The Tracker

CULTURE & PUBLIC POLICY

UNESCO

This monthly Tracker is produced by UNESCO to monitor the role of culture in public policy with regards to the UN Sustainable Development Agenda. It highlights developments within national and regional contexts, as well as emerging debates on culture's contribution to sustainable development. Drawing on a variety of sources, it provides a broad overview of cultural policy trends worldwide at the national, regional and international level and looks at ways in which countries integrate culture into other policy areas.

CONTENTS

AT A GLANCE ● CULTURAL POLICY HIGHLIGHTS ● CUTTING EDGE
REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES ● CULTURE IN THE 2030 AGENDA ● FIND OUT MORE

AT A GLANCE

The tourism industry is a major casualty of the COVID-19 pandemic, which in 2020 propelled a 74% drop in international arrivals and a US$1.3 trillion loss in global tourism revenues. Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing segments of the global tourism sector, with four out of ten tourists choosing their destination based on its cultural offer. In an ongoing context of uncertainty, governments around the world are identifying ways to deal with the devastating economic impact of the crisis and support resilient and inclusive recovery strategies for the future.

The **Cultural Policy Highlights** section presents the latest policy measures at national and local level.

In the **Cutting Edge** section, we look at how cultural tourism has grown to be a powerhouse for sustainable development, and what countries are doing to harness their cultural assets through tourism. We examine some of the major challenges, risks and opportunities for cultural tourism development, and what steps governments are taking to transition to more sustainable models of tourism development - today and in the post-COVID-19 context.

The latest developments shaping policy at regional level are outlined in the **Regional Perspectives** section.

Over a third of all countries report specifically on cultural tourism in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs): the section **Culture in the 2030 Agenda** covers these developments.

See **Find Out More** for recent updates from UNESCO.

Havana, Cuba, MaboHH, Getty Images Pro

CULTURAL POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

This section showcases a selection of the latest developments in cultural public policy from UNESCO Member States. Whilst reactive measures to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cultural sector are expected to largely guide cultural public policies throughout 2021, there are positive signs that countries and cities are transitioning from recovery measures to longer term strategies to build resilience in their cultural sectors.

Local Initiative

In The **Gambia**, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture has <u>launched a revision of the country's national tourism and culture policy</u> to realign tourism with the eight strategic priorities of the National Development Plan 2018-2021, which includes inclusive and culture-centred tourism.

Ministry of Tourism and Culture The Gambia

The **Bahrain** Authority for Culture and Antiquity has <u>signed a Memorandum of Understanding</u> with the **United States** Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad on the promotion and protection of cultural heritage. The agreement includes nine articles focused on respecting human rights, and promoting tolerance and friendship between states, ethnicities and religious groups.

In **Germany**, the Federal Cabinet has adopted its National Action Plan for Integration (NAP-I), which includes an extensive cultural chapter aimed at promoting diversity in cultural institutions and broadening the participation of people with a migration background in the cultural sector.

Globe Telecom

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of **Republic of Korea** <u>has announced a plan to revive the pandemic-hit culture and tourism industries</u> and continue to spread "hallyu" - or the Korean Wave - throughout 2021. The actions are focused on four major policy goals with domestic and international scope: support specific sectors impacted by COVID-19, help content producers go digital, promote Korean content, and support Korean language and culture education abroad.

In **Bolivia**, the National System of Original Peoples' Radio Stations (SNRPO) comprising 37 affiliated radio stations has collaborated with the Educa Bolivia programme to promote linguistic diversity in distance learning and ensure the right to education among children in rural areas of the country. The Radios of the Original Peoples broadcast educational content programmes in Spanish, Aymara and Quechua.

CULTURAL POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

In **Uganda**, the Ministry of Tourism has announced plans to upgrade road access to the UNESCO World Heritage site Bigo bya Mugenyi (Archaeological Earthworks) and the cultural heritage sites Nyero, Patiko and Emin Pasha's fort. The plans are part of the Government's UGX 2.2 trillion ($US600 million) commitment to develop tourism infrastructure over the next five years.

Bigo Bog, Rwenzori Mountains, Uganda by Christopher Kidd

Cook Island Tourism

In the **Cook Islands**, the Tauranga Vananga Ministry of Cultural Development and Cook Islands Tourism Corporation have signed a five-year Memorandum of Understanding for sustainable tourism and to offer Māori cultural training to local tour guides. The agencies will work together in specific areas of culture, including language, national events and vaka pride, as well as training in statistics, marketing and social media.

In the **United Kingdom**, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has announced a new programme of research to inform policy on the benefits of culture and heritage to society. In parallel, the DCMS's report "Valuing Culture and Heritage Capital: A Framework Towards Informing Decision Making" sets out how this approach can better support the evidence base behind private and public investments in culture and heritage.

In **Syria**, the Culture Directorate of Homs plans to launch several new projects as part of the governate's cultural post-conflict recovery efforts. The projects include a study to build a theatre institute, develop public libraries and restart arts courses in cultural institutions.

Uruguay has stepped up efforts to strengthen its orange economy. The Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) and the National Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (Inefop) have signed an agreement to streamline employment policies in the creative economy. In addition, the Uruguayan Association of Sound Recorders (ASU) and the Uruguay Ilumina collective signed a specific agreement to provide training and labour certification.

DanFLCreativo, Canva Pro

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts of **Benin** has taken steps to raise awareness of the musical history of the country by launching an anthology of Beninese music featuring the music of 60 artists from the past six decades. The initiative also seeks to promote respect for the rights of artists, and aligns with the Government's aim to promote culture as a driver of job creation and economic development through tourism.

Ministère Tourisme, Culture et Arts - BENIN

3

CULTURAL POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

In **Algeria**, the Ministry of Culture and Arts and the Algerian Confederation of Employers (CAP) have signed a partnership agreement to launch investments and economic projects in culture and the arts. The agreement supports the Ministry of Culture and Arts' endeavours to forge closer links between culture and the economy in accordance with the country's economic recovery plan.

The ruins of Djémila in Algeria. World Atlas

In the **British Virgin Islands**, the Caribbean Genealogy Library has launched the Oral History Project to capture the stories of the elderly members of the community and their contributions to the history and cultural heritage of the Islands. These efforts are part of the work of the Caribbean Genealogy Library to identify, preserve and provide access to Caribbean genealogy, history and cultural heritage information resources.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of **Slovenia** has launched Europe Readr, a project to foster reading culture and critical thinking across societies about sustainability and urbanism through a curated programme of activities. The project was initiated in view of the upcoming Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in July 2021.

EUNIC

The Government of Punjab in **Pakistan** has announced the finalization of its first-ever draft culture policy, which will be submitted shortly for cabinet approval. The proposed policy aims to leverage culture as an engine for creating employment and reducing poverty.

High jump traditional sport, The New Times

In the Nyanza district in **Rwanda**, the local government plans to incorporate infrastructure for traditional sports in its construction of a modern 10,000 seat stadium. The project aims to combat the declining participation in traditional sports, including wrestling, archery and high jump, as part of efforts to boost cultural tourism in the area.

CULTURAL POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

In **Kuwait**, the Committee for the Rehabilitation and Development of Historic Buildings of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters has agreed to begin rehabilitation projects on three heritage buildings in three different governates. The projects seek to strengthen urban regeneration and increase cultural attractions for the public.

Botrus elhajj, Getty Images

In **Mongolia**, the Parliament has adopted the country's first law on museums. The law enables an adapted and streamlined response to specific issues concerning the museum sector, and aims to improve funding mechanisms, building infrastructure and human resources.

National Museum of Mongolia

The **Republic of Croatia** and **Russian Federation** have signed their sixth implementation programme of cooperation in the field of culture for the years 2020-2022. The programme encourages exchange and cooperation between the two countries for artists and cultural and artistic institutions.

The municipality of Milan, **Italy**, has launched its initiative "One city, twenty museums: four districts" to create new ways of looking at the city's museums. The approach centres on establishing dialogue among institutions and cultural actors in the city, and promoting four new "museum districts".

In the **Dominican Republic**, President Luis Abinader has re-established by decree the National Council of Culture, the country's highest decision-making body in cultural policy chaired by the Minister of Culture, thus marking a strong reinvestment in cultural policy.

Marie Martin, Getty Images

The Government of **Oman** has announced plans to develop 14 tourist complexes in the various governates of the Sultanate that incorporate sustainability and empowering local communities and their role in protecting cultural heritage. The project is part of a range of programmes and initiatives of the Oman Tourism Strategy (2016-2040).

