

Why Finland signed the Faro Convention and what is the added value

I am very happy to be here in this meeting and to be able to state that Finland signed the Faro Framework Convention in June earlier this year. Just a couple of weeks ago, in October the Parliament ratified the Convention and passed a bill bringing into force the provisions of a legislative nature of the Convention in Finland. Later on, the Convention will enter into force.

Why?

Joining the Faro Convention seemed a logical step for the Finnish heritage administration, also from a wider perspective, as the Convention reflects well the topical developments of the past decades as well as recent challenges in both heritage policies and the Finnish society in general.

The Convention gives a wide-ranging and - even since over ten years after its birth - an up-to-date framework for heritage policies. It is flexible and responsive to current changes in policies and societies, and equivalent to the directions of development in Finland. The definition of cultural heritage included in the Convention corresponds well to the meanings taken on in the heritage field in Finland in the 21st century as well as those presented in heritage research.

Together with the Council of Europe Landscape Convention and the Strategy 21, the Faro Convention presents a valid framework for the needs of our heritage policy.

Further on, from the point of view of the administration, we see that the Convention gives added-value to the aim of mainstreaming heritage in other policy fields. It underlines the value of heritage to society, also across sectors and different stakeholders. And also, it supports mainstreaming heritage as one of the key resources, an infrastructure, of society.

The spirit of the Convention responds well also to the current changes in the role of heritage administration in Finland, possibly elsewhere as well. There is a trend towards wide cooperation between different actors, the role of administration becoming more and more that of an enabler, or a facilitator. We, the Finnish Heritage Agency, have, for instance, been actively creating and maintaining partnerships across sectors. These strategic partnerships are an important part of our operation today.

At the same time, we see that the significance of civil society – the so called third or even the fourth sector – as heritage actors is on the rise. Though it is a fact that there is a long tradition of civic activity in heritage in Finland, there is an increasing trend in heritage activity within civic associations and others interested parties. One example being the Finnish Local Heritage Federation which with its over 800 member associations around Finland is today an active operator in cultural heritage as well as cultural environment issues. In this development, participation and inclusion are the key words, and the concept of heritage community is particularly incisive.

As a challenge, one can name the current aim or trend to diminish participation of citizens e.g. in land-use planning in the name of streamlining and speeding it up. The Convention offers us timely arguments and backrest in this discussion.

Even more concretely, the Faro Convention – though it does not require immediate alterations to our current legislation, does positively urge us to develop participation in our heritage legislation, especially the act concerning archaeological remains dating from the 1960s. Overall, we regard the Convention as a positive incentive to develop all heritage-related actions in the spirit of the Convention.

How?

Ground for joining the Convention was carefully prepared in Finland. Ratification of the Convention was included in the national Cultural Environment strategy 2014–2020 as one of the measures to promote joint responsibility for heritage and good governance. Prior to the decision to sign and join the Convention, the Ministry of Education and Culture tasked the heritage authority, the Finnish Heritage Agency (then the National Board of Antiquities), to draw up a background report. In the project executed in 2014, we chose to use a participatory approach in line with the spirit of the Faro Convention.

The purpose of the exercise was to map and assess the citizens' and stakeholders' views regarding the topical challenges in fostering cultural heritage and promote discussion on the value of heritage for society, communities and individual citizens. Another aim was to make the Convention and its content better known in Finland. Identification of existing good practice was an additional goal.

One of the good practice examples highlighted in the preparatory report was the ADOPT A MONUMENT program, which encourages everyone to appreciate and preserve sites in their own neighbourhoods. Within the program caretaking of old buildings and archaeological sites is done on voluntary basis by adopting the site on a long-term basis.

These pre-ratification preparations executed in a participatory way underlined the possibilities that the Convention offers as tool for public discussion on heritage and its significance for society. It can provide a platform for interaction on various themes. In the preparations, we chose to focus on, first, cultural heritage as part of everyday life of communities and individuals, second, heritage as a resource for sustainable development, and third, on open, fair and people-oriented heritage governance. These themes were discussed on an Internet survey and in face-to-face discussion fora. We also used social media for interaction and communicated in several languages: in addition to Finnish also to a smaller extent in Swedish and Sami, as well as in English. Summaries were provided also with easy-to-read plain language.

What next?

Though active communication already during the preparatory phase, which was in 2014, we still need to focus on communication after the ratification of the Convention. We need to further inform the public and all relevant stakeholders about the content, aims and implementation of this Convention. Communicating the essence of an abstract international convention, such as Faro, in a concrete and captivating way is a challenge but an interesting one. Communication is, again, of essence to successful implementation.

Concrete steps of the implementation are currently under discussion. It would be of great importance for us to hear and share experience with those countries that are well ahead in the implementation. And, of course, make the best possible use of the CoE Faro tools.

However, I do see that in the implementation we need to take a closer look at heritage communities, create dialogue, explore and share existing good practice and create new procedures for cooperation between administration and diverse actors, new innovative and sustainable heritage partnerships. Administration should act more and more as a facilitator, whereas the role of the civil society, with its changing new forms including heritage communities, will grow stronger. Participation and sustainability are among the key words of the implementation.

One of the great possibilities in today's world are the digital means to improve access to cultural heritage and information on it. This is also among the challenges to be tackled: both as comes to information on heritage and to its production – or co-production – with our partners and the public, including crowdsourcing and the social media. The Faro Convention's articles on digital technology encourage going further also on this.

Our aim is to encourage and promote the implementation of the Convention and its spirit across sectors, in various fields of the society and on different levels of society ranging from the administration to the civil society and heritage communities. Our strengths lie in low hierarchy and existing networks between governmental and regional levels as well as the civil society. The challenges include e.g. the geographically wide distances in Finland: how to reach different parts of the country with its various communities and minorities?

The ratification coincides the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018. We shall definitely make use of this synergy. And hopefully find ways to join forces with the European Landscape Convention, which we have implemented in Finland since 2006.

Ratification will also open the door to participating in and contributing to the European cooperation connected with the Faro Convention. We do hope to learn and to contribute in cooperation with other states and experts.

Ulla Salmela
Chief Intendant, Finnish Heritage Agency
ulla.salmela@museovirasto.fi