

**Committee:** Special Conference on the preservation of cultural heritage and art (SPECON)

**Issue:** Tackling the cultural crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic

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**Position:** Deputy President

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## PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Christopher Foteinelis, I am currently a First Year International Baccalaureate Diploma candidate and I have the honor to serve as the Deputy President in this year's DSTMUN SPECON. I am really looking forward to our cooperation and I sincerely hope it will be a fruitful and entertaining committee experience for all of you. I will make a sincere effort to assist you gradually in both the lobbying and the debating procedure and I aim to make this an unforgettable MUN conference.

The study guide that follows will help you grasp the heart of the assigned topic as well as all the knowledge and crucial data you will need to do your own research and adapt to your country's policies. Thus, keep in mind that this study guide should not be used to replace your own independent research on the topic of "Tackling the cultural crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic". It merely serves as an introduction to the subject, and it provides you with the fundamental components in order for you to engage in more research of your own.

If you encounter any difficulties while reading the following study guide and need further explanation, do not hesitate to contact me on my school e-mail ([c.foteinelis@acg.edu](mailto:c.foteinelis@acg.edu)).

I wish you good luck with your preparation and I cannot wait to meet you all at the conference, either online or live!

Best Regards,

Christopher Foteinelis

## TOPIC INTRODUCTION

In modern-day societies, where all community sectors are becoming all the more globalized, culture is the only remaining differentiation between people. Culture is essentially a trait that is rooted deeply down on the history of a civilization. It is an umbrella term that includes terms like “ethics”, “habits”, “traditions”. Culture defines how a society functions has functioned in the past, and thus shaping the present. How people from the same communal group communicate with each other, share their experiences, and behave towards others, are all questions that can be answered while looking back to the group’s culture.

Culture is undoubtedly something that has left a noticeable footprint on the potential future of the civilizations. It is the first thing that develops among a large group of people is common habits which then develop into a permanent and prevalent quality. People feel nourished and even cherished in the appropriate kind of culture, since they share the same history and ideas as the people in their town, providing to everything a sense of cohesion. Moreover, it gives one a sense of community and security as it provides social and political stability. It is also evident that, when strangers share a common culture, they instantly form an emotional bond and develop a sense of trust.

Having defined culture and its significance in the modern-day world, it is also pivotal to acknowledge how a culture can be threatened and how can one declare a cultural crisis: Firstly, when we are talking about threats against cultures, we are originally comprehending the issues that may cause a culture to go “extinct” or simply just cease to exist. Most commonly noticed, wars, religious and political conflicts result in massacres and the destruction of cultural property. This can result in the vanishing of the concrete characteristics of a civilization, which include the aforementioned habits, traditions and ethics. That is when a state of crisis is declared: when the customs and traits of a group of people are exponentially disappearing, the responsible executive body of a country declares it a shock of cultural property.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the current crisis which then led to a global culture shock and, evidently, the international community needs efficient measures to halt the ongoing crisis.

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### Culture

Culture is described as the lifestyle of a certain group of people at a specific period, with notable emphasis on its general habits and beliefs. It is also an umbrella

covering terms such as “religion”, “tradition”, “political stance”, “morals and ethics” and “art”.

### **Cultural identity**

Cultural identity is a sense of belonging in a certain culture or civilization based on genealogy, common values, customs and religion and, in certain cases, personal experience and identification.

### **Culture shock<sup>1</sup>**

“Culture shock refers to the impact of moving from a familiar culture to one that is unfamiliar. This impact includes the anxiety and feelings (such as surprise, disorientation, uncertainty, and confusion) felt when a person must adapt to a different and unknown cultural or social environment.”

### **Cultural heritage**

Cultural heritage refers to the legacy of assets among a specific community. There are two types of inherited assets from past generations: (1) intangible and (2) tangible objects. The intangible type of cultural heritage reveals the oral traditions and performing rituals of the contextual civilization. The tangible form of cultural heritage describes concrete objects and is also divided into three main categories: movable, immovable, and underwater. The movable form is interconnected with paintings, sculptures, and manuscripts; the immovable form includes monuments and temples and lastly the underwater form includes shipwrecks, underwater ruins and underwater archaeological sites.

### **Cultural appropriation<sup>2</sup>**

“Cultural appropriation is the act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture.”