The Honiara City Council in the **Solomon Islands** has launched its Tourism and Culture Policy and ten-year strategic plan. The policy centres on the theme "Taking back the Happy Isles" to promote the cultural assets of the country, guided by the "think global, act local" concept.

Bringing cultural tourism back in the game

The **COVID-19 pandemic has stopped cultural tourism in its tracks.** Throughout 2020 international arrivals plunged by 74% worldwide, dealing a massive blow to the sector, which faces ongoing precarity and unpredictability. Amidst international travel restrictions, border closures and physical distancing measures, countries have been forced to impose wide-spread closures of heritage sites, cultural venues, festivals and museums, some of which may never reopen.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, global tourism was experiencing strong growth over several decades. Destinations earning US$1 billion or more from international tourism have almost doubled since the late 1990s. Tourism has become a key player in international commerce, outpacing global economic growth and, in 2019, injecting US$8.9 trillion into the global economy, or 10.3% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The cultural sector as a whole depends greatly on the tourism industry.

Marbury, Getty Images

Cultural tourism - defined by the UNWTO as tourism centred on cultural attractions and products - is one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry, accounting for an estimated <u>40% of all tourism worldwide.</u> It intersects with heritage and religious sites, crafts, performing arts, gastronomy, festivals and special events, among others. Countries around the world are harnessing their unique mix of tangible and intangible heritage and contemporary culture to boost economic growth and sustainable development through cultural tourism, which can lead to job creation, regeneration of rural and urban areas, and the protection of natural and cultural heritage. Cultural tourism is a continuingly evolving sub-sector, which continues to be transformed by changing lifestyles, burgeoning forms of culture and creativity, and traditional and digital innovation. It has also become an increasingly complex phenomenon - taking on greater political, economic, social, educational and ecological dimensions.

Cultural tourism accounts for about

40%

of all tourism worldwide

UNWTO, Report on Tourism and Culture Synergies

Cultural tourism is also a major pillar of employment globally and is considered by many countries around the world as a core priority to stimulate job creation, notably for youth. The tourism sector as a whole is estimated by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) to contribute 330 million jobs – one in ten jobs around the world – while cultural tourism alone accounts for a significant share of tourism employment by generating 40% of world tourism revenues. Cultural tourism permeates across the whole cultural ecosystem, sustaining employment around cultural and natural sites and museums, including through restoration and maintenance work, as well as throughout the different cultural domains – particularly crafts, gastronomy and performing arts – and further stimulated by festivals and cultural events. Beyond cultural jobs per say, cultural tourism also spurs employment across global, national and local economies given the interaction of the cultural tourism sector with many other economic sectors in services and industry, notably auxiliary services such as the hospitality, food and leisure sectors, as well as in the construction sector, particularly linked to the restoration and maintenance of cultural sites. The COVID-19 pandemic and related social distancing and travel restrictions measures has had a devastating impact on cultural tourism employment, prompting a snowball effect across many sub-sectors while also exposing its volatility and the high prevalence of informality. Women, young people, rural communities, indigenous peoples and informal workers have been disproportionately affected by the abrupt drop in cultural tourism revenues. In view of this major impact on employment in many countries – notably in regions that are major tourism destinations such as Europe, the Pacific or the Caribbean but also many countries in the developing world – restarting cultural tourism is a major concern for governments around the world, as strongly voiced by ministers at the Online Meeting of Ministers of Culture hosted by UNESCO on 22 April last.

mustafagull/Getty Images Signature

The growth of cultural tourism

People have long traveled to discover and visit places of historical significance or spiritual meaning, to experience different cultures, as well as to learn about, exchange and consume a range of cultural goods and services. Cultural tourism as a concept gained traction during the 1990s when certain sub-sectors emerged, including heritage tourism, arts tourism, gastronomic tourism, film tourism and creative tourism. This took place amidst the rising tide of globalization and technological advances that spurred greater mobility through cheaper air travel, increased accessibility to diverse locations and cultural assets, media proliferation, and the rise of independent travel. Around this time, tourism policy was also undergoing a shift that was marked by several trends. These included a sharper focus on regional development, environmental issues, public-private partnerships, industry self-regulation and a reduction in direct government involvement in the supply of tourism infrastructure. As more cultural tourists have sought to explore the cultures of the destinations, greater emphasis has been placed on the importance of intercultural dialogue to promote understanding and tolerance. Likewise, in the face of globalization, countries have looked for ways to strengthen local identity, and cultural tourism has also been engaged as a strategy to achieve this purpose. Being essentially place-based, cultural tourism is driven by an interest to experience and engage with culture first-hand. It is backed by a desire to discover, learn about and enjoy the tangible and intangible cultural assets offered in a tourism destination, ranging from heritage, performing arts, handicrafts, rituals and gastronomy, among others.

Cultural tourism is a leading priority for the majority of countries around the world -featuring in the tourism policy of 90% of countries, based on a 2016 UNWTO global survey. Most countries include tangible and intangible heritage in their definition of cultural tourism, and over 80% include contemporary culture - film, performing arts, design, fashion and new media, among others. There is, however, greater need for stronger localisation in policies, which is rooted in promoting and enhancing local cultural assets, such as heritage, food, festivals and crafts. In France, for instance, the Loire Valley between Sully-sur-Loire and Chalonnes, a UNESCO World Heritage site, has established a multidisciplinary team that defends the cultural values of the site, and advises the authorities responsible for the territorial development of the 300 km of the Valley.

While cultural tourism features prominently in policies for economic growth, it has diverse benefits that cut across the development spectrum – economic, social and environmental. Cultural tourism expands businesses and job opportunities by drawing on cultural resources as a competitive advantage in tourism markets. Cultural tourism is increasingly engaged as a strategy for countries and regions to safeguard traditional cultures, attract talent, develop new cultural resources and products, create creative clusters, and boost the cultural and creative industries. Cultural tourism, particularly through museums, can support education about culture. Tourist interest can also help ensure the transmission of intangible cultural heritage practices to younger generations.

Cultural tourism can help encourage appreciation of and pride in local heritage, thus sparking greater interest and investment in its safeguarding. Tourism can also drive inclusive community development to foster resiliency, inclusivity, and empowerment. It promotes territorial cohesion and socioeconomic inclusion for the most vulnerable populations, for example, generating economic livelihoods for women in rural areas. A strengthened awareness of conservation methods and local and indigenous knowledge contributes to long-term environmental sustainability. Similarly, the funds generated by tourism can be instrumental to ensuring ongoing conservation activities for built and natural heritage.

The growth of cultural tourism has reshaped the global urban landscape over the past decades, strongly impacting spatial planning around the world. In many countries, cultural tourism has been leveraged to drive urban regeneration or city branding strategies, from large-sized metropolises in Asia or the Arab States building on cultural landmarks and contemporary architecture to drive tourism expansion, to small and middle-sized urban settlements enhancing their cultural assets to stimulate local development. At the national level, cultural tourism has also impacted planning decisions, encouraging coastal development in some areas, while reviving inland settlements in others. This global trend has massively driven urban infrastructure development through both public and private investments, impacting notably transportation, the restoration of historic buildings and areas, as well as the rehabilitation of public spaces. The expansion of cultural city networks, including the UNESCO World Heritage Cities programme and the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, also echoes this momentum. Likewise, the expansion of cultural routes, bringing together several cities or human settlements around cultural commonalities to stimulate tourism, has also generated new solidarities, while influencing economic and cultural exchanges between cities across countries and regions.

StockSnap, Pixabay

Despite tourism's clear potential as a driver for positive change, challenges exist, including navigating the space between economic gain and cultural integrity. Tourism's crucial role in enhancing inclusive community development can often remain at the margins of policy planning and implementation. Rapid and unplanned tourism growth can trigger a range of negative impacts, including pressure on local communities and infrastructure from overtourism during peak periods, gentrification of urban areas, waste problems and global greenhouse gas emissions. High visitor numbers to heritage sites can override their natural carrying capacity, thus undermining conservation efforts and affecting both the integrity and authenticity of heritage sites. Over-commercialization and folklorization of intangible heritage practices – including taking these practices out of context for tourism purposes - can risk inadvertently changing the practice over time. Large commercial interests can monopolize the benefits of tourism, preventing these benefits from reaching local communities. An excessive dependency on tourism can also create localized monoeconomies at the expense of diversification and alternative economic models. When mismanaged, tourism can, therefore, have negative effects on the quality of life and well-being of local residents, as well as the natural environment.

