Achieving an effective policy legacy for the European Year of Cultural Heritage

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted an own-initiative report by Dace MELBRDE (ECR, LV) on achieving an effective policy legacy for the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

Recognising the value of cultural heritage

Members stressed that Europe's cultural heritage is a source of memory and knowledge that strengthens the common sense of belonging, promotes social cohesion and mutual understanding in society. Nearly a third of the sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List are located in the EU-27. More than 300 000 people work in the cultural heritage sector, while 7.8 million jobs are indirectly linked to it.

The report called on the Commission and the Member States to step up their action to protect, enhance and promote linguistic diversity in the digital age, to fully include the cultural heritage of minorities present in Europe in any reflection on European heritage, and to support traditional European and pan-European cultural events and cultural festivals in view of their role in raising awareness of Europe's cultural richness and diversity.

Education and skills

Members reiterated the importance of including various artistic art forms, such as music, film, theatre, literature, architecture and design, or in curricula support activities. In this respect, they considered that the House of European History should be provided with adequate funding to enable it to become a knowledge and collaboration hub for young researchers, teachers and students from all over the EU.

Stressing the growing role of digital education in the discovery of cultural heritage, the report called for the development of quality e-learning initiatives to make the discovery of cultural heritage more accessible and to strengthen heritage-related skills across Europe.

Concerned about the growing shortage of skilled craftsmen, restoration professionals and heritage experts, Members called on the Commission to include the preservation of key practices and knowledge in future cultural heritage preservation initiatives.

Digital cultural heritage

Members recognised the growing interest in digital cultural heritage, particularly during pandemics and associated lockdowns, as virtual communication tools are a source of solace and the only way for people, including those from disadvantaged and disabled backgrounds, to access culture.

The report underlined the need for a comprehensive European framework with adequate funding for the protection and promotion of digital heritage. It called for a comprehensive update of the Commission Recommendation of 27 October 2011 on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation, in order to reflect technological progress and the challenges and opportunities of the past decade.

Members called for the further development of the Europeana platform, which serves as a digital library, archive, museum and educational platform in Europe, including by allocating adequate funding. They also

insisted that the material to be digitised should be selected in an unbiased way to ensure the credibility of digital archives and collections.

Economic potential and sustainability

Members recognised that sustainable cultural tourism has a significant potential to generate growth and jobs in the EU, as already four out of ten tourists choose their destination on the basis of its cultural offering. They stressed, however, that the promotion of cultural tourism needs to be done in an inclusive manner with regard to local communities and economies and to lifestyles and traditions, and needs to strike a balance between economic, social, cultural and environmental requirements.

The report recommended further efforts to encourage travel to less well-known and popular destinations and rural areas, as well as low-season travel.

Members expressed concern about the impact on cultural heritage of pollution, vandalism, theft, poorly managed tourism and uncontrolled development, as well as of global warming and climate change. Member States are called on to put strong mechanisms in place to prevent overexploitation of cultural heritage, including through poorly managed tourist flows.

Towards a strategic approach to cultural heritage

Members called on the Commission to adopt a more integrated approach towards cultural heritage, treating tangible, intangible, natural and digital heritage equally and considering them as interconnected and inseparable. They recommend strategic cooperation between the European Union and other international organisations, in particular UNESCO and the Council of Europe, in order to better coordinate efforts and common standards to preserve and promote cultural heritage and to exchange good practice.

Lastly, the report reiterated its call to double the budget of the Creative Europe programme and to triple the budget of the Erasmus+ programme in the next multi-annual financial framework. It urged the Commission and Member States to provide adequate and targeted financial support to alleviate the crisis in these sectors of culture and creativity, including by providing access to social benefits for people in atypical forms of employment.