### **Intellectual Property**

Intellectual property is best described as governmental property that refers to creations of the mind such as technological inventions, blueprints, cultural and artistic works, literary works and symbols mainly used in commerce. As stated, one major

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<sup>1</sup> "What Is Culture Shock | Insurance Explained." International Student Insurance, [www.internationalstudentinsurance.com/explained/mental-health/culture-shock/what-is-culture-shock.php](http://www.internationalstudentinsurance.com/explained/mental-health/culture-shock/what-is-culture-shock.php).

<sup>2</sup> "CULTURAL APPROPRIATION | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cultural-appropriation](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cultural-appropriation).

aspect of intellectual property includes everything that comes along with cultural heritage.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

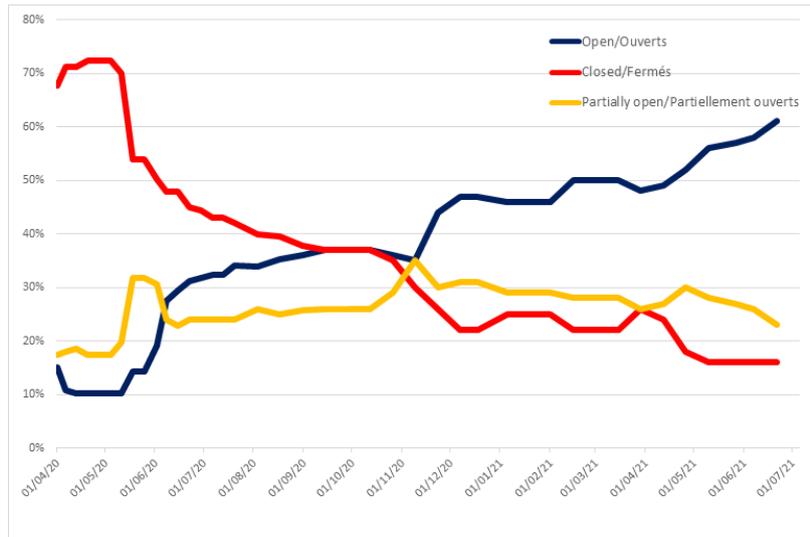
### Crisis in tangible forms of Cultural Heritage

As it was previously mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic has widely caused one of the biggest socioeconomic and cultural crises in the last couple of centuries.

Before outbreak of the virus, it was evident that lots of cultures, especially in the Middle East and West Asia, were threatened through war, political and religious conflicts, and government deterioration. Numerous cultures almost became extinct while major forces were destroying the tangible forms of cultural heritage that surrounded the area where these communities lived.

The pandemic was essentially the starting point of a cultural downfall. Heritage sites and museums around the world were shuttered for both visitors and workers during various lockdowns. When the public's attention is drawn to more pressing issues, such as the pandemic, governments may be inclined to take advantage of the chance to further their own agendas into applying controversial plans that ultimately refuse the recognition of cultural crises.

Regarding the actual results of the pandemic in the tangible cultural heritage sector, most historic sites such as monuments and archaeological grounds were at risk of deteriorating. Examples include the Iranian historical city of Bam, the Bamiyan Valley in Southern Russia, the Town of Zabid in Yemen, and Pavlopetri in Greece. The lockdowns, which caused the halt of cultural observations, prohibited the maintenance of such sites, and increased the unattendance of the public eye. Decay and neglect were inevitable and thus this scheme of endangered cultures became more regular and habitual.



**Figure 1: Graph showing cultural site closures during the pandemic<sup>3</sup>**

Even after the lift of all safety measures, the aforementioned sites may never be able to fully recover from this neglect. The age of the monuments and the ability to be restored and recovered create a linear and proportionate relationship which can be characterized as a spark of hope. This means that the older the monument is, the easier it is for it to be restored. However, while governments and citizens focus on more prevalent issues that have to do with the economy and the healthcare system as a whole, this so-called restoration and recovery is far from being a prioritized and possible future event.

**Crisis in intangible forms of Cultural Heritage**

Excluding the intermittent damage, the pandemic has caused on concrete objects of culture and in addition to posing a significant public health risk, the pandemic has noticeably and endangered intangible forms of heritage such as oral traditions and religious or social rituals.

