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Cultural heritage and climate change

Reply to Recommendation[1]: Recommendation 2277 (2024)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully examined Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2277 (2024) "Cultural heritage and climate change" and has forwarded it to the Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP) and to the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) for information and possible comments.

2. The Committee of Ministers welcomes the nexus between cultural heritage and mitigation and adaptation strategies to fight climate change and draws attention to the fact that, for many years, the Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP) has expressed concerns about the threat that climate change poses to cultural heritage in Europe. Aware that the link between culture and nature plays a crucial role in sustainable development, in 2023 the Steering Committee adopted L.I.N.K.E.D: Guiding principles for an integrated approach to culture, nature and landscape management, which aim to offer member States pointers for a holistic approach in policy-making, management, research and practice with an emphasis on integrating environmental awareness and justice.

3. The European Heritage Days, the most widely celebrated participatory cultural event shared by people living in or visiting Europe, featured in 2022 the theme of Sustainable Heritage. The focus was on the active role of communities building a more sustainable and resilient future for European heritage, in the context of environmental changes and related risks. In 2026, the theme will be Heritage at Risk; it will offer an opportunity to raise awareness of the critical risks confronting our built and natural environment, and how we might preserve it for future generations. Finally, using good practices from the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe as models of sustainable local development is another tool for addressing current climate challenges.

4. The Committee also pays special attention to the development and sharing of knowledge to better understand and mitigate the effects of the triple environmental planetary crisis, with a focus on the impact of climate change on tangible and intangible cultural heritage. From this perspective, it remains convinced that only increased synergy between the various international organisations involved in cultural heritage can effectively tackle the negative impact of climate change and encourage joint initiatives and co-ordinated actions to evaluate the potential impact of climate change on cultural heritage and to suggest how to mitigate such negative effects.

5. The Committee of Ministers would also underline that the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) has recently approved a draft Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on the social, economic and political participation of rural youth which, amongst others, highlights the need for policies and programmes to support the preservation, continuous transformation and transmission of cultural heritage. The draft text recalls the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CETS No. 199, so-called Faro Convention), which speaks of the importance of cultural heritage for the well-being of societies, particularly in rural areas, and its role in fostering a sense of identity and community belonging. This perspective is particularly important at a time when research points to a marked increase in mental health concerns amongst young people, including the phenomenon often referred to as "eco-anxiety", in the post-Covid era.

1. Adopted at the 1517th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (22 January 2025).

6. The European Youth Centres in Strasburg and Budapest are also prominent examples of significant tangible youth cultural heritage sites for the European youth sector. Established in 1972 and 1995 respectively, the Centres have become central meeting spaces, playing host to thousands of young people, young multipliers and activists in training activities, consultations and youth meetings. The Task Force dedicated to seeking ways to "green" the youth sector invited the Youth Department to report annually on the European Youth Centres' measures to incorporate sustainability in their operations and activities.

7. As regards the recommendation to develop "participatory governance models to involve the public, and especially young people, to engage in climate action and climate-related decision-making processes", the Committee of Ministers recalls the Reykjavík Declaration's commitment to strengthening the work on the human rights aspects of the environment and to integrate a youth perspective in the work of the Council of Europe. In these contexts, the Youth Department is actively engaged in the Inter-secretariat task force on the environment (TFE), and the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) will participate in the meetings of the newly created Multidisciplinary Group on the Environment (GME) providing a youth perspective in the preparation of a Council of Europe's first Environmental Strategy. Regarding the youth perspective, co-operation with several Council of Europe sectors is being actively pursued to explore how to integrate a youth perspective into their work.

8. The Committee of Ministers also draws attention to its recently adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 on young people and climate action. It is a groundbreaking text aimed at addressing the challenges arising from the climate crisis that young people face. It is the first international instrument to highlight the need to protect young people's rights, to involve them in climate decision-making processes, as well as to fight all forms of discrimination, with a special focus on climate justice. It encourages establishing accessible consultation platforms and removing structural obstacles that limit young voices in shaping climate policies.

9. Finally, the Council of Europe's Youth sector strategy 2030 and the Youth for Democracy programme reflect extensively young people's growing concerns with the acuteness of the climate crisis and its impact on the present and future of young generations. In 2020, the CMJ organised a thematic debate on "young people's right to a healthy environment" which resulted in the setting up of a dedicated Task Force to seek ways to "green" the youth sector. A Symposium on "Young people, democracy and climate action", organised by the European Commission and the Council of Europe partnership in the field of youth, took place on 24-26 September 2024 in the European Youth Centre Strasbourg. 120 young people, members of non-governmental youth organisations, voluntary and professional youth workers as well as researchers and policy makers discussed on changing ways in which young people are engaging with the climate crisis, their advocacy efforts and the main emerging priorities and challenges.