

CULTURE IN EMERGENCIES

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

[1]

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FACING CULTURE TODAY?

Cultural heritage and diversity are facing a growing number of threats and pressures as a result of emergencies, both natural and man-made. Cultural heritage is increasingly the target of systematic and deliberate attacks in numerous conflicts around the world, as well as looting on an industrial scale. This deliberate destruction is often paired with the persecution of individuals based on their cultural, ethnic or religious affiliation – part of a larger strategy of war meant to terrorize populations. Cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is also increasingly at risk from disasters caused by natural and human-made hazards, as well as the effects of climate change.

[2]

WHY DOES CULTURE MATTER IN EMERGENCIES?

Heritage and creativity, as expressions of identity and repositories of memory and knowledge, are an essential source of support for communities in crisis – both in times of conflict and disaster. Promoting respect for cultural diversity is fundamental to preventing violent extremism, while the significance of culture in the lives of communities makes its continuity essential for recovery in the wake of disasters. As a visible expression of common ground between communities, culture can also foster reconciliation and social cohesion in post-conflict situations. By protecting cultural heritage and promoting cultural pluralism in emergencies, UNESCO works to protect human rights, prevent conflicts and foster sustainable recovery.

[3]

HOW DOES UNESCO PROTECT AND PROMOTE CULTURE IN EMERGENCIES?

- i. **Global strategies.** In 2015, UNESCO adopted a Strategy for the reinforcement of the Organization’s action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict, which aims to strengthen the ability of Member States to prevent and mitigate the loss of cultural heritage as a result of conflict and natural disasters, and to incorporate the protection of culture into humanitarian action, security strategies and peacebuilding processes.
- ii. **Reconstruction and rehabilitation.** In 2018, UNESCO launched a flagship initiative to “Revive the Spirit of Mosul”, which, thanks to \$50 million in support from the UAE, will seek to restore and reconstruct Mosul’s cultural and educational institutions, notably the Al-Nouri Mosque and its leaning 45-metre Al-Hadba Minaret. UNESCO supported the reconstruction of 14 of the mausoleums of Timbuktu, destroyed by extremists in 2012, ensuring the continuity of the city’s ancient traditions and restoring a sense of community identity and pride. Following the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal, UNESCO launched a three-year project for the rehabilitation of the Kathmandu Valley World Heritage Site, where 131 heritage structures were destroyed.
- iii. **Cross-sector partnerships.** Working with the World Bank, UNESCO has launched a Position Paper on “Culture in City Reconstruction and Recovery”, which provides guidelines for integrating culture into post-crisis city reconstruction. UNESCO has also recently partnered with the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) to evaluate damage to Ancient City of Aleppo using satellite imagery. Under the 1954 Convention, UNESCO has transmitted the coordinates of heritage sites to militaries in Iraq and Mali.
- iv. **#Unite4Heritage.** UNESCO launched the #Unite4Heritage campaign in 2015, which works to empower young people to reject the propaganda of violent extremism and mobilise for the defence of their shared heritage. UNESCO also established the Heritage Emergency Fund, which to date has supported emergency preparedness, response and outreach in Ecuador, Myanmar, Haiti, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Libya, Peru and the Federated States of Micronesia.

CULTURE IN EMERGENCIES

KEY MESSAGES



Culture is increasingly at the front lines of numerous conflicts, disasters and crises around the world. We see attacks on cultural diversity – on artists and journalists, as well as schools, libraries, universities, museums, and other institutions of freethinking. We see the growing looting and illicit trafficking of cultural property, which serves as a key source of terrorist financing. As a consequence of climate change, we see heritage increasingly threatened by disasters.



We see the unprecedented, systematic destruction of cultural heritage by violent extremists, often accompanied by the persecution of people on cultural and religious grounds.



Extremists do not choose between culture and people – they attack both – and it is important to defend both. The protection of heritage is not simply a cultural issue, but a humanitarian and security issue as well.



Under Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, intentionally directing attacks against cultural heritage may be considered a war crime, and must be punished as such. The need to protect cultural heritage was recently recognized by the UN Security Council in Resolution 2347, the first resolution devoted solely to cultural heritage protection.



Protecting culture is an issue of development and recovery, as culture is a powerful force for resilience, giving people the strength to rebuild in the wake of emergencies – both natural and manmade – and the confidence to look to the future.



As a visible expression of common ground between communities, culture can also be a powerful tool for reconciliation and a building block for social cohesion.



The fight against the growing destruction of cultural heritage is fundamentally a battle for hearts and minds, particularly of young people. It is crucial that we reach out to young people; provide them with the tools of dialogue, citizenship and mutual understanding; and introduce a respect for history and diversity into education.

For more information, visit: <http://en.unesco.org/themes/culture-risk-0>