

Tradition and innovation at the 9th edition of the environmental Agencies Conference  
Matera and Brindisi, March 2-6, 2005

A place long inhabited, where it is easy to trace man's history from the Palaeolithic to today, from Neolithic villages to the vast urban fabric of Civita and Sassi. Gravina, Murgia and the 120 other rock churches with Byzantine frescoes make this place a completely unique habitat where people both built anew and modernised, exploiting the area's resources without destroying it, and instead becoming part of it. The architecture has followed the unique features of the land, seconding them, using them and placing them at the service of a genuine urban community. Indeed, it is impossible here to distinguish between what is rock and what is the work of man.

It is no coincidence that great masters of the cinema have set their films in this charming setting; its characteristics led UNESCO to declare it a "cultural landscape," the first in the world. Matera, the "City of Stones" appears in the "Heritage of Mankind" list, and unfolds in an evocative setting of rugged rock plunging vertically down to the Gravina Stream. Old and new mix so well that they become one. And it is precisely this mixture that marked the Environmental Agencies event which, almost as if it were trying to adapt to the host setting, also seems a combination of classic and innovative factors creating a traditional gathering marked by novelty.

Eight months after the Genoa conference, the customary agency event is not only changing scene but also creating new leading players. The Matera and Brindisi meetings have been open to diverse impulses, to comparison and debate, not only among professionals in the field but also among representatives of institutions, the scientific world, and business. And they've been the latter, as in previous years, who, up on the stage and in the bright lights, have analysed topics such as environmental education, energy and environment, sustainable tourism, protected areas, management and organisation.

There have been many activities for young people: involved in interactive workshops specially set up in the movie theatre hosting the session on environmental education, they have been shown films on environmental subjects. But the real novelty consists of the different structure and new method followed in setting up the conference. This year it was decided to apply different characteristics to the whole conference, with two very distinct sessions: Session A, devoted to the presentation of themes, and Session B, in which debate was the most prominent feature. In this context, for the first time at the agency event there was a host in charge of eliciting livelier participation from both guests and audience in general. Another unique feature is the itinerant nature of the ninth conference; after the first day in Matera, it

switched scene. Passing through the region, the event changed backdrop and arrived in Puglia where, in the setting of the major event of the "Mediterre" Fair, it set up shop in Brindisi, providing an unusual location for the agency stands. The city itself was a splendid backdrop for the exhibition areas of the regional agencies: visitors could admire the gardens of Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, with the Fontana dei Delfini (1876) and the Monument to Virgil. Perhaps taking its example from the city of Matera, which has been able to create without destroying, or perhaps because of the strategic position of the historic port of Brindisi, for centuries the only eastward-oriented connection point in southern Italy, the agency system, by opening itself up to new horizons, examined environmental topics with renewed zeal, as well as with the wisdom derived from years of experience.

Final objective? To succeed in providing further impetus to environmental policies by alternating tradition and modernity.