

# CULTURAL HERITAGE IN ACTION

Sharing solutions  
in European  
cities and regions



#EuropeForCulture



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## CULTURAL HERITAGE IN ACTION

### JULY 2021-JANUARY 2023

Sharing solutions in European cities and regions

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## CONCEPT NOTE

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# CULTURAL HERITAGE IN ACTION

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## What is Cultural Heritage in Action?

Cultural Heritage in Action is one of the actions of the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage of the European Commission. It is a peer-learning programme that allows over 100 local and regional policy makers to exchange knowledge on cultural heritage.

The project empowers cities and regions to strengthen their cultural heritage policies and initiatives as well as develop innovative solutions to preserve cultural heritage assets.

The project's consortium is led by Eurocities with KEA, ERRIN, Europa Nostra and Architects' Council of Europe. The project is funded by the European Union's Creative Europe programme from January 2020 to January 2023.

Three core topics formed the bedrock of all the project activities: participatory governance of cultural heritage, adaptive re-use of heritage buildings, quality of interventions on cultural heritage. These topics have been adapted to face the COVID-19 pandemic.

## What happened so far?

Throughout its first 18 months, the project has:

- Mapped out good practices and developed [a catalogue of 32 good practices](#) across Europe.
- Set up [10 online peer-learning visits](#), involving altogether more than 190 cultural practitioners and policymakers to share knowledge and insights. The value of cultural heritage is incredible, and so is the interest it generates across a diverse range of practitioners. Cultural heritage brings together all sorts of people, professions and skillsets.
- Produced a total of [39 videos](#) as part of the knowledge sharing and exchange of experience during the peer learning visits.

The project's thematic analysis (entitled 'cultural heritage: a powerful catalyst for cities and regions) presents the key findings from Cultural Heritage in Action. It captures the main trends identified during the project and articulates key learning points, for both policies and projects. It is available [here](#) on the project website.

## Cultural Heritage in Action in a second phase

The project will continue its knowledge sharing and exchange journey in a second phase to last until January 2023. We will continue to facilitate exchanges among the European Union's cities, regions, Member States and relevant stakeholders with a new set of activities:

- A web publication as an inspiring and practical tool gathering key documents and findings from the project in an interactive manner.
- 28 additional good practices to be featured in the existing catalogue of good practices from across the European Union, focusing on three new topics. The catalogue will showcase 60 good practices by the end of 2022.
- 5 onsite peer-learning visits, allowing participants to learn from each other's and from experts. Each visit will be followed by online sessions to continue the exchange of knowledge and experience between hosts, participants and experts.
- A set of various online peer learning activities to broaden the exchange of experiences and further disseminate the results of the project.

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## CULTURAL HERITAGE IN ACTION

### ADDITIONAL TOPICS

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In its second phase, Cultural Heritage in Action will focus on three additional and interlinked topics:

- Recovery and resilience through cultural heritage in a post pandemic world
- A more sustainable cultural heritage to face the climate crisis
- Governance and financing: new roles for local and regional authorities

### Recovery and resilience through cultural heritage in a post pandemic world

#### Key words

*COVID19, resilience, long-term recovery, health & wellbeing*

#### Why is it important for cities and regions?

The focal point of cultural heritage as a vector of sense of place and local identity makes it a central instrument to build resilient cities and regions in a post pandemic world.

The unprecedented sanitary crisis that started in March 2020 has not only affected our lives and our social and cultural fabric but our tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Covid-19 has shut down heritage sites and cultural institutions resulting in huge economic losses. Countless artists, crafts persons and heritage practitioners have seen their means to earn a living disappear and their vulnerability increase. The pandemic has posed, as well, serious social challenges. The quarantine prevented social relationship, isolating communities and broadening social inequalities.

Nonetheless, our cultural intangible heritage has been a part of what has kept us together during the hardest moments of the pandemic. Music and performances on backyards and balconies have connected us to our neighbours and helped us cope by providing an extra psycho-social support while at home. Local public authorities have also done their part in relieving the Covid burden by expanding library services through home delivery; preparing online cultural survival kits and even facilitating a mask fashion week.

Now, in a post pandemic world, the cultural heritage sector has an opportunity and an important role to play in building back cities and regions better.

Cultural heritage is a key component in the recovery process due to its potential to engage with contemporary events and co-produce new knowledge and heritage narratives with more diverse communities and perspectives. The cultural heritage capacity to increase citizens engagement would benefit cultural institutions such as museums in a post-Covid world where the trend is to localise the audience. The sanitary crisis is an opportunity to strengthen management strategies based on prevention and disaster response. COVID-19 has proved our creativity to deliver new cultural offers and services that will now become the new normal in our leisure time. Our public heritage spaces are now exposed to new uses accessible to all and available to meet outdoors (from concerts to street performances).

#### Key questions

- What have cities/regions learnt from the pandemic crisis when it comes to cultural heritage management/governance etc.? Are they now better equipped to deal with future crisis? How to keep the communities involved in the delivery of new cultural offers and services linked to cultural heritage?

