



**CHAIN 2022**

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# CHAIN 2022

Crisis and Cultural Heritage/  
Crisi e Patrimonio Culturale

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Il presente volume è pubblicato con scopi scientifici e di ricerca. Pertanto le illustrazioni, le immagini e i fotogrammi presenti all'interno del volume sono utilizzati esclusivamente a tale scopo.

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MARTINA TULLIO

*Focusing on people: community engagement in cultural heritage as a resource for recovery*

*Abstract:* Cultural heritage could be a resource for restarting after the current pandemic crisis. Specifically, World Heritage properties and their wider settings can play a significant role in socio-economic reconstruction and, thus, contributing to recovery. Furthermore, cultural heritage can support the creation of social cohesion empowering local communities and help them to overcome the pain. This contribution examines some of the best practices implemented to engage civil society in the enhancement of UNESCO World Heritage Sites as a strategic tool for recovery after the current pandemic crisis, past conflicts and disasters. Shifting the focus to people and include them in activities concerning cultural heritage could be the solution to cope with the consequences of crises, and it could represent a resource for strengthening civil society resilience.

*Keywords:* world heritage sites, community engagement and participation, local communities, recovery.

*1. Introduction*

Cultural heritage and its protection are not a priority when it comes to intervene with recovery policies (Wahba et al, 2020). In 2020, the world assisted to one of the worst pandemic crises in history, and now it is the time to count the damages in order to restart. Many experts agree with the fact that crisis is an opportunity to rebuilt everything has been destroyed. The inspiration comes from the Chinese word for crisis (*wéijī*危机), meaning danger but also opportunity, and reminds us that a moment of destruction can precede a new and positive era.

Can cultural heritage be a resource to cope with crisis? How can culture bring us together after a crisis? Covid-19 affected our cultural heritage all over the world, even UNESCO World Heritage Sites, from hereinafter WHS (UNESCO, 2020, pp. 10-11). A way to build social cohesion and resilience, especially after unpleasant periods, is allowing people and communities to experience cultural heritage as it was part of them. Because of that, community engagement represents an opportunity to change the perspective we are accustomed to. The idea is based on the ICCROM report of 2015, underlying that «Cultural heritage has been created by people and it has been created for people». A people-centred approach brings recognized benefits to heritage, to those working in the heritage sector and to communities (ICCROM, 2015, p. 3). In fact, it exists the need to change the perspective people have on cultural heritage, which is not something ‘out’ of their lives. Therefore, this contribution will briefly report some of the experiences of the best practices from all over the world concerning the resilience of communities and their recovery from crisis through the ‘involvement’ of cultural heritage. Specifically, it will focus on WHS inscribed on the World Heritage List, but it can offer a reflection on cultural heritage in general. The conclusion will show that community engagement and participation in cultural heritage activities are fundamental to build social cohesion and resilience. This means that cultural heritage ‘is’ a resource for recovery after disasters, conflicts and natural hazards, including pandemic.

## *2. UNESCO World Heritage Sites and Covid-19*

According to UNESCO (2022), around 90% of State Parties had closed their World Heritage properties due to Covid-19. The latest data collected from the 167 States Parties with World Heritage properties show that 116 countries (= 69%) have kept their sites open, whereas 21 countries (= 13%) have closed sites totally. For 30 countries (= 18%) partial closure has been indicated, which includes countries that are re-opening World Heritage places slowly after the crisis (UNESCO, 2022). The cancellation of na-

tional and local cultural and religious events - such as festivals, rituals, and varying forms of traditional practices - has had a direct impact on communities and their social fabric and cohesion. With museums, cultural institutions, World Heritage Sites, and other historic monuments closed, communities are deprived of culture as well as significant revenues. The medium- and long-term implications are significant as many natural and cultural World Heritage sites rely on tourism revenue to carry out conservation or archaeological work (Wahba et al, 2020).

