

Promoting cultural heritage could boost EU economy

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Opinion

Safeguarding Europe's cultural heritage part of our common values say Parliament deputies



Safeguarding Europe's cultural heritage is a key priority for MEPs in Parliament's culture and education committee. However, this is no easy feat.

Chair Silvia Costa explains, "Our historical, artistic and cultural heritage is just as threatened as our natural heritage. Yet it is an important part of the common identity of any place. Time is running out for the environment, and the same applies to cultural heritage - it needs to be protected everywhere."

A European four-year agenda, running until 2018, is currently in place, and Costa believes, "This is our chance to seize the opportunity to promote culture, creativity and the valorisation of cultural heritage as a competitive sector, able to express its full economic potential and lead to social growth. It must be able to boost social inclusion, innovation and quality employment. This is crucial."

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Last June, the committee adopted a report titled, 'Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe'. They believe cultural heritage must be safeguarded throughout the continent.

As S&D group shadow rapporteur Luigi Morgano explains, "cultural heritage refers to a wide array of material and immaterial expressions, such as architecture and landscapes; languages, music and traditions, including those related to religious heritage."

"Through these expressions, it is the story of we Europeans and we human that is being told, it is the founding values of European identity - from the local to the supranational - that are shared and promoted between citizens."

Morgano offers some ideas as to how to safeguard cultural heritage. He underlines that this "bears an economic and strategic potential. The cost of conservation really is an investment in our future. We can make this explicit by clarifying and extending the scope and amounts of European funds for SMEs and training in traditional crafts."

"We can also promote the European cultural heritage label in association with a European cultural card, granting access to heritage sites for vulnerable groups of society, such as children, the elderly, disabled people."

The Italian MEP also notes that, "cultural heritage isn't limited to its tourist dimension. In telling a universal story, educating about and safeguarding cultural heritage promotes understanding between different cultures. This is the first step towards mutual respect."

"Think about the destruction of cultural sites by Isis/Daesh; Palmyra in Syria told of commercial relations between Romans and Persians, of the meeting of different - distant - cultures."

"Destroying archaeological sites in Palmyra was symbolically destroying the intercultural approach they represented. As such, these are war crimes, crimes against humanity. Safeguarding cultural heritage, then, can also become - if I'm allowed an oxymoron - a real weapon of peace."

Greens/EFA group shadow rapporteur Ernest Maragall points out that, "Culture is one of the main instruments for achieving a cohesive society and maintain a shared and diverse European identity. As stated in Parliament's report, cultural heritage is the silent witness to our centuries long history, creativity and struggles."

"It is one of the pillars of European culture and our common legacy for the future generations. Europe's cultural heritage is one of the engines that helps build a shared identity based on an intercultural dialogue."

The Spanish deputy also says, "The EU makes a commitment on creativity and innovation and sets its

goals to develop a smart economy based on knowledge."

"Our cultural heritage has the capacity to underpin our cultural and creative industries and inspire creators and thinkers, if we are capable of making it available in the digital era."

However, for EFDD group shadow rapporteur Isabella Adinolfi, Parliament's report is lacking in certain aspects. She explains, "as the EU does not have direct jurisdiction over cultural heritage, the report cannot go into more detail on some key aspects."

"It would have been useful to have covered, for example, the development of specific recommendations for defining delicate areas like specialist staff training or guidelines for technical work that could be applied to cultural heritage in terms of preserving and promoting this heritage."

"Cultural heritage is a complex, delicate issue, and a report with such general recommendations could actually end up being counterproductive."

In her view, "Europe, especially in light of the economic crisis, cultural heritage has unfortunately been seen more as an opportunity for making money, the chance to boost economic growth and tourism."

"This has seen a real boom - but one that can in no way be sustainable - rather than as a legacy that our ancestors have handed down to us and that we need to protect for future generations."

About the author

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