

# THE RHONE RIVER CENTRE

## Of Man and Rivers

The Rhône River Centre project is unique in many ways. It brings together knowledge, uses and the territorial entities associated with the most highly developed river of France. The Centre is the only cultural and scientific institution of its kind in France. Our goal is the recognition of the value of the Rhône: a natural entity which is at once a cultural infrastructure and an asset for the common good. With our new facilities, which will open in 2008, we will be able to expand our audience and further develop our services for a continued reappropriation of this precious resource.

### **1. BUILDING LINKS BETWEEN EXPERTISE, CULTURAL DIFFUSION AND DOCUMENTARY SERVICES**

For the past fifteen years, the Rhône River Center has been active in developing **the social and cultural value of the Rhone River**, promoting diversity in its uses and accompanying the development of territories bordering the river.

To achieve this goal, the Centre first developed projects and services for **cultural promotion**: conferences, workshops, pedagogical activities for youth, major events and, and most notably, exhibits designed by the Centre, many of which have become traveling exhibits, hosted by numerous cultural and tourism organizations along the Rhône; the Rhône Festival, nautical sports events and schools, are just a few examples. When we open our new facilities in 2008, the Centre will have a multimedia room which will present a program dedicated to discovering the river environment, with a large scale, 3-dimensional model, DVDs, and interactive activity stations. Temporary exhibits will also be presented in the multimedia room. These exhibits will cover three major themes: discovery of the realities of river life, the stakes at hand, as well as the valorization of the river.

**The Documentary Center**, with its richly diverse collections, provides documentary services at the Centre for researchers and students, as well as for a broader audience of schools and associations, with cultural projects to promote river heritage. Specific agreements with several institutions in the Rhône Department are currently being developed, in order to create a network, with the Rhône River Centre in Givors as its hub. This project in progress will ultimately lead to the creation of **a cultural and heritage resource bank**.

Finally, the Rhone River Centre conducts **missions in social sciences and cultural engineering** (monitoring and analysis of the changes in river use; projects to promote the Rhône; creation of promotional tools and events which will help expand the inhabitants' knowledge and appreciation of the Rhône).

Let's take the example of two major operations studied and coordinated by the Rhône River Centre, the goal of these operations being to increase the visibility of public policy initiatives

related to the river and to organize the heritage elements that are part of the culture of the Rhône.

The first example, "**A Season for the Rhône**" will allow for the promotion of over 80 events associated with the river during the 2007-2008 seasons, extending from Lake Geneva to Camargue. These local, regional and inter-regional festivals, sports and cultural events will be better promoted through a central theme, with increased media visibility, leading to television productions presenting the river and its uses.

A second example, the project for an "**Historic and Cultural Itinerary presenting navigation on the Rhône**" resulted from interest shown by local governments and organizations that possess cultural objects symbolizing the story of navigation on the Rhône. A network was created with the support and encouragement of the Rhône River Centre. The goal of the network is to create an itinerary which will encourage local development and tourism. In order for the itinerary to be operational in 2008, a feasibility study was done in 2006. The perspective of this project is to receive an official label from the European Council in order to give the itinerary recognition within the European framework.

In collaboration with the Rhône-Alpes Region, the Centre organized the **Sixth Fluvial Symposium for Southern Europe** in Lyon in November 2006. The Symposium was the first international event in the Rhône-Alpes Region dedicated to the valorization of fluvial heritage. It equally was an opportunity to present the **Project for the Rhône**. The event provided participants with a framework for exchanging ideas, much in the same way as in earlier symposiums which took place in Spain, Italy and Portugal. The actors present in Lyon were able to draw up a list of actions and trends in tourism and local development in the international fluvial field, and considered the many partnerships and perspectives open to them. More than 300 people were present for the 3-day symposium; these included professionals in tourism, representatives of national and local governments, institutions that manage fluvial resources, private organizations for heritage and environmental protection, journalists and students. Thanks to the great diversity of the participants (1/4 from Spain, Italy, Portugal and Switzerland), numerous approaches to river development were considered and compared.