In times of crisis, culture might not be seen as an ‘official’ priority from an authority point of view, but it is present through individuals and communities as a resource to cope with adverse situations. Culture and cultural heritage are, at the same time, sectors to be protected and recovered in post-crisis processes, and they are resources for resilience to be integrated into all the recovery phases, as well as into the general disaster risk management discipline. It is not possible separate tangible and intangible aspects (Wahba et al, 2020).

### *1.1. Cultural heritage as a resource for recovery and the role of community engagement*

Something changed and it is changing when it comes to the importance of cultural heritage. As we know, the role of culture in building a more sustainable world is now widely recognized and reflected in the international agenda. In fact, Culture is integrated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015 by the United Nations. The indicators are supported by a conceptual framework of four transversal thematic dimensions. Talking about sustainability is something that also include Communities’ sustainability and their capacity to be resilient. These indicators assess the capacity of culture to stimulate effective engagement of local communities in public life. This means that we need to work in this direction to allow people to participate and to be included actively in activities that concern cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2021c). A suggestion comes from the definition of He-

ritage Community in Article 2b of the Faro Convention (Council of Europe, 2005). It implies collaborative actions concerning care and maintenance of cultural heritage, affecting not only their vulnerability, but also communities' fragility. This can trigger a vicious circuit in which actions on cultural heritage strengthen community cohesion, reduce urban degradation, start urban regeneration actions and encourage employment opportunities.

## *2. Good practices of community engagement in World Heritage Sites*

Regarding UNESCO, the 1972 Convention, within the activities led by the World Heritage Committee, shed lights on the importance of the enhancement of the role of Communities in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. During the 26<sup>th</sup> Session of the World Heritage Committee in New Zealand, the members of the Committee decided that a 'fifth C' should be added to the Strategic Objectives identified by the World Heritage Committee for promoting the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. According to the Decision of the official documents, the fifth C promotes «the enhancement of the communities in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention» (UNESCO, 2007, p. 7).

Although the number of studies in the field is increasing, there are still few examples of the participation of local communities in the enhancement and safeguarding of the WHS (Rasoolimanesh et al, 2017, pp. 4-8; Galla, 2012, pp. 1-3; Labadi, 2007, p. 163; Meskell et al, 2015, p. 17). Li et al (2020, pp. 5-6) identified some themes concerning the involvement of communities in cultural heritage activities: community identification – to define communities' roles and their connections to cultural heritage; active participatory methods – to raise awareness and build capacities in local communities; and community participation – to integrate cultural heritage management in sustainable urban development.

In the following paragraph, three case study are reported as examples of positive responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.

### *2.1. Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System (Belize)*

Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1996, the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System is a natural site of outstanding universal value which comprised seven protected areas, it is the largest reef complex in the Atlantic-Caribbean region, and it represents the second largest reef system in the world. This natural site was successfully removed from the List of World Heritage in Danger after nine years in 2018 thanks to the efforts made by the State Party for its mangrove protection and ban of oil development. Unfortunately, the spreading of the Covid-19 pandemic and the virus containment measures, as lockdowns and border closures, did not allow people to move from one country to another, and countries that relied on tourism for living suffered the major loss. Belize was one of them. As stated by UNESCO (2021b), eight out of ten people that visit Belize are engaged in some sort of marine activities, whether fishing, snorkelling, and diving. Moreover, according to UNESCO (2022), about 200,000 Belizeans - half of Belize's population - are dependent on the reef for their livelihoods and 15 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) is derived from the reef.

However, Belize found in the Resilient Reefs Initiative the way to overcome this problem. In June 2021, the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System appointed its first Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) as part of the global Resilient Reefs Initiative that aims to empower local communities to adapt to a changing climate. In fact, the Initiative provides capacity building, technical expertise and financial support to an initial four pilot marine World Heritage sites to assist local management and communities to change the way they understand climate risks and vulnerability and design site-based resilience strategies (UNESCO, 2021a). Scientists, coastal community members, government and business together create a joint strategy for the future of the reef. The

Reef Initiative is not about solving the global climate problem, but about building local resilience to inevitable change that is already happening.