These fault lines became more apparent when the pandemic hit – revealing the extent of over-dependence on tourism and limited structures for crisis prevention and response. While the current situation facing tourism is unpredictable, making it difficult to plan, further crises are likely in the years to come. Therefore, the pandemic presents the opportunity to experiment with new models to shape more effective and sustainable alternatives for the future.

hxdyl/Getty Images Pro

Harnessing cultural tourism in policy frameworks

From a policy perspective, countries around the world have employed cultural tourism as a vehicle to achieve a range of strategic aims. In Panama, cultural tourism is a key component of the country's recently adopted Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism 2020-2025 that seeks to position Panama as a worldwide benchmark for sustainable tourism through the development of unique heritage routes. Cultural tourism can be leveraged for cultural diplomacy as a form of 'soft power' to build dialogue between peoples and bolster foreign policy. For instance, enhancing regional cooperation between 16 countries has been at the heart of UNESCO's transnational Silk Roads Programme, which reflects the importance of culture and heritage as part of foreign policy. UNESCO has also partnered with the EU and National Geographic to develop World Heritage Journeys, a unique travel platform that deepens the tourism experience through four selected cultural routes covering 34 World Heritage sites. Also in Europe, cultural tourism has been stimulated through the development of <u>cultural routes linked to food and wine</u>, as well as actions to protect local food products, such as through labels and certificates of origin. The Emilia-Romagna region in Italy, for example, produces more origin-protected food and drink than any other region in the country. One of the regions' cities Parma - a UNESCO Creative City (Gastronomy) and designated <u>Italian Capital for Culture (2020-2021)</u> - plans to resume its cultural activities to boost tourism once restrictions have eased. Meanwhile, Spain has recently taken steps to revive its tourism industry through its <u>cities inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List</u>. In this regard, the Group of the 15 Spanish World Heritage Cities met recently to discuss the country's Modernization and Competitiveness Plan for the tourism sector. Cultural tourism has progressively featured more prominently in the policies of Central Asian and Eastern European countries, which have sought <u>to revive intangible heritage and boost the creative economy</u> as part of strategies to strengthen national cultural identity and open up to the international community. In Africa, cultural tourism is a growing market that is driven by its cultural heritage, crafts, and national and regional cultural events. Major festivals such as Dak-Art in Senegal, Bamako Encounters Photography Biennial in Mali, Sauti za Busara in United Republic of Tanzania, Pan-African Festival of Cinema and Television of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, and Chale Wote Street Art Festival in Ghana are just a handful of vibrant and popular platforms in the continent that share cultural expressions, generate income for local economies and strengthen Pan-African identity.

peeterv, Getty Images Signature

Countries are increasingly seeking alliances with international bodies to advance tourism. National and local governments are working together with international entities, such as UNESCO, UNWTO and OECD in the area of sustainable tourism. In 2012, UNESCO's Sustainable Tourism Programme was adopted, thereby breaking new ground to promote tourism a driver for the conservation of cultural and natural heritage and a vehicle for sustainable development. In 2020, UNESCO formed the Task Force on Culture and Resilient Tourism with the Advisory Bodies to the 1972 World Heritage Convention (ICOMOS, IUCN, ICCROM) as a global dialogue platform on key issues relating to tourism and heritage management during and beyond the crisis. UNESCO has also collaborated with the UNWTO on a set of recommendations for inclusive cultural tourism recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. In response to the crisis, the Namibian Government, UNESCO and UNDP are working together on a tourism impact study and development strategy to restore the tourism sector, especially cultural tourism.

UNESCO has scaled up work in cultural tourism in its work at field level, supporting its Member States and strengthening regional initiatives. In the Africa region, enhancing cultural tourism has been reported as a policy priority across the region. For example, UNESCO has supported the Government of Ghana in its initiative Beyond the Return, in particular in relation to its section on cultural tourism. In the Pacific, a Common Country Assessment (CCA) has been carried out for 14 SIDS countries, with joint interagency programmes to be created building on the results. Across the Arab States, trends in tourism after COVID, decent jobs and cultural and creative industries are emerging as entry points for different projects throughout the region. In Europe, UNESCO has continued its interdisciplinary work on visitor centres in UNESCO designated sites, building on a series of workshops to strengthen tourism sustainability, community engagement and education through heritage interpretation. In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, UNESCO is working closely with Member States, regional bodies and the UN system building on the momentum on the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development, including through Creative Cities, and the sustainable recovery of the orange economy, among others.

BS1920, Pixabay

In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to all of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Tourism is directly mentioned in SDGs 8, 12 and 14 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production (SCP) and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively. This is mirrored in the VNRs put forward by countries, who report on cultural tourism notably through the revitalization of urban and rural areas through heritage regeneration, festivals and events, infrastructure development, and the promotion of local cultural products. The VNRs also demonstrate a trend towards underlining more sustainable approaches to tourism that factor in the environmental dimensions of tourism development.

Several countries have harnessed cultural tourism as a policy panacea for economic growth and diversification. As part of Qatar's National Vision 2030 strategy, for example, the country has embarked on a development plan that includes cultural tourism through strengthening its culture-based industries, including calligraphy, handicrafts and living heritage practices. In the city of Abu Dhabi in the UAE, cultural tourism is part of the city's plan for economic diversification and to steer its domestic agenda away from a hydrocarbon-based economy. The Plan Abu Dhabi 2030 includes the creation of a US$27 billion cultural district on Saadiyat Island, comprising a cluster of world-renowned museums, and cultural and educational institutions designed by international star architects to attract tourism and talent to the city. Since 2016, Saudi Arabia has taken decisive action to invest in tourism, culture and entertainment to reduce the country's oil dependency, while also positioning the country as a global cultural destination. Under the 2020 G20 Saudi Presidency, the UNWTO and the G20 Tourism Working Group launched the AlUla Framework for Inclusive Community Development through Tourism to better support inclusive community development and the SDGs. The crucial role of tourism as a means of sustainable socio-economic development was also underlined in the final communique of the G20 Tourism Ministers in October last.

Siem Reap, Cambodia by nbriam

On the other hand, cultural tourism can catalyse developments in cultural policy. This was the case in the annual Festival of Pacific Arts (FestPac) that triggered a series of positive policy developments following its 2012 edition that sought to strengthen social cohesion and community pride in the context of a prolonged period of social unrest. The following year, Solomon Islands adopted its first national culture policy with a focus on cultural industries and cultural tourism, which resulted in a significant increase in cultural events being organized throughout the country.

When the pandemic hit, the geographic context of some countries meant that many of them were able to rapidly close borders and prioritize domestic tourism. This has been the case for countries such as Australia and New Zealand. However, the restrictions have been coupled by significant economic cost for many Small Island Developing States (SIDS) whose economies rely on tourism and commodity exports. Asia Pacific SIDS, for example, are some of the world's leading tourist destinations. As reported in the Tracker last June, in 2018, tourism earnings exceeded 50% of GDP in Cook Islands, Maldives and Palau and equaled approximately 30% of GDP in Samoa and Vanuatu. When the pandemic hit in 2020, the drop in British tourists to Spain's Balearic Islands resulted in a 93% downturn in visitor numbers, forcing many local businesses to close. According to the World Economic Outlook released last October, the economies of tourism-dependent Caribbean nations are estimated to drop by 12%, while Pacific Island nations, such as Fiji, could see their GDP shrink by a staggering 21% in 2020.

Socially-responsible travel and ecotourism have become more of a priority for tourists and the places they visit. Tourists are increasingly aware of their carbon footprint, energy consumption and the use of renewable resources. This trend has been emphasized as a result of the pandemic. According to recent survey by Booking.com, travelers are becoming more conscientious of how and why they travel, with over two-thirds (69%) expecting the travel industry to offer more sustainable travel options. Following the closures of beaches in Thailand, for example, the country is identifying ways to put certain management policies in place that can strike a better balance with environmental sustainability. The UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Pledge launched in partnership with Expedia Group focuses on promoting sustainable tourism and heritage conservation. The pledge takes an industry-first approach to environmental and cultural protection, requiring businesses to introduce firm measures to eliminate single-use plastics and promote local culture. The initiative is expanding globally in 2021 as a new, more environmentally and socially conscious global travel market emerges from the COVID-19 context.

