

Position Paper

Country. Italy



Committee: Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Committee

Topic: CITIZENS OF EARTH AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN COVID TIMES

Issue: Citizens of the Earth and Cultural Heritage in Covid times

Topic background

Cultural heritage involves Global citizenship because it transcends both geography and political borders and it regards humanity.” Now, more than ever, people need culture,” said Ernesto Ottone R., Assistant UNESCO Director-General for Culture. “Culture makes us resilient. It gives us hope. It reminds us that we are not alone”. Cultural Heritage includes tangible culture (such as buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, works of art, and artifacts), intangible culture (such as folklore, traditions, language) and natural heritage (including culturally significant landscapes, and biodiversity). Covid is impacting our movable, immovable and intangible cultural heritage, affecting our social life and urging citizens and policymakers to find solutions . Cultural heritage sites have always been under threat: armed conflicts and war, natural disasters like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, pollution, urbanization and unchecked tourism, Illicit trafficking and also neglect.

Previous actions taken

Italy has been highly impacted by the Covid crisis because it is home to the greatest number of UNESCO World Heritage of any country. The UNESCO and Italy have always worked in synergy to protect our cultural heritage creating a Task Force in February the 16th 2016 called “the Blue Helmet of Culture” to safeguard cultural heritage from illegal trafficking and protecting natural artifacts from the hands of extremists in crisis areas. Thanks to the 1972 World Heritage Convention a world heritage site can be inscribed on the World Heritage Danger List according to some criteria that can both refer to cultural or natural heritage.

Inscribing a site on the World Heritage Danger List allows the World Heritage Committee to allocate immediate assistance from the World Heritage Fund to the endangered property. Recently, from the 2nd of June to the 11th of June 2020 there

has been the first online international Expert Workshop on *the Culture /2030 Indicators* , organized by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics where 27 countries took part. These countries were introduced to the methodology of the *Culture/2030 Indicators* and given guidance on data collection as well as implementation on the national and local levels. The role of culture in building a more sustainable world is now widely recognized and reflected in the 2030 International Agenda where the UNESCO 10 Thematic Indicators for Cultural Heritage are proved to be crucial to measure and monitor the role of culture in building a more sustainable world . However, despite the efforts made by the UNESCO, Covid 19 is impacting the world economy in a short period of time.

The lockdown, imposed since March 9th, 2020, created a state of almost total inaccessibility to cultural heritage, leading to the closure of all cultural institutions and sites, museums, libraries as well as all churches. The situation immediately imposed a series of organizational and governmental realignments related to the management and safety of these places. Consequently, it has been necessary to identify differentiated solutions among the different types of cultural institutions and sites: museums, archives, libraries, archaeological sites and parks as well as monumental complexes. Equally serious has been the damage to cinemas, concerts and theatres and more generally to the entertainment sector, forced to close due to the ban on aggregation and meetings in public places. In particular, the tourism and culture sectors, have been impacted by the health crisis . The Mibact, (The Minister of Cultural Heritage and Activities), after having listened to the voice of the operators and taken part to meetings and trade union tables, intervened with the creation of emergency funds, with the extension and strengthening of social safety nets and with additional dedicated support tools, which are added to the general measures implemented by the Government.

Possible solutions

Italy strongly believes that the global nature of the COVID -19 crisis should encourage the international community to work in synergy and reinvest in international cooperation and intergovernmental dialogue . We are aware of the crucial role played by tourism and we think this sector should work in partnership with cultural professionals. In particular, we believe that cultural tourism should be empowered because culture is one of the driving forces for the growth of tourism.

We appreciate the efforts made by the UNESCO to launch a global social media campaign, in order to promote access to culture and education around cultural heritage during this period of mass confinement. We hope a further social media campaign will be extended also to disadvantaged categories and micro communities.

We also suggest, considering that websites with virtual tours to heritage sites or museums are the best way to stay in touch with culture during the health crisis, to promote an internet literacy campaign specially addressed to elderly people who sometimes are not well experienced in using mutimedial material.

We underline the crucial role of sustainable tourism in the safeguard of cultural heritage in Covid times . We appreciate the importance of sustainable tourism projects , which seek to promote lesser-visited locations by drawing people away from overcrowded tourism centers, and encouraging them to visit in the off-season. These projects seek a better distribution of the income that tourism generates, as well as a reduction in the environmental stress that crowds can bring. We again call Member States to invest on Sustainable tourism that is a key pillar for the conservation of natural and cultural heritage of many developing countries and historically marginalized populations and rural communities where tourism represents a vehicle for integration.

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