

## **THE NORTHERN HOLYLAND CULTURAL HERITAGE WAY**

### ***A decentralized Cooperation Program - Region of Tuscany (Italy) - Israel - Palestinian Authority***

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*Palestinian partners:* **Municipalities of Anabta, Nablus and Tulkarem**

*Israeli partners:* **Municipalities of Akko, Haifa and Taibe**

In September 1999 during a seminar "*Tuscany in the World and with the World*", a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Palestinian municipalities Anabta, Nablus, Tulkarem, the Union of Local Authorities in Israel (ULAI) and the Region of Tuscany.

Following this event, the partners submitted a project proposal to the European Union under the name of "**Tuscany, Israel, Palestine - Decentralized Cooperation Program**".

With the political climate improving, the mayors and professionals from the participating municipalities met in March 2003 with the President of the Region of Tuscany, Claudio Martini, to confirm their commitment to the project. After that, the working group on "Cultural Heritage" convened on professional meetings in Taibe and Haifa; and the partners decided to establish a cultural heritage route that will connect the six participating municipalities and will show tourists the local tourist sites.

The project - finally called "**Northern Holy Land Cultural Heritage Way**" - was officially established with a final declaration prepared and signed by all parties on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2003 in Florence.

The six cities have decided to focus on the following issues:

- **Akko**, the khans, the Pisan Harbour, the Promenade and the white bazaar
- **Anabta**, the historic centre and the water mill building
- **Haifa**, the German Colony and two surrounding areas
- **Nablus**, the Roman sites (theatre and amphitheatre)
- **Taibeh**, the Mameluk Tower
- **Tulkarem**, the 'Old Municipality' Building

The activities within this Network will concentrate in a first stage on four subjects:

1. Establishing small-medium enterprises
2. Slow - Food
3. Restoration
4. Promotion of the Network

The goals of the Network are mainly to build trust and communication between partners, from political municipal leaders level to professionals engaged in the project.

The five years of cooperation and the many meetings with the Network partners led to personal friendship ties between the engaged people, which contributed to bring new interested persons to the project. The successful cooperation led to today's situation, where Israeli and Palestinian partners meet directly, without the need of the presence of a third partner. This situation was impossible at the beginning; the meetings had to be held in places far from the region.

The outcome of this project will be an important increase of the employment conditions in the six participating cities by creating new jobs in the following sectors:

- construction
- restaurants
- guides

- souvenirs shops
- information centers

The project will also put Anabta, Taibe and Tulkarem on the tourism map by creating a tourist attraction site in each one of them. This will enable the young generation to diversify its studies to the culinary, handicrafts, tourism, and transportation fields. The project will preserve historical-cultural monuments and will enable the cities to open joint markets, especially near the fence, which will be the first signal for building bridges of mutual understanding instead of a wall of hate. This new employment possibility will also have its influence on the Palestinian population, opening new work places at the renovated sites.

From the tourist point of view the network is unique by its diversity in cultural elements, various historical periods and partners representing the three religions. Big and small cities are united under the roof of the project.

Who are the potential tourists?

First of all, the citizens of Tuscany that committed themselves to the project and will send their pioneer representatives to be the ambassadors of goodwill and the promoters of the project.

Youth exchange may be the second step on our way. Success with youth will lead to tourism focused in cultural heritage, it will attract environmental and peace supporters and finally every other tourist that wish to taste the Holy Land, who will have new attractions to visit.

We believe that with the strong support of UNESCO, the European Union and the Region of Tuscany the success of our project is assured, despite the hostilities and current unstable situation. The sustainable tourist route will enforce trust, mutual dialogue and cooperation as a steady peace alternative. We are confident that this project will lead us to create, in the near future, the extended Via Maris Network, connecting Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Egypt with Europe.