Senja, Norway by Jarmo Piironen
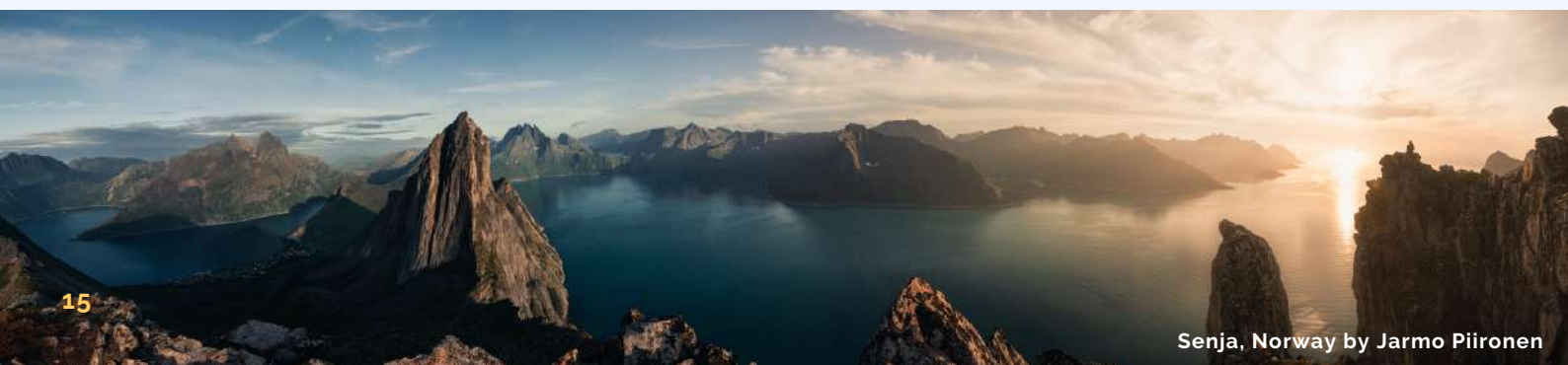
Climate change places a heavy toll on heritage sites, which exacerbates their vulnerability to other risks, including uncontrolled tourism. This was underlined in the publication "World Heritage and Tourism in a Changing Climate", published by UNESCO, UNEP and the Union of Concerned Scientists, which analyses the consequences of climate change on heritage, and its potential to permanently change or destroy a site's integrity and authenticity. Extreme weather events, safety issues and water shortages, among others, can thwart access to sites and hurt the economic livelihoods of tourism service providers and local communities. Rising sea levels will increasingly impact coastal tourism, the largest component of the sector globally. In particular, coral reefs - contributing US$11.5 billion to the global tourism economy – are at major risk from climate change.

Marine sites are often tourist magnets where hundreds of thousands of annual visitors enjoy these sites on yachts and cruise ships. In the case of UNESCO World Heritage marine sites – which fall under the responsibility of governments - there is often a reliance on alternative financing mechanisms, such as grants and donations, and partnerships with non-governmental organizations and/or the private sector, among others. The West Norwegian Fjords – Geirangerfjord and Nærøyfjord in Norway derives a substantial portion of its management budget from sources other than government revenues. The site has benefited from a partnership with the private sector company Green Dream 2020, which only allows the "greenest" operators to access the site, and a percentage of the profits from tours is reinjected into the long-term conservation of the site. In iSimangaliso in South Africa, a national law that established the World Heritage site's management system was accompanied by the obligation to combine the property's conservation with sustainable economic development activities that created jobs for local people. iSimangaliso Wetland Park supports 12,000 jobs and hosts an environmental education programme with 150 schools. At the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, where 91% of all local jobs are linked to the Reef, the Coral Nurture Programme undertakes conservation through planting coral, and promotes local stewardship and adaptation involving the whole community and local tourist businesses.

Grafner, Getty Images

With borders continuing to be closed and changeable regulations, many countries have placed a focus on domestic tourism and markets to stimulate economic recovery. According to the UNWTO, domestic tourism is expected to pick up faster than international travel, making it a viable springboard for economic and social recovery from the pandemic. In doing so it will serve to better connect populations to their heritage and offer new avenues for cultural access and participation. In China, for example, the demand for domestic travel is already approaching pre-pandemic levels. In Russian Federation, the Government has backed a programme to promote domestic tourism and support small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as a cashback scheme for domestic trips, which entitles tourists to a 20% refund for their trip. While supporting domestic tourism activities, the Government of Palau is injecting funds into local businesses working in reforestation and fishing in the spirit of building new sustainable models. The measures put in place today will shape the tourism to come, therefore the pandemic presents an opportunity to build back a stronger, more agile and sustainable tourism sector.

Local solutions at the helm of cultural tourism

While state-led policy interventions in cultural tourism remain crucial, local authorities are increasingly vital stakeholders in the design and implementation of cultural tourism policies. Being close to the people, local actors are aware of the needs of local populations, and can respond quickly and provide innovative ideas and avenues for policy experimentation. As cultural tourism is strongly rooted to place, cooperating with local decision-makers and stakeholders can bring added value to advancing mutual objectives. Meanwhile, the current health crisis has severely shaken cities that are struggling due to diminished State support, and whose economic basis strongly relies on tourism. Local authorities have been compelled to innovate to support local economies and seek viable alternatives, thus reaffirming their instrumental role in cultural policy-making.

Venice, Oliver Dralam/Getty Images

Cultural tourism can be a powerful catalyst for urban regeneration and renaissance, although tourism pressure can also trigger complex processes of gentrification. Cultural heritage safeguarding enhances the social value of a place by boosting the well-being of individuals and communities, reducing social inequalities and nurturing social inclusion. Over the past decade, the Malaysian city of George Town – a World Heritage site – has implemented several innovative projects to foster tourism and attract the population back to the city centre by engaging the city's cultural assets in urban revitalization strategies. Part of the income generated from tourism revenues contributes to conserving and revitalizing the built environment, as well as supporting housing for local populations, including lower-income communities. In the city of Bordeaux in France, the city has worked with the public-private company InCité to introduce a system of public subsidies and tax exemption to encourage the restoration of privately-owned historical buildings, which has generated other rehabilitation works in the historic centre. The city of Kyoto in Japan targets a long-term vision of sustainability by enabling local households to play an active role in safeguarding heritage by incrementally updating their own houses, thus making the city more resilient to gentrification. The city also actively supports the promotion of its intangible heritage, such as tea ceremonies, flower arrangement, seasonal festivals, Noh theatre and dance. This year marks the ten-year anniversary of the adoption of the UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL). The results of a UNESCO survey carried out among Member States in 2019 on its implementation show that 89% of respondents have innovative services or tourism activities in place for historic areas, which demonstrates a precedence for countries to capitalize on urban cultural heritage for tourism purposes.

Cultural tourism has been harnessed to address rural-urban migration and to strengthen rural and peripheral sub-regions. The city of Suzhou – a World Heritage property and UNESCO Creative City (Crafts and Folk Art) - has leveraged its silk embroidery industry to strengthen the local rural economy through job creation in the villages of Wujiang, located in a district of Suzhou. Tourists can visit the ateliers and local museums to learn about the textile production. In northern Viet Nam, the cultural heritage of the Quan họ Bắc Ninh folk songs, part of the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, is firmly rooted in place and underlined in its safeguarding strategies in 49 ancient villages, which have further inspired the establishment of some hundreds of new Quan họ villages in the Bắc Ninh and Bắc Giang provinces.

