

Preserving heritage can help ensure social inclusion

CAN social inclusion be achieved through cultural heritage preservation?

A European Conference hosted in Nicosia last week said "yes."

The conference - entitled 'European Heritage and Employment' - was one of three European symposiums taking place in France, Cyprus, and Malta between 2006 and 2008.

The events aim to raise awareness of the potential of training and employing the unemployed to preserve cultural heritage sites.

The conference speakers emphasised reduced unemployment, preservation of heritage and beautification of the environment as only some of the direct benefits of this approach.

Welcome addresses were delivered by the Ambassador of France to Cyprus Nicolas Galey and director of the Foundation for the Management of the European Programmes for Life Long Learning, Androulla Papanastasiou.

Head of the European Representation in Cyprus, Androulla Kaminara, spoke on EU policies on social inclusion and cultural heritage.

"The fight against poverty and social exclusion relies heavily on the integration of people furthest from the labour market," she said.

"Persistence of large numbers of people at risk of poverty and excluded from



SPEAKER: Head of European Commission to Cyprus Androulla Kaminara spoke on EU policies on social inclusion and cultural heritage.

the labour market represents an inescapable challenge to the objective of social cohesion enshrined in the European Union treaty," Kaminara said.

Founder and director of the Acta Vista Group Arnaud Castagnede presented the model of social inclusion and cultural heritage preservation.

The model is already implemented very successfully in southern France and it can be used in the cities and communities of Cyprus

for the maintenance of built but also natural heritage.

Castagnede is also a recipient of the Schaub Award for social entrepreneurship.

Conference participants were also informed on the training methodology developed through the project by representatives of partner organisation from France, Malta, and Italy.

Integration

The Conference was organised by the Synthesis Centre for Research and Education Ltd, the local partner of the consortium.

The project is promoted by the French organisations Acta Vista. Other partners include Initiatives Europe Conseil (France), Heritage Enterprise (Malta), and IARD (Italy).

The next European conference will be held on December 5 in Malta.

Commenting on the conference, Synthesis Centre director George Isaias, said: "This model for social integration preserves our very cultural heritage but also gives individuals that need a helping hand a chance for training and employment.

"In addition, the Cyprus government can utilise this experience to implement a social cohesion policy addressing a number of current and future challenges, such as immigrants, applicants for political asylum, ex prisoners and others."