The Rhône River Centre has publishing activities which include its newsletter, **Courant Rhône (Rhône Trends); fluvial and territorial heritage**. The newsletter is published twice yearly and distributed to over 2,000 actors in the public and private sectors of the Rhône basin.

The Centre has equally published a study devoted to the contemporary river entitled "The Rhône, New Beginnings" (***Le Rhône, un fleuve en devenir(s)***).

A 15-member team (cultural mediators, researchers, project leaders, an information officer and a general manager, along with administrative personnel) design and implement the activities of the Centre, which has a consolidated annual budget of approximately 1M Euros.

This team allows the Centre to design and implement activities which promote the development of the river and its reappropriation by the general public, through numerous partnerships.

## **2. CREATING A NETWORK OF PARTNERSHIPS – LOCAL TO INTERNATIONAL**

**The Rhône-Alpes Region** and the **French national government** (Ministry of Culture) support the Centre with promotional activities, press, training, exchanges and networking. **Several agreements** have also been signed with the Ministry of Culture (the Regional delegation (DRAC) and the National Department of Heritage), the Rhône-Alpes Region, the City of Givors and the University of Lyon 2. As a part of a convention signed with the University of Lyon 2, students in geography, sociology, anthropology and urban development, along with research and teaching units, have taken part in activities at the Rhône River Centre. The Centre equally carries out training for professionals (guides for heritage sites) and continuing education (teachers from the National Education system). These programs take place at the Centre as well as at other locations.

In 2006, the Centre developed the proposals for the cultural and heritage portions of the **Plan for the Rhône**, a program for sustainable development of the Rhône river which was approved by the CIACT, under the auspices of the Rhône basin committee and the State and Regional governments present in the Rhone basin.

The Rhône River Centre has designed a **project for the city of Givors** which links the city center to the Rhône river and to the Pilat Regional Natural Park (hiking trails, heritage walks, etc.). In designing the project, the Centre has worked actively to achieve the recognition of the river as an important structural element of the larger local development contract referred to as « Rhône Pluriel ». 70 communities of the mid-Rhône region located downstream from Lyons are part of this contract. (2006-2010)

The City of Givors, which initiated the project for the creation of the Rhône River Centre, is represented on its Board of Administration, along with other associates: the Pilat Regional Natural Park, the Union of Communities Rhône Pluriel and the University of Lyon 2. The Rhône-Alpes Region and the Regional Delegation of the Ministry of Culture are also called on as permanent consultants to the Board.

In order to create a closer relationship between the river and the inhabitants, the Centre has developed numerous partnerships; local (schools, youth activity centers, the Jousting Club, the Office of Tourism, etc.) as well as international.

**The Greater Lyon Urban Community** had made the Rhone River Centre a partner in its **Future Strategies program** called "**Lyon 2020**". In this program of education in

sustainable development, the rivers are a central, emblematic element of the Lyons metropolitan area.

**The Rhône Department** has provided funding for a pedagogical guide to be distributed in all of the Junior High Schools in the Rhône Department: the guide has been available online since January 2007.

### **3. DEVELOPING AND PARTICIPATING IN A NEW APPRECIATION OF THE RIVER.**

In order to federate all actors (elected officials as well as private organizations) who view the river as a national heritage to be improved, the Rhône River Centre initiates and participates in different projects which can create synergies at local and international levels. This point of view led to the creation of the **Rhône Network** in 1994. Today, approximately fifty museums, archive services and associations from the Valais to the Camargue regions take part in the network and are in collaborative contact with the public institutions in charge of the river's development: the Regions, Departments and local authorities. This type of collaboration is contributing to recognition of the central role of the river in structuring identity and development throughout the Rhône territory. Annual meetings enable these actors to consider many questions related to improvement of the river heritage (Arles 2003 "The River: A Common Heritage" – Nyon "Intangible heritage of the Rhône and Lake Geneva" – Lyon 2005 "The Rhône, new beginning(s), river (s) and sustainable development").