89% of Member States have innovative services or tourism activities in place for historic areas

UNESCO survey on the implementation of the 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape
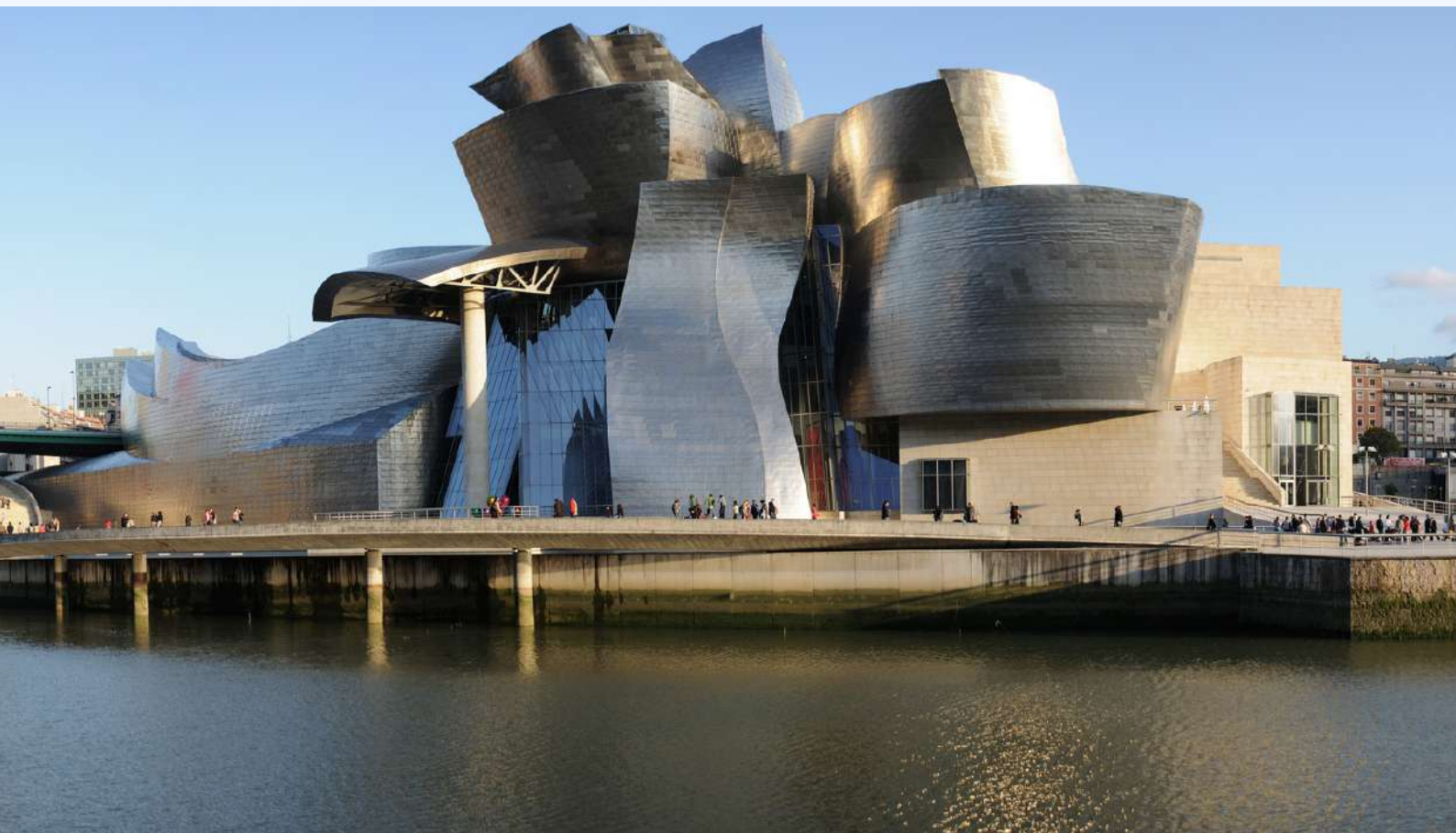
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Spain by erlucho

Many top destination cities are known for their iconic cultural landmarks. Others create a cultural drawcard to attract visitors to the city. France, the world's number one tourist destination, attracts 89 million visitors every year who travel to experience its cultural assets, including its extensive cultural landmarks. In the context of industrial decline, several national and local governments have looked to diversify infrastructure by harnessing culture as a new economic engine. The Guggenheim museum in Bilbao in Spain is one such example, where economic diversification and unemployment was addressed through building a modern art museum as a magnet for tourism. The museum attracts an average of 900,000 visitors annually, which has strengthened the local economy of the city. A similar approach is the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), established in 2011 by a private entrepreneur in the city of Hobart in Australia, which has catalysed a massive increase of visitors to the city. With events such as MONA FOMA in summer and Dark MOFO in winter, the museum staggers visitor volumes to the small city to avoid placing considerable strain on the local environment and communities. Within the tourism sector, cultural tourism is also well-positioned to offer a tailored approach to tourism products, services and experiences. Such models have also supported the wider ecosystems around the iconic cultural landmarks, as part of "destination tourism" strategies.

Destination tourism encompasses festivals, live performance, film and festive celebrations as drawcards for international tourists and an economic driver of the local economy. Over the past three decades, the number of art biennials has proliferated. Today there are more than 300 biennials around the world, whose genesis can be based both on artistic ambitions and place-making strategies to revive specific destinations. As a result of COVID-19, many major biennials and arts festivals have been cancelled or postponed. Both the Venice Architecture and Art Biennales have been postponed to 2022 due to COVID-19. The Berlin International Film Festival will hold its 2021 edition online and in selected cinemas. Film-induced tourism - motivated by a combination of media expansion, entertainment industry growth and international travel - has also been used for strategic regional development, infrastructure development and job creation, as well to market destinations to tourists. China's highest-grossing film of 2012 "Lost in Thailand", for example, resulted in a tourist boom to Chiang Mai in Thailand, with daily flights to 17 Chinese cities to accommodate the daily influx of thousands of tourists who came to visit the film's location. Since March 2020, tourism-related industries in New York City in the United States have gone into freefall, with revenue from the performing arts alone plunging by almost 70%. As the city is reliant on its tourism sector, the collapse of tourism explains why New York's economy has been harder hit than other major cities in the country. Meanwhile in South Africa, when the first ever digital iteration of the country's annual National Arts Festival took place last June, it also meant an estimated US$25.7 million (R377 million) and US$6.4 million (R94 million) loss to the Eastern Cape province and city of Makhanda (based on 2018 figures), in addition to the US$1.4 million (R20 million) that reaches the pockets of the artists and supporting industries. The United Kingdom's largest music festival, Glastonbury, held annually in Somerset, recently cancelled for the second year running due to the pandemic, which will have ripple effects on local businesses and the charities that receive funding from ticket sales.

Similarly, cancellations of carnivals from Santa Cruz de Tenerife in the Canary Islands to Binche in Belgium has spurred massive losses for local tourism providers, hotels, restaurants, costume-makers and dance schools. In the case of the Rio de Janeiro Carnival in Brazil, for instance, the city has amassed significant losses for the unstaged event, which in 2019 attracted 1.5 million tourists from Brazil and abroad and generated revenues in the range of US$700 million (BRL 3.78 billion). The knock-on effect on the wider economy due to supply chains often points to an estimated total loss that is far greater than those experienced solely by the cultural tourism sector.

Every year, roughly 600 million national and international religious and spiritual trips take place, generating US$18 billion in tourism revenue. Pilgrimages, a fundamental precursor to modern tourism, motivate tourists solely through religious practices. Religious tourism is particularly popular in France, India, Italy and Saudi Arabia. For instance, the Hindu pilgrimage and festival Kumbh Mela in India, inscribed in 2017 on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, attracts over 120 million pilgrims of all castes, creeds and genders. The festival is held in the cities of

Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik every four years by rotation. Sacred and ceremonial sites have unique significance for peoples and communities, and are often integral to journeys that promote spiritual well-being. Mongolia, for example, has around 800 sacred sites including 10 mountains protected by Presidential Decree, and lakes and ovoos, many of which have their own sutras. In the case of Mongolia, the environmental stewardship and rituals and practices connected with these sacred places also intersects with longstanding political traditions and State leadership.

Cities with a vibrant cultural scene and assets are not only more likely to attract tourists, but also the skilled talent who can advance the city's long-term prospects. Several cities are also focusing on developing their night-time economies through the promotion of theatre, concerts, festivals, light shows and use of public spaces that increasingly making use of audio-visual technologies. Situated on Chile's Pacific coast, the city of Valparaíso, a World Heritage site, is taking steps to transform the city's night scene into a safe and inclusive tourist destination through revitalizing public spaces. While the economies of many cities have been weakened during the pandemic, the night-time economy of the city of Chengdu in China, a UNESCO Creative City for Gastronomy, has flourished and has made a significant contribution to generating revenue for the city, accounting for 45% of citizen's daily expenditure.

The pandemic has generated the public's re-appropriation of the urban space. People have sought open-air sites and experiences in nature. In many countries that are experiencing lockdowns, public spaces, including parks and city squares, have proven essential for socialization and strengthening resilience. People have also reconnected with the heritage assets in their urban environments. Local governments, organizations and civil society have introduced innovative ways to connect people and encourage creative expression. Cork City Council Arts Office and Creative Ireland, for example, jointly supported the art initiative Ardú- Irish for 'Rise' – involving seven renowned Irish street artists who produced art in the streets and alleyways of Cork.