Evidently, spring festivities and seasonal, annual, or gradual ceremonies have been halted. The inability for communities to come together in rites and festivities that usually promote intergenerational exchange as well as exchange between local and foreign communities, was severely damaging. For example, the annual Muslim ceremonies which occur in Mecca were forbidden, Christmas festivities in Jerusalem were not organized and indigenous people in the United States could not perform the annual Powwow ceremony.

Furthermore, on a side note, citizens from all sectors of public life have noticed a critical transformation from a live to a digital way of communication and

<sup>3</sup> "Monitoring World Heritage Sites Closures." UNESCO, 22 June 2021, [en.unesco.org/covid19/culture/response/monitoring-world-heritage-site-closures](https://en.unesco.org/covid19/culture/response/monitoring-world-heritage-site-closures).

sharing of ideas. What this essentially means is that the people who come from more technologically advanced societies have the ability to sustain their intangible forms of cultural heritage while other communities have to culturally and socially suffer until they are able to practice their own beliefs and rituals non-virtually. This has already sparked an inequality controversy, since urban life ensures cultural stability while rural life is unable to identify with the new wave of technology and the arisen technological opportunities.

Last but not least, one other immediate implications of the pandemic with regard to the intangible sector of culture is social isolation. Isolation has a negative impact on people's physical well-being and mental health, highlighting the need of social engagement and interaction with significant places, where cultural heritage plays a major role. The problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how the amount of space available and the distance between people influence profound changes in the personal, social, and economic realms. Therefore, isolation, as an implication of the pandemic, posed a consequential hazard to cultural heritage.



**Figure 2: Image depicting Mecca, Medina during a state of lockdown prohibiting Muslim ceremonies to occur<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> "Curfew in Mecca, Medina Extended to 24 Hours over Coronavirus." Breaking News, World News and Video from Al Jazeera, 2 Apr. 2020, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/4/2/curfew-in-mecca-medina-extended-to-24-hours-over-coronavirus](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/4/2/curfew-in-mecca-medina-extended-to-24-hours-over-coronavirus).

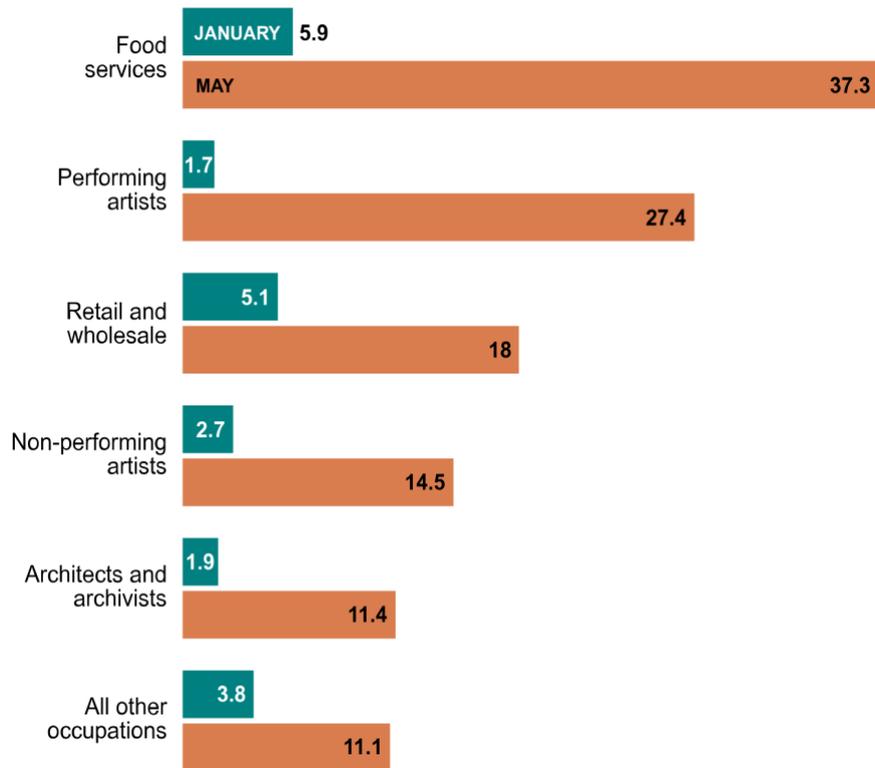
### **The arisen financial and social challenges of art workers**

As it is already known, several controversies have arisen in regard to the plight of artists and cultural workers the past year. With a plethora of cultural sites, theaters and entertainment areas being shut down, those employed in the art sector face major challenges in the labor market.

