



PRESS RELEASE

Strasbourg, 31 May 2016

European Heritage Communities 2016: Shaping our shared future

The European Heritage Days is a flagship initiative creating a positive impact on the life of local communities. This annual pan-European event gives visibility to cultural and environmental assets, local skills and traditions, architecture and works of art, with the aim of enriching the lives of citizens and bringing them together. It is a concrete example of how local communities can contribute to the European dimension of heritage and celebrate heritage as a shared European value.

The Council of Europe and the European Commission are delighted to announce that **"Heritage and Communities"** is the pan-European theme for the 2016 European Heritage Days. It reflects how heritage defines our sense of community, past and present, but more importantly, how it can contribute to shaping our shared future.

"Heritage communities are the manifestation of synergy between heritage and diversity with a constructive approach – valuing and celebrating on one side and actively searching for alternatives for societal challenges by all actors having a role and responsibility for the improvement of their quality of life. The Council of Europe, with an enlarged and cross-disciplinary approach to cultural heritage and diversity, encourages Heritage Communities to assert the principle of every person's right of access to the cultural heritage of his or her choice, while respecting the rights and freedoms of others." said Gianluca Silvestrini, Head of the Managing Diversity Division, Council of Europe.

Europe indeed has unrivalled cultural heritage and history. In every historic building, in every stone wall, thatched roof or plasterwork ceiling lays a treasure and a specific context of place. Empowering Heritage Communities helps promote participatory governance and an imaginative future.

In an increasingly transnational, homogeneous and virtual world, it is imperative that priority is given to locally-led initiatives that contribute to community well-being and which champion inclusivity, creativity, resilience, self-knowledge, imagination and cultural acuity. With its community-based initiatives and place-based distinctive approach, Heritage Communities create a platform to revisit and redefine relations in order to address the societal challenges faced in Europe today.

Council of Europe contacts:

[Gianluca Silvestrini](#) (+33 3 88 41 22 03) - Manager, European Heritage Days Programme, Directorate General of Democracy

[Giuseppe Zaffuto](#) (+33 3 90 21 56 04) – Media Officer

European Commission contacts :

[Emilia Appiou](#) (+ 32 2 29 55719)- Manager, European Heritage Days Programme, Directorate-General Education and Culture

The level of public engagement in the European Heritage Days programme reveals a large and growing appetite among citizens to participate in the cultural life of Europe. The public's imagination has been ignited, releasing an enthusiasm and energy that can contribute to the issues facing us, in particular by providing new ways of access, dialogue, exchange and belonging.

Karel Bartak, Head of Culture Unit, European Commission has emphasised that *"the European Commission and the Council of Europe are committed to supporting national heritage days programmes which join forces with regional and local organisers – who have a lot of dedication and talent – in order to make this project a reality. Thanks to this cooperation, more sites are made accessible and more events are organised every year; for 2016 more than 20 million visitors are expected to participate. This will further enhance public awareness of cultural heritage as a strategic resource for Europe's society and economy, and stimulate the appreciation of the richness of the European cultures in the run up to the European Year of Cultural Heritage to be held in 2018."*

Editors Notes

Every year in September, the 50 signatory States to the European Cultural Convention take part in the European Heritage Days – a joint action of the Council of Europe and the European Commission, putting new cultural assets on view and opening up historical buildings normally closed to the public. The cultural events highlight local skills and traditions, architecture and works of art, but the broader aim is to bring citizens together in harmony even though there are differences in cultures and languages. Last year for the first time over 30 countries participated in a programme of events celebrating Europe's industrial and design heritage. This year, a similar number will celebrate "Heritage and Communities".

Launched in 1985, the European Heritage Days have been organised since 1999 as a joint initiative of the European Commission and the Council of Europe. The 50 signatory states to the [European Cultural Convention](#)¹ take part. Events organised during the month-long celebration showcase architecture and art, local skills and traditions seeking to promote mutual understanding among European citizens.

Cultural heritage is a priority under Creative Europe, the EU's programme for the cultural and creative sectors. The European Heritage Days receive up to €200 000 in support from Creative Europe and €200 000 from the Council of Europe; most events are funded with national or regional backing.

To find out more:

European Heritage Days Portal: www.europeanheritagedays.com

Council of Europe: [European Heritage Days](#)

European Commission: [European Heritage Days](#)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/EHDays

Twitter: [@JEP_EHD](#)

¹ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/018>