ASCAME commits to diversifying Mediterranean tourism, boosting culture and cultural heritage through iHERITAGE, an innovative international project for the dissemination of UNESCO's Mediterranean heritage

- Innovating tourism beyond sun and beach, iHeritage promotes cultural heritage and cultural experiences as a revulsive for a more sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean region -

Barcelona, March 26, 2021 - The iHeritage ICT Mediterranean Platform for UNESCO's Cultural Heritage project, which has been launched recently, represents today one of the most ambitious commitments of the European Union for the digital transformation of the Mediterranean cultural tourism industry.

The Mediterranean UNESCO cultural heritage needs new techniques to improve its level of interpretation, taking advantage of new technologies and commercialising the latest research results. In this regard, iHERITAGE will provide new solutions through an innovation-driven growth process to promote cross-border technological transfer, Living Labs, industry-academia collaboration and the creation of spin-offs and new products, using the latest Information and Communication Technologies (ICT): Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR) and Mixed Reality (MR).

This international cooperation project gathering 10 partners from 6 Mediterranean countries (Egypt, Spain, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon and Portugal), among which the Association of Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce (ASCAME), is expected to last 30 months and its activities are scheduled to last until February 2023.

With a budget of approximately 3.8 million euros - 90% EU contribution and 10% project co-financing in the framework of ENI CBC MED programme - iHeritage proposes a real revolution in the way to feel and experience our cultural heritage.

Moreover, the main objectives of iHeritage include the creation of the first Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Mediterranean (CRESPIEM), for which UNESCO recognition (category 2) will be sought, and the launch of the first UNESCO ICT Cultural Heritage Cluster in the Mediterranean.
For ASCAME, this is a project of great interest, which is in line with its "Recovery Plan and the New Economic Development Model for the Mediterranean" presented last July 2020. This Recovery Plan contains more than 100 initiatives for the economic recovery of the main sectors of activity of the economies of the Mediterranean countries, among which the tourism sector stands out for its weight and relevance.

Tourism is one of the main economic drivers, as it generates a large number of jobs in most Mediterranean countries. For this reason, ASCAME has launched a series of proposals ranging from the creation of a bailout and rescue fund for companies and businesses in the tourism sector most affected by the consequences of COVID-19, to the implementation of the "Mediterranean Brand". The purpose is to highlight the unique value of Mediterranean tourism compared to other regions and to promote the Mediterranean as a sustainable tourism destination.

The creation of a "Mediterranean Tourism Council" aimed at fostering new opportunities for the economic growth of the Mediterranean tourism sector is another of ASCAME's key proposals.

In this respect, iHeritage takes an important step towards boosting the region's cultural tourism industry through the digitisation of a large part of the Mediterranean's cultural heritage, a World Heritage Site. This project is expected to play an important role in the economic recovery of the sector in the Mediterranean in the post-COVID-19 period and set up many key activities that will benefit ASCAME’s members. Among those, it is necessary to highlight the existence of training programs for the development of innovative products/services open to the private sector as well as other stakeholders; the creation of 76 innovative products/services to boost the valorisation of the Mediterranean intangible cultural heritage; the set-up of research agreements among universities, researchers and SMEs; or the establishment of new institutional framework for safeguarding and valorising the Mediterranean Intangible Cultural Heritage with the creation of CRESPIEM, etc.

Therefore, the iHeritage project is a significant stimulus for the development of the cultural tourism industry in the Mediterranean. It will not only develop innovative technological products, but will also help to improve the employment of young people - through the planned training and support for new spin-offs - and, in the process, boost employment in the creative industry sector in the Mediterranean.


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