Financially speaking, art workers are significantly more likely to obtain a self-employed financial status. Because of their unique properties, these types of work create numerous challenges on the financial sector: governmental financial stimuli packages are out of reach for self-employed individuals and state insurance. Therefore, a form of safety is also not available. Such professionals seek other part-time occupations to fill in their financial gaps and once the pandemic started, their already atypical working patterns disappeared. Lastly, unlike most of corporate employees, art workers do not have a binding contract ensuring permanent financial stability and steady income.

As already mentioned, the existing combination of independent and self-employed employment conditions, on the one hand, and the peculiarities of artists' employment, on the other, often makes it difficult for them to obtain social security benefits. These benefits not only include health insurance and protection from income interruption but also ensure income and social equality and legal representation. It is widely known that self-employed individuals cannot be socially and financially equal with the employed ones based solely on the fact that one category is wholly independent while the other is dependent on an enterprise.

Taking all of this information into consideration, the ultimate inequality art workers face unveils that throughout the ongoing pandemic, all the challenges have further and intensely damaged the status of individuals who are occupied with preserving cultural heritage on a financial and social level.



**Figure 3: Unemployment Rates in Arts and Artist-Heavy Occupations (Jan 2020 vs May 2020)<sup>5</sup>**

## MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

### Greece

Greece is undoubtedly a country with a plethora of important cultural artifacts, monuments, and manuscripts. Objectively, it is a major country involved into preserving cultural heritage since it is one of its main sources of income and basis for sustainability and maintenance. While heavily relying on external financial assistance, the Greek government invests in tourism which is a major economic contributor through visits on cultural sites and museums. The Greek cultural and creative sector has already been severely damaged by the ongoing financial crisis of the Greek economy, but it is safe to acknowledge that this industry is one of the few that have managed to maintain governmental interest.

The Greek government has already been characterized as a quintessential example of how to manage a health crisis regarding the cultural sector. Greece has

<sup>5</sup> "The Pandemic Is a Disaster for Artists." RAND Corporation Provides Objective Research Services and Public Policy Analysis | RAND, [www.rand.org/blog/2020/07/the-pandemic-is-a-disaster-for-artists.html](http://www.rand.org/blog/2020/07/the-pandemic-is-a-disaster-for-artists.html).

taken steps to help people who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic, with emphasis on culture. These steps include providing temporary financial assistance to self-employed people (especially seasonal cultural workers) and deferral of taxes for at least three months for all non-profit organizations, self-employed individuals, and wage earners who have been critically affected by the pandemic. By contributing 15 million EUR to the cultural field, Greece is setting an example for how a cultural crisis must be combated.

### Support Art Workers Movement



Figure 4: The “Support Art Workers” movement’s logo<sup>6</sup>

After a second national lockdown was declared, the rest of the Greek community wanted to rebel against the restricting measures imposed by the Greek government. This huge reaction included movements and protests that concerned the indecisiveness and the wrong declarations political officials made. One major and noteworthy section of these mass protests was a movement called “Support Art Workers”. Greek art workers organized mass silent protests outside the Greek parliament demanding financial stimuli packages and economic support from the Greek National Bank. This movement, spreading across the media and political scene, set a worldwide example of how citizens must properly protest in order for the government to support the entertainment industry.

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<sup>6</sup> “Support Art Workers: Blog.” ImproVIBE, [www.improvibe.gr/ell/blog/support-art-workers](http://www.improvibe.gr/ell/blog/support-art-workers).



**Figure 5<sup>7</sup>: Image depicting a silent protest outside the Greek Parliament  
(Translation: Culture cannot be suppressed)**

## Mali

The Republic of Mali is a Northwestern African and economically developing country that can be characterized as an exemplar for all UN Member States on how to handle the pandemic while also ensuring a flourishing cultural sector. Mali set the basis for cultural preservation by enhancing its cultural structures with the help of diplomacy through international cooperation. Malian professional dancers, singers and culturally expressive individuals took on the challenge posed by the pandemic and while everything was prohibited due to multiple national lockdowns, they expressed themselves online to promote COVID-19 awareness.