Chengdu Town Square, China by Lukas Bischoff

Environment-based solutions support integrated approaches to deliver across the urban-rural continuum, and enhance visitor experiences by drawing on the existing features of a city. In the city of Bamberg, a World Heritage site in Germany, gardens are a key asset of the city and contribute to its livability and the well-being of its local population and visitors. More than 12,000 tourists enjoy this tangible testimony to the local history and environment on an annual basis. Eighteen agricultural businesses produce local vegetables, herbs, flowers and shrubs, and farm the inner-city gardens and surrounding agricultural fields. The museum also organizes gastronomic events and cooking classes to promote local products and recipes.

In rural areas, crafts can support strategies for cultural and community-based tourism. This is particularly the case in Asia, where craft industries are often found in rural environments and can be an engine for generating employment and curbing rural-urban migration. Craft villages have been established in Viet Nam since the 11th century, constituting an integral part of the cultural resources of the country, and whose tourism profits are often re-invested into the sustainability of the villages. The craft tradition is not affected by heavy tourist seasons and tourists can visit all year round.

Indigenous tourism can help promote and maintain indigenous arts, handicrafts, and culture, including indigenous culture and traditions, which are often major attractions for visitors. Through tourism, indigenous values and food systems can also promote a less carbon-intensive industry. During COVID-19, the Government of Canada has given a series of grants to indigenous tourism businesses to help maintain livelihoods. UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions announced that it will grant, through the International Fund for Creative Diversity (IFCD), US$70,000 dollars to Mexican indigenous cultural enterprises, which will support indigenous enterprises through training programmes, seed funding, a pre-incubation process and the creation of an e-commerce website.

Tourism has boosted community pride in living heritage and the active involvement of local communities in its safeguarding. Local authorities, cultural associations, bearers and practitioners have made efforts to safeguard and promote elements as they have understood that not only can these elements strengthen their cultural identity but that they can also contribute to tourism and economic development. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the role of intellectual property and in the regulation of heritage. In the field of gastronomy, a lot of work has been done in protecting local food products, including the development of labels and certification of origin. Member States are exploring the possibilities of geographical indication (GI) for cultural products as a way of reducing the risk of heritage exploitation in connection to, for example, crafts, textiles and food products, and favouring its sustainable development.

The pandemic has brought to the forefront the evolving role of museums and their crucial importance to the life of societies in terms of health and well-being, education and the economy. A 2019 report by the World Health Organization (WHO) examined 3,000 studies on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being, which indicated that the arts play a major role in preventing, managing and treating illness. Over the past decade the number of museums has increased by 60%, demonstrating the important role that museums have in national cultural policy. Museums are not static but are rather dynamic spaces of education and dialogue, with the potential to boost public awareness about the value of cultural and natural heritage, and the responsibility to contribute to its safeguarding.

Data presented in UNESCO's report "Museums Around the World in the Face of COVID-19" in May 2020 show that 90% of institutions were forced to close, whereas the situation in September-October 2020 was much more variable depending on their location in the world. Large museums have consistently been the most heavily impacted by the drop in international tourism – notably in Europe and North America. Larger museums, such as Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum and Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum have reported losses between €100,000 and €600,000 a week. Smaller museums have been relatively stable, as they are not as reliant on international tourism and have maintained a closer connection to local communities. In November, the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO) released the results of a survey of 6,000 museums from 48 countries. Of the responding museums, 93% have increased or started online services during the pandemic. Most larger museums (81%) have increased their digital capacities, while only 47% of smaller museums indicated that they did. An overwhelming majority of respondents (92.9%) confirm that the public is safe at their museum. As reported in the Tracker last October, the world's most visited museum, the Louvre in France (9.3 million visitors annually) witnessed a ten-fold increase in traffic to its website. Yet while digital technologies have provided options for museums to remain operational, not all have the necessary infrastructure, which is the case for many museums in Africa and SIDS.

93% of 6,000 museums from 48 countries have increased or started online services during the pandemic

Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO)

New technologies have enabled several new innovations that can better support cultural tourism and digital technologies in visitor management, access and site interpretation. Cultural tourists visiting cultural heritage sites, for example, can enjoy educational tools that raise awareness of a site and its history. Determining carrying capacity through algorithms has helped monitor tourist numbers, such as in Hạ Long Bay in Viet Nam. In response to the pandemic, Singapore's Asian Civilizations Museum is one of many museums that has harnessed digital technologies to provide virtual tours of its collections, thus allowing viewers to learn more about Asian cultures and histories. The pandemic has enhanced the need for technology solutions to better manage tourism flows at destinations and encourage tourism development in alternative areas.

Shaping a post-pandemic vision : regenerative and inclusive cultural tourism

As tourism is inherently dependent on the movement and interaction of people, it has been one of the hardest-hit sectors by the pandemic and may be one of the last to recover. Travel and international border restrictions have led to the massive decline in tourism in 2020, spurring many countries to implement strategies for domestic tourism to keep economies afloat. Many cultural institutions and built and natural heritage sites have established strict systems of physical distancing and hygiene measures, enabling them to open once regulations allow. Once travel restrictions have been lifted, it will enable the recovery of the tourism sector and for the wider economy and community at large.

While the pandemic has dramatically shifted the policy context for cultural tourism, it has also provided the opportunity to experiment with integrated models that can be taken forward in the post-pandemic context. While destinations are adopting a multiplicity of approaches to better position sustainability in their plans for tourism development, there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

Houses in Amsterdam, adisa, Getty, Images Pro

A comprehensive, integrated approach to the cultural sector is needed to ensure more sustainable cultural tourism patterns. Efforts aimed at promoting cultural tourism destinations should build on the diversity of cultural sub-sectors, including cultural and heritage sites, museums, but also the creative economy and living heritage, notably local practices, food and crafts production. Beyond cultural landmarks, which act as a hotspot to drive the attractiveness of tourism destinations, and particularly cities, cultural tourism should also encompass other aspects of the cultural value chain as well as more local, community-based cultural expressions. Such an integrated approach is likely to support a more equitable distribution of cultural tourism revenues, also spreading tourism flows over larger areas, thus curbing the negative impacts of over-tourism on renowned cultural sites, including UNESCO World Heritage sites. This comprehensive vision also echoes the growing aspiration of visitors around the world for more inclusive and sustainable tourism practices, engaging with local communities and broadening the understanding of cultural diversity.

As a result of the crisis, the transversal component of cultural tourism has been brought to the fore, demonstrating its cross-cutting nature and alliance with other development areas. Cultural tourism – and tourism more broadly – is highly relevant to the 2030 for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs, however, the full potential of cultural tourism for advancing development – economic, social and environmental - remains untapped. This is even though cultural tourism is included in a third of all countries' VNRs, thus demonstrating its priority for governments. Due the transversal nature of cultural tourism, there is scope to build on these synergies and strengthen cooperation between ministries to advance cooperation for a stronger and more resilient sector. This plays an integral role in ensuring a regenerative and inclusive cultural tourism sector. Similarly, tourism can feature as criteria for certain funding initiatives, or as a decisive component for financing cultural projects, such as in heritage or the cultural and creative industries.

Several countries have harnessed the crisis to step up actions towards more sustainable models of cultural tourism development by ensuring that recovery planning is aligned with key sustainability principles and the SDGs. Tourism both impacts and is impacted by climate change. There is scant evidence of integration of climate strategies in tourism policies, as well as countries' efforts to develop solid crisis preparedness and response strategies for the tourism sector. The magnitude and regional variation of climate change in the coming decades will continue to affect cultural tourism, therefore, recovery planning should factor in climate change concerns. Accelerating climate action is of utmost importance for the resilience of the sector.

THPStock, Canva

The key role of local actors in cultural tourism should be supported and developed. States have the opportunity to build on local knowledge, networks and models to forge a stronger and more sustainable cultural tourism sector. This includes streamlining cooperation between different levels of governance in the cultural tourism sector and in concert with civil society and private sector. Particularly during the pandemic, many cities and municipalities have not received adequate State support and have instead introduced measures and initiatives using local resources. In parallel, such actions can spur new opportunities for employment and training that respond to local needs.