- What has been the impact of the pandemic crisis on the uses of cultural heritage buildings and public spaces? How have they been reinvented for new uses? How to make sure they remain accessible to all and vector of health, wellbeing and quality of life in cities and regions?
- How will cities and regions use the recovery and resilience facility (national plans) in the future? What should be the role of European funding for recovery and building back better?
- How are digital tools and opportunities integrated in the development and management of cultural heritage projects and initiatives?

## Cultural heritage for local sustainable development

### Key words

*Sustainability, sustainable tourism, climate change, European Green Deal, resilience, urban regeneration, adaptive re-use of heritage buildings, quality of interventions on cultural heritage*

### Why is it important for cities and regions?

Deeply entangled in its surrounding environment, cultural heritage is subject to changes and adaptations. Climate change, through consequences such as global warming, rising sea levels, extended dry seasons or floods and heavy storms, adds potential changes to cultural heritage that could be damaging and threatening its very core. The effects of climate change are already degrading and irreversibly changing our natural and cultural heritage. It puts thousands of sites with cultural, historic, and archaeological values at risk of being damaged or lost altogether, including archaeological sites that have not yet been discovered.

It is clear that structural changes are necessary in the management of our cultural environment. In that sense, the climate crisis also offers a moment of radical new thinking and innovation and an opportunity to explore and test innovative ways to protect and adapt monuments, historical buildings and sites from the effects of climate change and natural hazards.

Cities and regions therefore need to adapt cultural heritage, but they can also adapt through it and thanks to it. Cultural heritage can also be a component of climate change resilient solutions themselves and teach us a lot about being part of a more resilient and sustainable world.

Cultural heritage conveys traditional knowledge that builds resilience for change to come and leads us to a more sustainable future. Cultural heritage can become part of a more circular system of adaptive reuse, with heritage buildings being transformed to take future risks and changes in the climate into account. Heritage sites can serve as places of opportunities for climate communication and education, and researchers on historic sites can help us understand past responses to changing climate conditions, which can in turn inform decision makers and practitioners in cities and regions on how to develop adaptation and mitigation strategies for the protection of cultural heritage.

To safeguard our natural and cultural heritage, decision makers and practitioners in cities need to bring environmental sustainability and action on climate change into their work. Doing so will unlock the potential of cultural heritage to be a driver for a new green and sustainable economy; enhance economic, social, and cultural value in cities and regions; and contribute to all key areas of the European Green Deal.

### Key questions

- How to ensure a sustainable urban and regional regeneration through cultural heritage? How to develop a more sustainable cultural tourism in cities and regions?
- How can cities and regions invest in cultural heritage to ensure a successful European Green Deal? How are cities and regions contributing through cultural heritage investments to the New European Bauhaus? How is cultural heritage contributing to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals at local level?

- How are cities and regions making the most of cultural heritage to face future changes in the climate and adapt their local territories to these new threats? How are cities and regions protecting cultural heritage from risks linked to climate change?

## Governance and financing: new roles for local and regional authorities

### Key words

*Support to cultural heritage, funding, partnerships, empowerment, participatory governance, citizen participation*

### Why is it important for cities and regions?

Cultural heritage and cultural environments, whatever their size, are an essential resource to build identity, sense of belonging and can serve for social cohesion, pride and integration. Inhabitants want to feel at home in their city/region and be part of a distinctive community with an identity; they are keener to engage in the protection and enhancement of what they consider their heritage.

Local and regional authorities are increasingly aware of the importance to place citizens as actors rather than users of their territory. Over the years, this has translated into initiatives involving citizens in the development and management of public policies or approaches seeking to engage in a dialogue with stakeholders who are part of the distinctive identity of a territory. Citizens have been encouraged to take on a wider range of responsibilities to ensure that local services continue to be delivered and improved effectively in the future.

Culture and cultural heritage have often been at the forefront of citizens participation and engagement, as artistic intervention is a good trigger to have citizens interested and willing to shape their environment in a co-designed manner. Investing in culture and local cultural heritage can create opportunities to engage and empower citizens through a strong participatory approach.

Besides, culture and cultural heritage have often been used as tools to test and renew local governance models into something more flexible, dialogue-based and co-designed, be it with local stakeholders, associations and organisations, and even inside local and regional authorities themselves.

### Key questions

- What are the new roles of local and regional authorities when it comes to supporting cultural heritage organisations and stakeholders?
- How are cities and regions organising participatory governance, community involvement and co-design of policies linked to cultural heritage? How are they addressing the needs and expectations of people at different ages, from different genders, from different communities' background? How are they dealing with contested and dissonant heritage?
- How are digital tools and opportunities integrated in the development and management of cultural heritage projects and initiatives?
- What are the alternative sources of funding and new business models implemented at local level to deliver cultural heritage policies activities? How are cities and regions making the most of European Union funding streams?