## Italy

The emergency measures implemented to combat the coronavirus pandemic, which included a total lockdown throughout the country, had a negative impact on Italy's cultural industry. Italy, as a country full of historical sites, theaters, and cultural grounds, initially responded poorly to the pandemic. It was one of the first European countries to hit record-high daily COVID-19 cases and the Italian government imposed measures when the overall cases surpassed 100,000. Along with the systematic lockdowns, the cultural industry suffered as well.

On a positive note, a legislative decree launched by the Italian government named "Cura Italia" on March 17<sup>th</sup> 2020, aimed at reviving many withering sectors. It

<sup>7</sup> Reader Newsroom. (2020, May 7). Support art workers. <https://www.reader.gr/koinonia/328746/support-art-workers-se-exelixa-sygkentrosi-kallitehnon-sto-syntagma-zitoyn-metra>

also provided a significant relief to the cultural sector by establishing financial stimuli packages reaching up to 130 million EUR in order to support performing artists.

### **European Union (EU)**

The European Union (EU) is a socioeconomic and political union made up of countries that are only located in the geographic region of Europe. Its goal is to encourage commerce, transparency, and financial assistance among citizens of the Union Member in question. Regarding the pressing cultural crisis, the EU has taken initiatives to fight it, two of which (Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative and the SURE package) have had a sincere impact on how the sector works during a state of crisis.

### **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is the principal cultural organ of the United Nations that focuses solely on the preservation of cultural heritage, financial and social status of art workers, and ensuring education of all humans. To raise awareness, UNESCO has already created a weekly “Cultural & COVID-19: Impact and Response Tracker”, which is essentially an overview of the fast-developing situation, in response to the enormous impact the COVID-19 pandemic has on the culture sector. Since UNESCO does not have any executive abilities or binding contracts with any government, the only way it could ultimately assist the situation is through two main ways: the World Heritage Centre and Creative Cities.

The World Heritage Centre (WHC) is a reporting and monitoring sub-section of UNESCO that was created by the 1972 World Heritage Convention whose purpose is to ensure that World Heritage is maintained and preserved. During the pandemic, the WHC provided constant advice to the General Assembly which was based on research that the center has undertaken.

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was established to foster collaboration with and among cities that have identified creativity as a key component for long-term urban development. All the countries that make up this network work together to achieve a similar goal: putting creative and cultural industries at the center of their local development plans and agendas. The digitalized way of preserving cultural heritage and observing such sites through the use of technology appeared to be more than useful throughout the pandemic as a medium of sustaining the contextual cultural sites.

### **World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)**

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is as an international forum that was created in 1967 by the ratification of the WIPO convention. Its primary mandate is to protect the intellectual property of all Member-States which includes the protection of cultural heritage and the tackling of any crisis that may arise.

From the beginning of 2020 until now, the WIPO’s engagement in the cultural crisis imposed by the ongoing pandemic has been more than noticeable. Even though its actions have not actually contributed to the preservation, the organization’s statistical analysis and continuous conferences and webinars have significantly raised awareness and helped prevent other sectors of culture from being damaged.

More specifically, the 61<sup>st</sup> WIPO Assembly, which took place on September 21<sup>st</sup> 2020, revolved around the international cooperation that needs to be held in order to revive the intellectual property sector on a global level with special focus on regions that have been affected the most, such as countries in the Mediterranean, Middle East and Southern Asia.

#### TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
16 <sup>th</sup> November 1945	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization was created
14 <sup>th</sup> May 1954	The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was signed
14 <sup>th</sup> July 1967	The ratification of the WIPO Convention and the creation of the World Intellectual Property Organization
16 <sup>th</sup> November 1972	The 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage was signed
17 <sup>th</sup> October 2003	The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was signed
27 <sup>th</sup> October 2005	The 2005 Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society was signed
17 <sup>th</sup> March 2020	The Legislative Decree “Cura Italia” was launched

2 <sup>nd</sup> April 2020	The EU signed the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative to assist Member States during the financial and cultural crisis
17 <sup>th</sup> May 2020	First protest organized by the “Support Art Workers” movement
18 <sup>th</sup> June 2020	Successful initial results of the EU’s SURE Initiative became available
21 <sup>st</sup> September – 25 <sup>th</sup> September 2020	The 61 <sup>st</sup> WIPO Assembly occurred regarding the rehabilitation of culture

### RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

#### The 1954 Hague Convention of The Protection of Cultural Property in The Event of Armed Conflict

The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was adopted at The Hague in 1954. After the enormous destruction of cultural heritage caused by the Second World War, this treaty was the first international convention with a global scope that focused only on cultural heritage preservation in the case of armed conflict. It includes measures such as respect for cultural property situated in any territory, establishment of military forces responsible for the sites’ preservations and sanctions for breaches of the convention. It significantly contributed to the global community as it provided the legal framework on how to tackle a cultural crisis.

