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Speech Barbara TOCE, Italy (L, SOC/G/PD), Co-Rapporteur

Culture without borders: Cultural heritage management for local and regional development

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking all those who contributed to this report:

First of all, Professor Maria GRAVARI-BARBAS, our expert, who has done a remarkable job and we have learned a lot from her. And also, all our discussion partners who participated in the Reflection Group and helped improve the report, especially the Chair of the Steering Group on Culture, Heritage and Landscape.

Colleagues,

Our Committee has contributed to cultural issues with various resolutions in the past such as the Resolution on “Intercultural and inter-faith dialogue” and the Resolution on Jewish Cemeteries that calls on local authorities to protect, preserve and maintain burial sites.

In this new report, we want to highlight the important role of local and regional authorities in the overall management of cultural heritage.

I will start by presenting the explanatory memorandum. My co-rapporteur Rena Dourou will then present the Resolution and Recommendation.

Before I present our main ideas, I want to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on cultural heritage and events.

Without visitors, there is little income to maintain cultural sites in our towns and cities. Traditional festivals, music and rituals have been put on hold and the revival will not always be easy.

This lack of cultural activities impacted our citizens at many levels. As Ernesto Ottone from UNESCO said: "today, more than ever, people need culture. Culture makes us resilient. It gives us hope. It reminds us that we are not alone."

Last year, when I proposed to write a report on the subject, I wanted to underline how important it is to create connections between cultures.

It is these connections that help us understand and promote the values that are so vital for democracy: solidarity, dialogue, tolerance and respect for human rights and rule of law.

The pandemic challenged these values. Cultural heritage is one tool to help us rebuild them after COVID-19.

To be successful, we will need to reinvest in international cooperation, dialogue and a sense of belonging. We will need to develop sustainable and inclusive cultural heritage management.

Our report looks at the importance of managing cultural heritage at the local and regional level.

First of all, we invite cities and regions to look at cultural heritage through a new lens. We want to raise local authorities' awareness on the fact that Cultural heritage is not just material. It also includes intangible practices, knowledge and experience.

By looking at cultural heritage this way, we look at people and how they connect to history and to each other.

Cultural heritage can strengthen social cohesion and intercultural dialogue. Exploring shared history and roots can help bring people together people.

Secondly, we look at cultural heritage as a tool for sustainable local and regional development.

Cultural tourism is an engine of economic growth. It generates income and helps create jobs. It stimulates sectors like tourism, construction, real estate and cultural and creative industries.

New forms of tourism, such as “slow tourism” or rural tourism stimulate local economies, especially in remote areas.

However, we need to avoid over-tourism, which has social and ecological impacts. In cities like Barcelona, Amsterdam and Venice, we see that cultural tourism leads to higher prices, a lack of housing and divisions between citizens.

Cultural heritage management must be sustainable, both environmentally and socially. It should benefit not only those working in the tourist industry, but all local communities.

Thirdly, we outline the obstacles to sustainable local and regional cultural heritage management.

For example, there are not enough tools for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. There is also a lack of data that goes beyond the economical dimension. We need to better understand all the benefits that cultural heritage can bring to our citizens, for example for well-being and creativity.

Cultural heritage management should also be more inclusive. Many people still feel like cultural sites are not accessible to them. The report has many examples of good practices which can serve as inspiration.

To conclude, sustainable cultural heritage management can bring Europeans together, while still celebrating their diversity. I hope that this report will contribute to that.

Thank you for your attention.