***The Right to Heritage as a Catalyst for Sustainable Development***

*SPEU 2021 - International Conference,* September 10 – 11, 2021

Executive Summary and Follow-up Proposal

**Rationale and findings of the conference**

In Europe, **cultural heritage as a part of sustainable development** is a fact and appears in various strategies and financial frameworks. In sustainable development, its **economic dimension** is recognised and promoted. However, heritage is much more than that. To be able to assert all its aspects and values, we need to be aware of heritage rights and claiming them in favour of a development that will be truly sustainable.

We need to approach heritage in all its **complexity**, from architectural heritage, urban contexts, and landscapes to the intangible heritage, inextricably linked to the community and its identity.

Heritage plays an essential role in the quality of life of Europeans, so we need to cultivate an approach that focuses on individuals and the community, emphasising cultural aspects and the knowledge accumulated in heritage. In addition, several cross-cutting themes, some of which are also highlighted in current European initiatives, seek to achieve human well-being. These cross-cutting themes include sustainability, climate change, the European Green Deal, high-quality architecture (Baukultur) and the New European Bauhaus.

**Cultural and heritage rights are recognised as a value** based on specific international and European legal frameworks. The most frequently exposed are the Framework convention of the Council of Europe on the value of cultural heritage for society and the Council of Europe Convention on offences relating to cultural property. They guide the exercise of heritage rights and the obligations associated with those rights (to respect the heritage of others, to resolve various interpretations of heritage peacefully, restrictions arising from other human rights, and the duty to act against illegal conduct). Countries, including those outside the EU, are invited to ratify the conventions. However, only a broad transposition into national legal systems will enable efforts to ensure that heritage is adequately supported and that its destruction is sanctioned.

The right to heritage stems from the right to **insights into existential issues of modern man based on knowledge, ability to express, create and enjoy the values** reflected in our heritage and the quality and cultural diversity of our living environment. In this way, the right to heritage contributes to the sustainable development of both the individual and society.

At the level of individual communities, the right to heritage is identified with the **right to language**, which leads us to consider implementing the educational process so that this right will be exercised.

Suppose heritage rights in Europe and partly around the world have at least declarative support. In that case, adequate support for their implementation in sustainable development is not self-evident even in the European Union. While efforts are needed in third world countries to persuade governments and raise public awareness to recognise at least the economic potential of heritage, economic pressure on heritage is prevalent in Europe. Moreover, along with economic development and the current geopolitical situation, the European Union faces the challenges of migration, which raises the question of migrants' right to their heritage, its values and their attitude towards the majority's heritage and its values.

The level of exercise of the right to heritage is particularly recognisable in cases of **difficult heritage**, i.e., heritage related to the violation of human rights. The speakers touched on such painful points of the common past, which in the form of heritage represent the memory of the community's often silenced and dark stories.

The **active approach to cultural heritage is an essential element of sustainable development**, but this is not sufficiently recognised in the international community. It is also difficult to monitor the actual situation in this area because there are no **concrete indicators** for evaluating heritage sustainability.

The **idealisation of the paradigm of a non-conflicting relationship between natural and cultural sustainability** is often called into question, where a more balanced relationship between the two should be pursued.

In the context of the heritage impact assessment, the speakers drew attention to the **conflict of values within the concept of heritage rights** when, for example, interventions that endanger heritage values were carried out to improve accessibility. The solution lies in inclusive communication, the establishment and cultivation of partnerships and respect for heritage values.

Discussions at the Conference showed that many European and global organisations, intergovernmental bodies, scholars, experts, and civil society respond to development challenges and opportunities in the heritage field. Those views are eventually integrated into European policies, programmes, and initiatives.

**Conference main conclusions**

From the discussions at the Conference, we can deduct specific guidelines and initiatives.

The **legislative framework** offers a first step towards regulating general issues. However, loose legislation tends to lead to a distorted attitude towards heritage and heritage rights.

Legislation must enable **public participation** in heritage protection in spatial planning and other procedures concerning the quality of life and where decisions are made on implementing the public interest related to heritage. This part is still relatively under-established.

In parallel with measures of a legal and administrative nature, **soft approaches** are needed, building an array of participatory tools and practices that promote dialogue, active stakeholders’ involvement in heritage work, share responsibilities between authorities and the public concerned, and peaceful resolution of heritage disputes.

The problem of **difficult heritage** can be alleviated, at least in part, by legislation redressing injustices or regulating remembrance, or by practices, such as in museums that address the sensitive topic through personal stories and thus involve all parties affected. However, we mustn't trigger new conflicts by addressing such a conflict heritage. It takes courageous confrontation and awareness of difficult moments, overcoming them and establishing shared values that connect individual experiences.

Cultural **diversity** is as necessary **for humankind as biodiversity is for nature** is a crucial analogy indicated by the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. This realisation can be essential to our survival in times of crisis since it essentially reconnects humans and nature.

The potential for **public participation in promoting heritage** **digitalisation** and establishing a community in which individuals are not passive users, but essential co-creators of e-heritage content brings immense opportunities to museums and other heritage institutions.

We can sum up the conference conclusions with the following lines:

* Heritage rights and sustainable development are highly correlated.
* Exercising heritage rights depends more on soft approaches than legalistic ones.
* Heritage rights can give sustainable development policies better chances of success because of underpinning their humanistic dimension.

Considering European and international frameworks, complementarity and cooperation prove to be a necessary condition. We can only ensure heritage sustainability through a long-term approach, which is especially true of deliberating upon these aspects at the **Conference on the Future of Europe**.

From all these insights, the humanistic message of the Conference emanates**. Culture and heritage should become the humanistic agenda of Europe, united around European values**, as heritage is above all part of our humanistic tradition.

**Possible follow-up**

1. **Address culture and cultural heritage as constituents of European Union strategic considerations:**

* In line with the Rome Declaration of G20 ministers of culture, the Ljubljana Conference on the rights to heritage and the Europa nostra Venice call for action advocate cultural heritage at the G20 Heads of State and Government Summit 2021,
* At the Conference of the Future of Europe, raise the profile of cultural and heritage rights.

1. K**eep mainstreaming cultural heritage into present EU policies, especially in**:

* New Bauhaus Initiative,
* European Green Deal,
* EU external relations.

1. **Prepare 2023 - 2026 Council Work Plan, which will:**

* Develop tools for reaching sustainable development goals through exercising heritage rights for:
  + Dialogue and participatory approach,
  + Sustainable heritage management,
  + Implementing quality principles and indicators for evaluating the contribution of heritage rights to sustainable development goals.
* Combine such tools with the development of knowledge ecosystems where heritage wisdom gets community support to be creatively used for a sustainable future.