## *2.2. Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras (Philippines)*

«For 2,000 years, the high rice fields of the Ifugao have followed the contours of the mountains. The fruit of knowledge handed down from one generation to the next, and the expression of sacred traditions and a delicate social balance, they have helped to create a landscape of great beauty that expresses the harmony between humankind and the environment» (UNESCO WHC, 2022). This is the description of the cultural landscape of the Rice Terraces of the Philippines, one of the 121 properties inscribed on the World Heritage List recognised as the «combined works of nature and of man», as it is written in Article 1 of the Convention. Specifically, this site is delimited in five clusters of the most intact and impressive terraces, located in four municipalities; the product from these territories belongs to the Ifugao ethnic group, a minority community that has occupied these mountains for thousands of years, whose Hudhud chants were inscribed in 2008 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO WHC, 2022).

Lapniten (2021) observed that «social and economic changes are threatening the future of the terraces and the forests that sustain them, with many terraces either being abandoned or converted to less-sustainable farming of cash crops». Most of the people that lost their businesses during Covid-19 have been swayed towards the methods of vegetable farming. Thus, a solution to fight the depopulation of the area concerns education: introducing a Bachelor's Degree in Agriculture and conducting land and contents surveys could create a sustainable market (Lapniten 2021). Furthermore, heritage conservation is one of the main objectives of the organization called Save the Ifugao Terraces Movement (SITMO), whose activists are committed into

supporting traditional terrace farming, and helping framers pursuing satisfied incomes through sustainable livelihood projects that «keep the forests and terraces standing» (Lapniten, 2021).

### *2.3. Genoa: Le strade Nuove and the system of the Palazzi dei Rolli (Italy)*

The bottom-up approach project described in this paragraph involves the Italian Site of Genoa, inscribed on the List in 2006 that represents «the first example in Europe of an urban development project parcelled out by a public authority within a unitary framework and associated to a particular system of ‘public lodging’ in private residences, as decreed by the Senate in 1576» (UNESCO WHC, 2022). Recently, the World Heritage Site of Genoa renewed its Management Plan, a document that explain how the property can preserve its Outstanding Universal Value. In this occasion, the Municipality of Genova and Fondazione Santagata for the Economy of Culture launched a call for ideas funded by the Law 77/2006 of the Ministry of Culture called Rolli Lab, which was intended to find out ideas for the enhancement of the Site of Genoa. This project involved designers and entrepreneurs, start-ups, small and medium-sized enterprises, associations, spin-offs and individuals, who could apply individually or form a team. The proposals must be based on the following themes: preservation, promotion, enhancement, reception. The projects receive more points than others if they are linked to the objectives of the Management Plan of the UNESCO WHS. This is an extraordinary case of community engagement because it shows that the Municipality needs to involve local people and residents in order to deeply contribute to the ‘health’ of the city, as well as the World Heritage Site (Comune di Genova, 2022). Even if it is not directly related to the concept of recovery, it is a good practice that can be replicated in other WHS as a positive way to involve local communities in cultural heritage activities for the socio-economic reconstruction after a crisis.

### 3. Conclusion

Cultural heritage is a resource for recovery. As stated by Wahba et al (2020), «the ability of communities to access and enjoy culture and cultural rights must be guaranteed in these circumstances as it can help them cope with the psychological distress caused by crises and ensures their well-being in the recovery process».

Even in case of war conflicts or natural disasters, cultural heritage is considered as a useful tool to cope with crises, but also the three case studies above mentioned show that cultural heritage has a positive impact on promoting cultural resilience in society; furthermore, social participation in recovery also raises the relationship of affection between population and heritage, and finally, a traumatic event can stimulate the rediscovery of cultural heritage and start cooperation so that communities can improve their resilience.

How can cultural heritage be a resource for recovery? By involving communities in Cultural Heritage activities. Shifting the focus to people and including them in this type of activity could be the solution to cope with the consequences of crises, and it could represent a resource for strengthening civil society resilience. Future directions in the field can include focusing on people and their needs to provide a richer cultural offer, which will be capable of appealing the young generation. Education has a crucial role in this sense.

Finally, implementing cooperation between private and public sector in the cultural field has the major impact on socio-economic recovery in case of crisis.



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