknowledgments from Françoise Kemajou, Director of POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS, who briefly introduced the work of PLS as a European think and do tank promoting and implementing professional insertion programmes for young NEETS and vulnerable public.

## Keynote (09:45 - 10:15)

### New Trends in the Heritage Sector to Create Social and Societal Impact,

Koen Van Balen, KULeuven, Representing Europa Nostra

Koen Van Balen discussed new trends in heritage reuse, highlighting the importance of a cultural well-being framework where heritage plays a central role in creating social and community bonds. Using examples of inclusive and ecological restoration, such as "De Hoorn" and "Hal 5" in Belgium, as well as the "Winter Circus" in Ghent, he demonstrated how these projects promote cultural diversity and strengthen citizens' emotional connections. He also emphasized that cultural heritage contributes to sustainability by addressing economic, societal, environmental, and cultural aspirations and challenges.

## Presentation of the HERO Project, Partners, Results, and Conclusions (10:15 - 11:00), Florian Zappa, Project Coordinator at Actavista and Salima Chitalia, Senior Project Officer at Pour la Solidarité

The presentation included a [video](#) portraying the HERO project's aim to preserve and transmit heritage while promoting social inclusion and sustainability. The video further put forward the project partners' work in eco-construction and sustainable restoration, focusing on traditional techniques and professional integration. The goal is to share the history and conservation methods within an inclusive and ecological approach. It included a presentation of the HERO project partners:

- [ACTAVISTA](#) (France): Assists individuals without professional experience, particularly in construction, by offering training programmes, especially in heritage restoration.
- [BAO Formation](#) (France): Delivers qualifying training in the field of ancient masonry, having developed a pedagogy of learning by doing adapted to people with difficulties in accessing training opportunities.
- [BOULOUKI](#) (Greece): An interdisciplinary research collaborative, focusing on the study of traditional building techniques and materials; working and collaborating with engineers.
- [DRAGODID](#) (Croatia): An education, training and awareness raising organisation focusing on vernacular architecture, specifically dry stone techniques.
- [POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS](#): Think and do tank promoting social inclusion and innovation and facilitating project initiatives.

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With the ambition to contribute to a sustainable and resilient Europe the aim of the HERO project was to improve training of instructors in the field of built heritage restoration with a particular emphasis on:

- The inclusion of people in precarious conditions, and
- The implementation of environmentally sustainable practices.

By combining heritage, inclusion and environmental aspects through training, HERO has intended to enhance the skills of vocational training instructors in the built heritage by:

- Developing more inclusive training practices aimed at people who are furthest from employment, and
- Familiarising trainers with eco-friendly restoration methods and the preservation of traditional building techniques

The HERO project received €340,000 in funding over three years from the European Union.

HERO project delivered the following results:

- **Mapping of inspiring practices**: mapping heritage sites in Europe and Mediterranean region combining heritage restoration with social inclusion illustrating how heritage renovation can become a lever professional, social and environmental inclusion.
- **Training and Tools**: a pedagogical toolkit for heritage professionals, trainers, and organisations to upgrade heritage restoration worksite into inclusive and eco-friendly platforms for training and reskilling and a set of [video tutorials](#), hands on content and training activity concepts to equip the heritage restoration training community with ready-to-use material.

To conclude, Florian Zappa noted that Europe, with many UNESCO World Heritage sites, faces increasing heritage deterioration. The labour shortage in the construction sector, combined with limited access to jobs, worsens the situation. The HERO project aims to address these challenges by strengthening sustainable restoration skills and integrating traditional techniques into a contemporary context.

Finally, Salima Chitalia presented **recommendations**, addressed to different stakeholders, including policy makers at national and European levels. These are developed after testing various methodologies and from results of concrete activities in the field. She also insisted that they may overlap with existing recommendations emanating from the various initiatives and projects developed in the sector during the

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past years and particularly since European Year of Culture, in 2018 and its legacy document, the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage.

Seven recommendations were developed, calling among other, to:

- Develop vocational and education training (VET) programmes focusing on traditional techniques and encouraging development of a skilled workforce;
- Transform heritage worksites into training and inclusion platforms, notably using the back to work model;
- Make craftsmanship more attractive and valued by developing awareness raising programmes on construction and traditional craftsmanship for the younger generations;
- Use heritage to drive the ecological transition and calling for ecological techniques to be included into certification and training programmes for construction professionals;
- Promote VET training and apprenticeships programmes and employability in remote areas through heritage;
- Foster collaboration between public authorities and civil society through heritage.

**[The New European Bauhaus \(NEB\): European Framework, Heritage, and Sustainability \(11:30 - 12:30\)](#)**, Tatiana Coelho De Oliveira, New European Bauhaus Team, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO), European Commission

After the coffee break Tatiana Coelho De Oliveira presented the New European Bauhaus (NEB), an initiative launched in 2021 to integrate culture into the EU's Green Deal. The NEB supports sustainable urban redevelopment and heritage preservation projects. She cited examples like the Sacromonte Caves Museum in Spain and the Danube Design Lab in Bulgaria, showcasing how NEB promotes projects focusing on innovation and inclusion. She highlighted that the NEB was included in the EU cohesion policy receiving funding to allow the development of concrete NEB project at the local level. She spoke about the NEB prizes, awarded since 2021, to small municipalities and a future call for application that will be launched in January 2025.



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A networking lunch allowed participants to further continue and prolong their thoughts and reflexions.



**Roundtable 1 - Transforming Heritage Restoration Sites into Platforms for Training, Social Inclusion, and Employability (14:00 - 14:45)**, moderated by Coline Pelissier, Project Manager in charge of academic relations, ACTAVISTA

## Panellists:

- Sébastien Mainil, Training Coordinator, Walloon Heritage Agency, Belgium
- Achraff Kharaz, Operations Manager, *Chantier Ecole*, Morocco
- Vili Fotopoulou, Department Head, Ministry of Culture, Greece

Panellists had the opportunity to introduce their respective structure from [Morocco](#) and [Greece](#), the latter focusing on intangible culture, and how training, social inclusion and employability was integrated into their work. The roundtable highlighted the following aspects:

- The importance of transmitting traditional techniques also through community engagement and intersectoral approaches.
- Creating opportunities for young people with disabilities.
- An inclusive approach from an early age.

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**Roundtable 2 - Fostering Territorial Sustainable Development through Heritage and Eco-Construction (15:00 - 15:45)**, moderated by Florian Zappa, Project Coordinator, ACTAVISTA

## Panellists:

- Panos Kostoulas, Co-Founder, Boulouki
- Clémentine Daubeauf, Project Coordinator, Eurocities
- Ken De Cooman, BC Architects Studies & Materials
- Gino Heyndrickx, Federation of Heritage Restoration Professionals, Belgium

This discussion focused on eco-construction and sustainability. Speakers emphasised:

- Using local materials and traditional techniques to reduce carbon footprints.
- Community engagement in heritage conservation to integrate historical buildings into modern urban development.
- Collaboration between engineers, architects, and local communities to ensure functional and sustainable heritage use.