The RehabiMed Project is the result of one observation: in some countries the rehabilitation activity represents more than 50% of the whole construction sector activity, while in other countries it does not even reach 10%. In addition, countries with the highest rates of rehabilitation activity are also the most developed ones; as a result, we can use this data as an indicator of development. Nowadays, RehabiMed is a network of Mediterranean experts from organizations and institutions of 15 countries: Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Territories, Spain, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

**Promoting rehabilitation as a factor of development**

On the basis of this argument, RehabiMed has chosen as strategic objective to strengthen the activities of rehabilitation and preservation of traditional architecture, as factors of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental). By following this objective, we contribute to the improvement of residents’ daily life, we foster local economic activity, and we preserve the architectural heritage, which is a symbol of our culture and traditions.

In the case of RehabiMed, rehabilitation is understood as a vast array of interventions, which aims to recover and update a lost or deteriorated function. In our case: inhabitation. Rehabilitation offers different scales of interventions, from the territory and urban fields (city, district or street) to the building itself. Our field of work is a territory that includes very diverse realities, which we must bear in mind when proposing ways of rehabilitation. In the vast and varied Mediterranean region we can find abandoned districts as opposed to overcrowded districts,
where people cannot live any more. We are also facing the phenomenon of gentrification of historic centres. All these examples are part of an infinite spectrum of conflicting realities. For each one, the solution is, without doubt, responsible processes of rehabilitation and revitalization.

**The RehabiMed method for rehabilitation**

Rehabilitation must come from a deep and rigorous understanding of the reality of each place in order to establish the best way of intervening. For that reason, diagnosis is the only guarantee for correct action in rehabilitation processes.

This is the message that RehabiMed has transmitted in many training sessions that have been carried out in order to sensitize different agents: politicians, technical staff and residents. The process to be followed is also important and participation processes for all concerned persons are crucial for the elaboration of ideas and decision-making. All this can be found in the RehabiMed Method, which is structured in five steps and offers guidelines for every action. The five steps are: orientation or political decision-making; diagnosis or territory analysis; strategy with an accurate reflection and elaboration of the Action Plan; implementation of the Plan and monitoring with constant assessment.

Tourism, for instance, is one of the sectors with a major global reach, which affects and will affect more particularly the Mediterranean region. The sea, the climate and the heritage are the main values offered to tourists and traditional architecture is essential. Expectations from this sector are really impressive and the possibilities that mass tourism will be a threat to the environment and will result in population expulsion and in the destruction of an already vulnerable heritage are great. Current initiatives in the field of tourism are not all positive and our task is to prepare the agents and the region to benefit from opportunities that encourage sustainable tourism. In the whole region there are plenty of experiences showing us the grave dangers that are threatening us and how a historic centre can become a caricature of what it used to be and how its population can become entirely depleted.
The social impact of RehabiMed

We are currently working on four rehabilitation operations in places that are geographically, culturally and economically distant from each other. In these places the complexity of persons involved as well as the environment is immense. We are assessing the flexibility of our proposals in order to realize operations which are efficient, respectful and correct.

Rehabilitation presents diverse aspects and orientations. In Lefkara, Cyprus, we are working on the possibilities that rehabilitation offers to improve urban landscape and to strengthen social cohesion; in the case of Cairo, we have chosen Wekala as a work centre for craftsmen from different areas in order to show that rehabilitation can improve their work conditions, their work environment and their business opportunities; in the medina of Marrakesh, our objective is to work towards rehabilitation of precarious overcrowded housing in order to point out rehabilitation’s social aspects as well as the great impact that small action can have on the improvement of the population’s living conditions. Finally, in the case of Kairouan in Tunisia, the objective is sustainable tourism in a World Heritage city where we have to combine the daily activities of the residents and the tourists and also find ways of rehabilitation that lead this symbiosis to local development and not to destruction.

Mediterranean Experiments - Ciutat Vella of Barcelona

Identifying and advertising concrete rehabilitation experiments is also part of RehabiMed action. Such experiments must show the approach and the results that have been reached in concrete operations, watching the entire process from the very first steps, through concrete action, to the results achieved.

Promoting good practices is, without doubt, an efficient way to collect useful ideas for other cases and to avoid repeating previous mistakes.
One example of these good practices is the rehabilitation of Barcelona’s historic city, a process that has been going on for 25 years and that has followed an exemplary path with the constant commitment of the authorities and a flexible management, which has allowed for adjustment of the processes to the changes of realities that are taking place in a city as dynamic as Barcelona.

In 1980, before the Olympic Games, Barcelona’s historic centre was in an extremely worrying state and required strong involvement to stop its progressive degradation. 70% of the district’s buildings had been built before 1900, of which 2% presented risks of collapsing, more than 7000 apartments had no sanitation and public service networks were obsolete. In addition to this material degradation, there were great social problems as well, with an important concentration of population of low income, more than 5,000 people living from prostitution, and a declining commercial activity.

In 1983, an Improvement Plan was presented and later extended in 1985 with the (PAI) or Integral Action Plan and in 1987 with the declaration of (ARI) or Integrated Rehabilitation Area.

All these Plans, with the objective to fix the problems noticed in the infrastructure, housing, economic activity and quality of life, established a consensus among different agents and public institutions, as well as a mix of public-private funding, a precise planning and a management office to supervise the whole process (PROCIVESA).

In the year 2000, after the completion of the Olympic Rehabilitation Projects, Cairo, Egypt

Rehabilitation Projects, Cairo, Egypt
Games, 80% of the planned action had been finalized with the opening of new spaces, the creation of new housing and the rehabilitation of ancient buildings, the creation of public centres at local and urban level, and the renovation of infrastructures. All this action contributed to major improvements in the district and to its actual integration into the rest of the city.

After 25 years of work, in 2004, new studies were carried out to assess the district’s new reality with its strengths and weaknesses. The results implied new necessities and new objectives. A wave of immigration had arrived in the area and around 50% of the population were foreigners regrouped according to their origin, 25% of buildings needed rehabilitation and strong real estate speculation affected the market. In addition, the integrative location of city services in the district resulted in conflicts with the neighbours, owing to mobility problems, tourist influx and new commercial activities.

The complexity of working towards the improvement of districts was obvious. An international project in which nine investigation centres and 14 European municipalities were involved: “Sustainable renovation of buildings for sustainable neighbourhoods (HQE2R)” conducted an analysis of this complexity and created evaluation tools to assess the effects of diverse action from a global perspective. A sustainability circle was thus created allowing evaluations with five objectives, 21 targets and 60 key issues and indicators.

The conclusions of this process pointed out the complexity of intervention at a district level, the not so easy balance between diverse actions, the necessity of a flexible and global strategy to lead the process, and our limited experience of the holistic and multidisciplinary concept that sustainability requires in concrete applications. The creation of scenarios has proved to be very useful in the definition of hypotheses and in constant monitoring.