#### The 2005 Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society

The 2005 Faro Convention is a Treaty that highlights the significance of heritage in terms of human rights and democracy. It promotes a deeper understanding of heritage and how it affects communities and society, while also encouraging individuals to understand that cultural heritage is made up of more than objects and locations. The measures it proposes are conceptualizing the term “cultural heritage”, creating a framework to foster economic and social flourishing which supports cultural activities and enriching all sectors of society with cultural development.

### PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

#### The 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage

The 1972 World Heritage Convention is one of the most crucial conservation instruments of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Convention explicitly lists the duties of all Member States regarding the prevention of a cultural crisis and their obligations when it comes to local cultural preservation. The measures it proposes include the hiring of staff and services to maintain a clean environment, the scientific and technical research on conservation and the obligation to report on a regular basis to the WHC about the current state of the historical monuments within the contextual state.

### **The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is a UNESCO treaty that was adopted on 17 October 2003. This Convention considerably set up the legal framework on how to protect intangible cultural heritage on a global level. More specifically, the text of the convention explicitly mentions that its purpose is to ensure respect among intangible culture, including religious forms of culture, and to raise awareness on an international level about the importance of the aforementioned cultural category as well as promote international assistance among all Member States.

### **The Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative**

The Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative is essentially an initiative adopted by the EU Member States that has already made 27 billion EUR available for all members to take advantage of and reestablish their financial systems. By immediately addressing the contextual country's issues, the governments can request from the EU Commission a standard amount of funds in order to re-orient their sectors, including the financial one.

### **The "Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE)" Package**

The European Union's support package named "Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE)" has been able to assist self-employed and unemployed individuals in stabilizing their financial status. Focusing on art workers, the European Commission along with its Member States have gathered 100 billion EUR to help them stay afloat during the pandemic and support enterprises that have economically suffered.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Taking all aforementioned into serious consideration, we come to the conclusion that the ongoing global cultural crisis directly caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is an issue of ultimate significance and solutions are needed in order to

combat it, so as to ensure a safety net and prevent cultures from being endangered and getting extinctic.

### **International Recognition**

First and foremost, one of the most important aspects of the possible solutions is the international recognition of how serious this situation is and how it will affect future generations. By bringing the issue to the public's attention and igniting social mobilization, the international community will gain a better understanding of the scope of the problem and the steps that must be followed to address it.

### **Promotion for ratifications**

Furthermore, politically speaking, the already existing conventions have not been signed nor ratified by all the UN member states. The promotion and ratification of these treaties is a critical step in legally and stably ensuring that the necessary solutions are implemented. This means that a unified response to the cultural crisis in all disciplines will undoubtedly ensure the required balance and conservation of the sites while also supporting the globe in recovering from its cultural shock.

### **Education**

COVID-19 triggered a cultural catastrophe and ultimately revealed one way this crisis could be combatted: education. Through education, the international community will be able to tutor all future generations about the consequences of pandemics on culture. This is the only way to ensure that such deterioration in the cultural sector will be prevented and through all of the above mentioned ratifications of relevant conventions, the current youth and the generations to come will have a holistic idea of what needs to be done in order to ensure the protection of cultural heritage.

### **Halting of cultural appropriation**

It is also a fact that the manipulation of cultures either for profit or for political or religious support, whether or not it is caused by a pandemic, critically injures cultures on a global level. Cultural appropriation is something undoubtedly evident and noticeable in the media scene. By halting the above contributing factors through conventions and general conferences, the cultural crisis that humanity experiences currently will be limited and soon seize to exist.

### **Financial support**

As one of the major components of the crisis is the unemployment of art workers and the deterioration of businesses that manage historical and archaeological sites, financial stimuli packages have to be offered in order to ensure a stable local

economy. If governments globally agree to provide stimuli to the aforementioned businesses and self-employed art workers, then the crisis would sufficiently stabilize.

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