Other examples of major collaborations can equally be mentioned:

- The Centre was one of the founding members of the Rhône Basin Zone Workshop (ZABR), a **Scientific Interest group** which federates over 20 research laboratories. The objective of this group is to constitute a multidisciplinary, scientific river observatory to guide public policy makers. The responsibility of the Centre in the framework of this project is to act as a "social river watch" and to design and implement a **social observatory** for the ZABR. In this framework, the Centre completed studies on the development of river use, the expectations of inhabitants and means of associating the public in the management of the river and water resources. This scientific observation is closely linked to research at the Centre on the notion of an anthroposystem. In 2004 and 2005, extensive work on the anthroposystem model in relation to the river was done by the Centre; investigations were already being done at that time to establish an anthropology of the river, and the Centre was granted the official 'Ethnopôle' label. In 2007, several projects will examine the symbolic dimension of the river within the context of extended urbanisation, changes in terms of river management and observation of the changing uses of the Rhône.

- **The Heritage Commission France-UNESCO** invited the Rhône River Centre to participate in the development of the program « Rivers and Heritage ». The goal of this

program is to promote river-to-river cooperation. Exchanges have thus been developed with the Senegal and the Ganges; a partnership agreement has been signed with the Senegal River Centre, created in 2006 with the aid of its homologue in the Rhône.

- In 2000, the Rhône River Centre created a **Economic Pole for Rhône Heritage** in the framework of an operation conducted by the DATAR (Delegation for Territorial Planning and Regional Action). In 2002, the SGAR Rhône-Alpes asked the Centre to examine the role played by the river in the Greater South East region. In 2003, the Rhône River Centre was called upon by the Rhône-Mediterranean-Corsican Water Agency, along with the Department for the Environment of the Rhône Basin (DIREN), to elaborate a method of scientific follow-up of the uses and expectations of local populations in the framework of the **10-year program of ecological and water flow rehabilitation of the "Old Rhône"**. The Centre is monitoring the socio-economic portion of this program from 2004 through 2008. In association with a strategy for flood prevention of the Rhône elaborated by the DIREN of the Rhône basin, the Centre contributed thorough documentation for the general public for the portal web site [fleuverhone.com](http://fleuverhone.com).

- The Centre has begun a project with the Water Agency concerning the notion of an added social value which can be given to the Rhône through policies and programs designed for managing the fluvial environment.

While the Centre works regularly with the governmental sector (territorial entities; cities, departments and regions), it has also established ties with actors from the private sector (for example, the National Company of the Rhône, a public interest corporation). The National Company of the Rhône asked the Centre to take charge of the socio-economic portion of an impact study which is part of its **project to restore navigation on the High Rhône in France**. (2004-2005). The Centre is equally involved in the elaboration of an environmental and landscape management project. The objective of this project is to analyze the effects that the heritage dimension of the river can have on projects in areas bordering the river.

#### **4. NEW ONLINE IN 2007**

The websites of the Rhône River Centre are a vital vector of communication to the general public. The Centre manages its own web site [www.maisondufleuverhone.org](http://www.maisondufleuverhone.org) devoted to the activities of the organization, as well as the portal web site [www.fleuverhone.com](http://www.fleuverhone.com) created by the Rhône River Centre in collaboration with the Press agency « Esprit Public ». This portal is dedicated to knowledge about the river (encyclopaedia of the river's heritage and tourist resources) and presents information pertaining to the entire course of the Rhône.\*

These websites are equally a tool for developing exchanges and sharing knowledge. In 2004, the Foundation of France funded a project called **"Tell me the story of your river: Rhône and Daugava"**. This project was designed by the Rhône River Centre with the Museum of the Daugava, its partner in Latvia. During two school years, students from the French High

School in Riga used a collaborative website to exchange their knowledge, representations and experiences related to their river with students from a Junior High School in Givors. The project is part of the program called "Europe far and wide". The original project in this program, designed in the same way, was carried out with a Brazilian school, in collaboration with the Museum of Bélem. (2000) A portal site dedicated to the concept was opened in 2006 with a link to the site [www.racontemoitonfleuve.org](http://www.racontemoitonfleuve.org) .

\*With support from the Rhône-Alpes Region, the Rhône-Mediterranean-Corsican Water Agency, the DATAR and the Greater Lyon Urban Community (2004)