Greater diversification in cultural tourism models is needed, backed by a stronger integration of the sector within broader economic and regional planning. An overdependence of the cultural sector on the tourism sector became clear for some countries when the pandemic hit, which saw their economies come to a staggering halt. This has been further weakened by pre-existing gaps in government and industry preparedness and response capacity. The cultural tourism sector is highly fragmented and interdependent, and relies heavily on micro and small enterprises. Developing a more in-depth understanding of tourism value chains can help identify pathways for incremental progress. Similarly, more integrated – and balanced – models can shape a more resilient sector that is less vulnerable to future crises. Several countries are benefiting from such approaches by factoring in a consideration of the environmental and socio-cultural pillars of sustainability, which is supported across all levels of government and in concert with all stakeholders.

abhishek gaurav, Pexels

Inclusion must be at the heart of building back better the cultural tourism sector. Stakeholders at different levels should participate in planning and management, and local communities cannot be excluded from benefitting from the opportunities and economic benefits of cultural tourism. Moreover, they should be supported and empowered to create solutions from the outset, thus forging more sustainable and scalable options in the long-term. Policy-makers need to ensure that cultural tourism development is pursued within a wider context of city and regional strategies in close co-operation with local communities and industry. Businesses are instrumental in adopting eco-responsible practices for transport, accommodation and food. A balance between public/ private investment should also be planned to support an integrated approach post-crisis, which ensures input and support from industry and civil society.

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the essential role of museums as an integral component of societies in terms of well-being, health, education and the economy. Digitalization has been a game-changer for many cultural institutions to remain operational to the greatest extent possible. Yet there are significant disparities in terms of infrastructure and resources, which was underscored when the world shifted online. Museums in SIDS have faced particular difficulties with lack of access to digitalization. These imbalances should be considered in post-crisis strategies.

The pandemic presents an occasion to deeply rethink tourism for the future, and what constitutes the markers and benchmarks of "success". High-quality cultural tourism is increasingly gaining traction in new strategies for recovery and revival, in view of contributing to the long-term health and resilience of the sector and local communities. Similarly, many countries are exploring ways to fast track towards greener, more sustainable tourism development. As such, the pandemic presents an opportunity for a paradigm shift - the transformation of the culture and tourism sectors to become more inclusive and sustainable. Moreover, this includes incorporating tourism approaches that not only avoid damage but have a positive impact on the environment of tourism destinations and local communities. This emphasis on regenerative tourism has a holistic approach that measures tourism beyond its financial return, and shifts the pendulum towards focusing on the concerns of local communities, and the wellbeing of people and planet.

Entabeni Game Reserve in South Africa by SL_Photography

AFRICA

The 2021 theme for the African Union (AU) "Arts, Culture and Heritage: a lever for building the Africa we want" was central to discussions of the 34th Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, which was held virtually from 6 to 7 February 2021. The annual African Union Summit emphasized that consolidation and support for Africa's cultural and artistic assets are a unifying force for the African people, and can play a crucial role to catalyse the socio-economic development and integration of the African continent. The meeting underlined how the theme goes hand-in-hand with the AU's aspirations to promote Pan-African unity, self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity as put forward in the continent's master plan Agenda 2063. The incoming President of the African Union and President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Felix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, recalled at the meeting that "the arts, culture and heritage are the foundation of the African renaissance. They offer us the opportunity to return to our roots". However, inadequate budgetary allocations to culture, arts and heritage inhibit the potential of arts and culture sectors to be vectors of peace, integration, growth and development in Africa, as underlined by President of the transition government of the Republic of Mali, Bah Ndaw, who urged Member States to allocate at least 1% of their national budgets to these sectors by 2030.

The AU theme was also a feature of the 2021 edition of the Ségou'Art-festival on Niger, held from 4 to 7 February in Mali, which included a Pan-African seminar on "Art, culture and heritage: levers to build the Africa we want" in collaboration with the Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa (OCPA). Speaking at the opening ceremony, Malian Minister of Culture, Handicrafts and Tourism, Kadiatou Konare, underlined that the Ségou'Art-Festival sur le Niger stands out as a major event across Africa and a driving force for development, growth, and job creation. The seminar resulted in the roadmap "Appel de Ségou" (Ségou Appeal), which charts how the arts and culture can help build "the Africa we want". The outcomes and recommendations of the seminar will be shared with the Government of Mali and the African Union.

Piotr Usewicz

ARAB STATES

The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) launched the Arab Platform for Culture and Heritage on the sidelines of last month's Permanent Committee for Arab Culture. The platform provides information on ministries and cultural bodies and institutions, as well as an interactive online space to support dialogue between Arab thinkers and artists to advance Arab culture in digital platforms and strengthen the cultural sector in Arab countries.

More than five years into the conflict and resulting humanitarian crisis in Yemen, the country's unique cultural heritage has suffered severe collateral damage. UNESCO has taken steps to mobilize its partners and resources to safeguard the country's heritage during the conflict. UNESCO's EU-funded project "Cash for Work: Promoting Livelihood Opportunities of Urban Youth in Yemen" has reported progress in response efforts carried out in the World Heritage properties Sana'a, Shibam and Zabid, as well as the historical city of Aden in Yemen. Since its launch in 2018, the project has assessed 8,000 historical buildings and sites, and provided jobs for more than 4,000 youth.

Cash for Work, Yemen by UNESCO

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

At the 24th Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers, held online on 4 February 2021, ASEAN Tourism Ministers voiced their commitment to boosting sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism in the region. The meeting resulted in the adoption of the Phnom Penh Declaration on a More Sustainable, Inclusive, and Resilient ASEAN Tourism, developed by Cambodia. Ministers also encouraged ASEAN National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) to develop work programmes for its implementation and to promote the ASEAN Tourism Recovery. Similarly, the updated ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan (ATSP) 2016-2025 was endorsed, which outlines the strategic direction of future cooperation in the tourism sector, including regional corridors, and circuits and product packages for cultural and heritage tourism.

Amidst the fluctuating situation of the COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, countries in the region have taken steps to revive the cultural tourism sector and support tourism-dependent economies to recoup the millions of dollars in losses racked up throughout 2020. Australia and Singapore, for instance, are discussing the possibility of a "green lane" between the two countries with no 14-day isolation requirement upon arrival. The Indonesian Government says that it is currently drawing up plans for a "travel bubble" with four countries - China, South Korea, Japan and Australia - to help revive the country's tourism sector.

AFP Photo

EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

Voices Of Culture 2019 – 2021, the structured dialogue platform between civil society and the European Commission, underlined launched a call for applicants for its fourth topic on the status and working conditions of artists and cultural and creative professionals. Successful applicants in the cultural sector will be invited to a digital Brainstorming Meeting in April and to a Dialogue Meeting in Brussels in June to share inputs on these issues.

Several activities were launched in the framework of Horizon 2020, the EU's research and innovation programme to drive economic growth and create jobs over the period 2014-2020. The Horizon 2020 financed project TExTOUR aims to design innovative and sustainable cultural tourism strategies for the socio-economic territorial development of lesser known areas in Europe and beyond. The project will work with eight pilot Cultural Tourism Labs located within and outside the EU and beyond and involve a range of stakeholders with a relevant role in the in the cultural tourism sector. Similarly, the project Smart Cultural Tourism as a Driver of Sustainable Development of European Regions - SmartCulTour encourages community participation in the governance of cultural tourism destinations supported by tools for policy design, strategic planning and management. UNESCO is partnering with SmartCulTour and is in charge of coordinating work in six Living Labs (LLs): Scheldeland region in Flanders (Belgium); Utsjoki municipality in Lapland (Finland); Huesca province (Spain); city of Split metropolitan area (Croatia); city of Vicenza (Italy); and Rotterdam metropolitan region (The Netherlands).

Sveti Stefan island in Montenegro, AlbertoLoyo/Getty Images Pro

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (BCIE) signed an inter-institutional cooperation framework agreement on 4 February to boost the productivity and competitiveness of Central American economies and promote cultural and educational cooperation projects in the region. Through a series of research and targeted projects, the agreement notably focuses on developing competitiveness and productivity of young Ibero-Americans to advance employability. In addition, both institutions will carry out a diagnostic report to determine the current state of employability of young Ibero-Americans. On 9 February, the OEI also joined with Fundación Alternativas to organize a high-level meeting open to the public to analyse the situation of cultural rights in Ibero-America in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. The working document for the meeting "Cultural rights: towards a new generation of public policies", published by Fundación Alternativas, highlights the need for cultural policies to recognize culture as a fundamental human right.

