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Malta's World Heritage sites are learning cases for interdisciplinary training on Disaster Risk Reduction



A workshop - jointly organised by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, Venice (Italy), the Section on Earth Sciences and Geo-Hazards Risk Reduction, Natural Sciences Sector of UNESCO, and the Maltese National Commission for UNESCO - will bring together heritage professionals, site managers and emergency responders from South-East European and Mediterranean countries on 14-19 November 2015 in the City of Valletta, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1980. Participants from Albania, Cyprus, Greece, Malta and Turkey will gather in the Campus of the University of Malta and will be introduced to disaster risk reduction principles to be incorporated in management plans for World Heritage sites and other cultural heritage sites.

Natural hazards, including the effects of climate change, are increasingly impacting people's lives and our shared heritage – eliciting concern from international to local communities. Disasters do happen, and while many cannot be avoided, preparatory measures can mitigate or effectively reduce their impact. Furthermore, investing in risk preparedness can help to avoid high expenditure in the response and post-disaster recovery stage.

Experience shows that the heritage itself can contribute to reducing the effects of disasters in various ways. Traditional knowledge systems, in the form of physical planning and construction, can be useful for mitigation purposes, as can local

management systems and ecological solutions, which prevent or mitigate the impact of disasters and provide sufficient coping mechanisms to deal with post-disaster situations. Cultural properties can also serve as safe havens for surrounding communities for their temporary relocation during emergencies, as well as a community's focal point during their recovery.

In 2007, the World Heritage Committee adopted a 'Strategy for Reducing Risks from Disasters at World Heritage Properties' which encourages all State Parties to develop disaster risk management plans for the World Heritage properties in their respective countries. The new internationally endorsed 'Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030' also clearly highlights the importance of reducing disaster risk in cultural heritage sites.

With this in mind, the workshop in Malta will adopt a participatory methodology and a special focus will be placed on risk preparedness for geohazards, specifically landslides, earthquakes, wild fires and floods, as well as structural fires, with the participation of an interdisciplinary team of highly qualified international experts and trainees from World Heritage sites' management and emergency responders. The aim will be to raise awareness amongst professionals and responsible agencies of the need to develop appropriate and tailored disaster management plans and to build capacities in the development of appropriate risk management mechanisms in cultural sites of the South-East European and Mediterranean areas.

The workshop will contribute to mainstreaming disaster risk management principles in the management systems of World Heritage sites in South-East Europe Mediterranean countries. Two World Heritage sites of Malta - City of Valletta and Megalithic Temples of Malta - will be used as learning cases to serve the entire region.

Heritage professionals from Malta and countries of the South-East European and Mediterranean area will be provided with knowledge on current thinking, methods and tools available to identify, assess and manage multiple natural-derived hazards and risks and learn about preparatory measures to mitigate their material and human impact. The workshop will close with a final presentation developed during the workshop by the trainees at the Italian Cultural Institute in Valletta.

The workshop will involve specialists from: UNESCO; Research Institute for Geo-Hydrological Protection, CNR-IRPI; Department of Chemical and Geological Sciences, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, UNIMORE; UNESCO Chair at the Institute of Disaster Mitigation for Urban Cultural Heritage, Ritsumeikan University (ICOMOS/ICORP); Marrion Fire & Risk Consulting; Institute of Atmospheric Sciences and Climate, CNR-ISAC; Department of Geosciences, University of Malta.

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