



ASEM INITIATIVE
Spain and the Philippines
(co-sponsored by Indonesia)

***Training Workshops related to the Restoration
of Cultural Heritage and the Environment***

(Madrid, 14 and 15 June 2007)

CONCLUSIONS

The ASEM Initiative “Training Workshops related to the Restoration of Cultural Heritage and the Environment” was held in Spain on 14 and 15 June 2007. The event was co-chaired by Spain and the Philippines and co-sponsored by Indonesia. More than 50 ASEM countries participated and agreed upon the following conclusions derived from the two days’ work involved in the Initiative.

One of the key factors to enriching the ASEM process is the organization of Initiatives by the countries participating in this process. Thus, the mere realization of such an Initiative and the necessary effort to this end made by the organizing countries is, in itself, reason for great satisfaction and a factor aiding and advancing the dialogue between Asia and Europe represented in the ASEM process.

A permanent concern of the governments of the ASEM partner countries is that of reducing unemployment rates as their economies grow. Specifically, their aim is to ensure that young people may have access to a decent job, enabling them to enjoy personal and family development in accordance with their merits and qualifications. However, special attention should also be paid to other social groups, particularly women that encounter difficulties in entering the job market. The ultimate goal is for the social groups that are currently unemployed to become part of the active workforce.

Recovering and maintaining the rich historical heritage possessed by many of the ASEM partners is also an urgent priority and an unavoidable obligation if these historical

assets are to be handed down to future generations in the same condition as they were received, if not better.

It is undeniable that on today's international agenda one of the priority issues is that of protecting the environment, in the light of the stark reality of global warming, and taking into account the equally imperative obligation to achieve a balance between economic growth and concern for the environment.

We are faced, thus, with three basic challenges: enabling training to ensure decent jobs may be achieved; conserving our heritage; and protecting the environment. It is possible to respond to these simultaneously, as has been borne out in the experience of the Workshops, in which all three of these factors were addressed. The most outstanding aspects of this experience are summarised below:

- It involves a dense network of instruments for training and occupational guidance, including basic and specialised professional training, supportive basic compensatory training, risk-prevention training, formulas for self employment, job-seeking techniques and basic computing skills.
- The high motivational and recovery-aiding value to young people from difficult situations, whether in the family, at work, financial or educational-cultural.
- The enormous local and regional impact of combining the added value of the completed product or the service performed with the decrease in youth unemployment.
- The great adaptability to different situations within a country or abroad, together with flexibility in areas of action and adaptation to changing times.
- High relevance to environmental protection, both as regards the creation and maintenance of natural and urban areas, and professions related to waste recycling and wastewater treatment.
- The incorporation of new technologies: the field of communication, the provision of attention to dependent persons (with a physical or mental incapacity, the elderly, minors, ethnic minorities).
- The involvement of different administrations and public or private bodies, at diverse levels, in the local context.
- Suitability for training in crafts skills, which are often not taught in standard educational systems and which may be in danger of disappearing.
- The creation of small businesses, which in the local context constitute an invaluable formula for job creation.

Among the ASEM partners, there are countries presenting circumstances similar to those found in Spain when the Training Workshops Initiative came into being, i.e. the presence of unskilled, unemployed sectors of the population.

The ASEM partners also include countries with a rich cultural heritage for which restoration programmes are needed, in terms of both material and human resources. Additionally, the environment is often threatened by unsuitable exploitation and by the expansion of cities.

For all these reasons, the representatives of the ASEM members present at this Initiative consider that the experience of the Training Workshops could be of interest to inspire similar schemes in other ASEM countries. In fact, countries such as Germany have put into practice similar initiatives, after reaching an agreement with the trade unions.

Therefore, the ASEM partners are invited to identify social sectors, historical sites and non-urban locations in which it might be appropriate to set up and develop experiences based on Training Workshops, always taking into account the circumstances and particular characteristics of the country in question. As observed by the representative from the Philippines, culture and its economic dimension also constitute a field in which initiatives of this type could be carried out.

The experience of the Training Workshops could also be useful concerning initiatives that are currently in progress, such as the Indonesia Youth Employment Network (YEN) which, like the Training Workshops at their outset, promotes job prospects for the young. Both programmes provide the necessary tools for young people lacking qualifications to be able to find a job, thus providing a lifestyle and a way forward for many youngsters who previously lacked future prospects. In addition, and in the same context, these two practical ventures are both based on the view that the problem of unemployment should be tackled via institutional cooperation between the public administration and private concerns.

A similar situation is to be found in Japan, where the Government is developing a programme for the protection of the National Heritage in areas such as Shirakawa-go and Goyakama. Focusing on what is termed the "Intangible Heritage", this programme coincides with the Training Workshops in that recovery of the heritage should not concentrate its activity exclusively on the "classical" heritage, such as certain buildings and historical cities, but

should go further, to include landscapes and monuments formed by natural formations, as well as traditional skills that foster and develop the culture of the region.

The experts who met in Madrid are of the opinion that this Meeting constitutes the launch pad for a process that should be continued in forthcoming years. With this in mind, all the States that participated in the ASEM are invited to develop a coordinated action involving the various projects that are currently in progress or that might be established on the basis of the Madrid Meeting.

In order to materialise this programme and put it into practice in different ASEM countries, the partners present at this forum for dialogue expressed their interest in incorporating the experience of the Training Workshops as a topic for exchanges of views into the framework of the EU-ASEM meetings for dialogue, in the field of employment and social and cultural affairs, taking into particular consideration the goal of eradicating poverty in Asia. This new initiative will encourage the mobilisation both of governmental bodies and of civil society. It should be stressed, moreover, that productive, dignified employment is called upon to play a key role, and that social cohesion must be achieved within a process of sustainable socio-economic development, as agreed at the 2005 UN Summit.

The experience of the Training Workshops shows that what was initially seen as a problem – unemployment – can be transformed into a resource providing a means of future progress. It can be said, thus, that promoting employment, restoring the national heritage and protecting the environment are all challenges that our countries must face up to on the basis of a strengthened dialogue within the ASEM system.