Turning to the Caribbean sub-region, UNESCO is working to amplify youth voices by launching a platform for youth to express their views on equality, diversity and inclusion through the social media campaign #iRespectU. The campaign promotes an environment of peace and mutual understanding and factors in how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting issues around inclusion in the sub-region.

Jamaica Youth Theatre

CULTURAL TOURISM IN THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

Cultural tourism is increasingly recognized as a development driver, demonstrated by its inclusion in a third of all countries' Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), which aim to track progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Tourism contributes both directly and indirectly to most SDGs. Sustainable tourism is specifically referred to in SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) and SDG 14 (life below water). It is also a component of other culture-based policies, such as safeguarding cultural and natural heritage, thus contributing to the implementation of other SDGs, notably SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 15 (life on land). Similarly, the tourism sector can benefit from progress made in other SDGs.

The VNRs demonstrate that tourism is increasingly a component of national sustainable development plans. Countries are working to capitalize on their cultural and natural assets, as well as specific human capacities to advance development objectives, including through economic diversification, the socio-economic development of urban precincts and rural areas, skills development and job creation, promoting cultural diversity and social inclusion, and supporting conservation efforts. Moreover, the VNRs suggest a policy trend towards greater exploration of the linkages between cultural tourism and environmental protection.

CULTURAL ASSETS AS A DRIVING FORCE OF TOURISM

Many countries cite touristic initiatives that leverage cultural heritage and cultural and creative industries (CCIs) to achieve SDG targets 8.9 and 11.4. These actions often target the revitalization of urban and rural areas through culture-based strategies, including heritage regeneration, festivals and events, infrastructure development, and the promotion of local cultural products. As highlighted in last month's issue of the Tracker, the VNRs show that many countries are employing policies that couple tourism and handicrafts to achieve development goals. The strategic plan of **Senegal**, for instance, outlines actions for the development of new areas for tourism promotion, together with the promotion of cultural and creative industries. Meanwhile, in **Singapore** visitor experiences have been improved by injecting vibrancy into various urban precincts through festive celebrations and art events that have engaged local people and businesses. **Kuwait** launched the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad and the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Centers to develop new cultural districts and create a social and creative hub to showcase the country's heritage, host events and activities, and provide a space for dialogue and knowledge sharing.

Nepal mentions how an increase in tourism has benefitted people living in rural areas while raising awareness of the country's culture and natural landmarks. In **Panama**, the Afro-Panamanian Route promotes and strengthens the culture, identity and human rights of Afro-Panamanian people while striving for an authentic tourism experience. Creating a genuine cultural immersion experience is also central to **Brunei Darussalam's** work in community-based ecotourism. One such initiative, One Village One Product, provides opportunities for local communities to promote their handicrafts and performing arts to tourists.

As noted by several countries in their VNRs, safeguarding cultural heritage can stimulate tourism to strengthen or diversify local and national economies, as well as broaden participation in the global economy. This approach is underlined by the **Bahrain** Authority of Culture and Antiquities that highlights how its culture-based programmes "Spring of Culture", "Pearl Road" and "Our Heritage is Our Wealth" have been instrumental in promoting tourism. **Greece's** National Growth Strategy distinguishes cultural heritage, cultural and creative industries and tourism as one of eight priority areas for the country, which it considers integral to the country's globally competitive tourism product. The Greek Government is working on numerous projects to safeguard and raise awareness about the country's rich cultural heritage comprising archeological sites, museums and monuments. Heritage mapping, conservation and tourism are at the heart of an Interamerican Development Bank project in **Bahamas** that targets job creation for tour guides, researchers and other cultural professionals.

Ballet Revolucion, Spring of Culture, Bahrain,

LINKING GREEN AND BLUE TOURISM

Several countries cite strategies that draw on cultural and natural heritage, the environment and biodiversity as a way of advancing sustainable tourism. Many of these actions focus on nurturing a stronger environmental consciousness on the part of the tourism provider and consumer, and highlight greater stakeholder engagement at local level. **Guyana's** Green State Development Strategy (Vision 2040) includes objectives and actions related to the development of ecotourism as part of the sustainable development of the country. **Uruguay's** National Plan of Sustainable Tourism features two main objectives that target tourism development by building the knowledge of cultural and natural resources, and promoting the use of renewable resources and environmentally-friendly technologies. This is supported by the country's Tourism Green Seal that recognizes the efforts of tourism establishments to improve their environmental activities. **Canada** mentions Parks Canada, an organization present in more than 400 communities that promotes and preserves national parks and historic sites and protects indigenous communities in the parks. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Community Economic Development Initiative also works in partnership with First Nations across Canada to complete joint community economic development (CED) plans and strategies on issues such as employment strategies, business parks and land-use planning, and mapping culturally significant sites to aid with tourism and improve public consultation.

The teardrop-shaped Ôasis is an elevated accommodation offering/Parks Canada

Niger River, from the left bank – Corniche de Yantala, Niamey, Niger by mtcurado

Niger plans to improve its touristic accommodation capacity by favouring more environmentally friendly ecotourism, particularly in biosphere reserves, the Addax Sanctuary and other protected areas. The country is also developing a master plan for sustainable tourism development, training tourist guides, organizing events and developing the green belt of Niamey. **Iceland** emphasizes responsible tourism and treating the land with consideration and respect for nature; an approach supported by measurable factors for sustainability and social responsibility. The country's overarching strategy for tourism aligns with a project on sustainable food tourism (2019-2020) under Iceland's Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Investing in sustainable tourism can also be a strategy for economic diversification, as stated by **Liberia**, which proposes to capitalize on ecotourism to conserve biodiversity, reduce deforestation and generate revenue. In 2020, the Liberian Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Green Ecovillage Network for the construction of Green Ecovillages that will focus on the regeneration of natural environments, the preservation of cultural heritage and the improvement of the livelihoods of various communities.

Malta cites a joint project with Italy, Greece, Albania and Spain to promote smart and sustainable growth in Mediterranean coastal touristic cities through integrated sustainable tourism models for better energy, water and waste management, which is underpinned by the enhancement of local heritage and natural resources, as well as the promotion of responsible behavior by tourists. **Indonesia** reports on the Belitung Mangrove Park, which was transformed from land previously used for mining in order to rehabilitate ecosystems and reduce carbon emissions. The country foresees planting 330 ha of mangrove and coastal forests, education on mangroves and coastal forests, and the active involvement of the community in the park's management.

The importance of the blue economy to development is mentioned by several countries, including **Norway**, which invests heavily in research into ocean-based industries, including tourism. The blue economy is also included as part of development strategies of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), where tourism industries often comprise a large share of the economy. **Cabo Verde**, for example, is working to raise awareness of its blue economy as an integrated policy to improve its tourism sector, address inequalities, ensure the sustainable development of marine resources, and participate in the global economy. The **Netherlands** cites the Caribbean Research and Management of Biodiversity Foundation based in Curaçao that conducts studies in the region promoting scientific tourism. The initiative seeks to increase the number of researchers visiting Curaçao while boosting the protection of the unique marine ecosystems and coral reefs. Such projects help reinvest economic dividends from tourism into conservation activities and support the livelihoods of local communities.

Senja, Norway
by, VisitNorway

LATEST NEWS

UNESCO CELEBRATES THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF CREATIVE ECONOMY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

UNESCO celebrated the International Year on 1 February and released an accompanying roadmap in conjunction with the annual Intergovernmental Committee of the 2005 Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which was held online from 1 to 6 February 2021. The 14th session of the Intergovernmental Committee approved funding for six International Fund for Cultural Diversity (IFCD) projects, and examined preliminary conclusions from over 240 UNESCO ResiliArt debates held throughout 2020.

READ MORE

ICELAND BOOSTS EFFORTS FOR CREATIVE ECONOMY RECOVERY IN BEIRUT

The Government of Iceland has signed an agreement with UNESCO to provide direct support to artists and cultural associations in Beirut through the creation of training programmes in the fields of the performing arts, music, visual arts and cinema. The 15 million ISK (US$116,000) pledge will support UNESCO's LiBeirut initiative that was launched following the explosions in Beirut last August to aid in the recovery of education and culture in the city.

READ MORE

INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

International Mother Language Day, celebrated every year on 21 February, seeks to boost awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism. This year's theme for the International Day "Fostering multilingualism for inclusion in education and society," focused on promoting inclusive educational policies that integrate linguistic diversity, and ensuring access to education in the first language or mother tongue in early childhood education.

READ MORE