

CRE-ACTIVE YOUTH PROMOTING CULTURAL HERITAGE FOR TOMORROW

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Abstract: The term conservation includes complex and differentiated valorisation activities of the cultural and natural heritage which link the past to the present. So do young people, bridging the past, the present and the future. This paper presents some examples of projects based on creative access for young people enabling them to be active contributors in the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage creatively, fostering volunteer work as well as new ways of employability. It focuses on the added value youth participation can offer at the individual (sense of accountability, active civic engagement, identity and competences building) and societal level (inter-cultural and inter-generational dialogue, appreciation of cultural differences, youth-friendly innovations).

Keywords: heritage, degradation, conservation, youth participation, volunteer..

1 Introduction

According to the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage [1], the cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artifacts (monuments, groups of buildings and sites) and intangible attributes of a group or society which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art, science, aesthetic, ethnology and/or anthropology. It provides testimonies to, and links between the past and the present [2].

The state of conservation of many very old important cultural objectives is impacted not only by the environment aggressiveness, but also by domestic and industrial activities, and by the cultural and environmental education level of people. Over time deterioration and degradation processes can affect the physical, structural and functional state of artifacts leading to the partial or complete deletion of the messages they convey. These processes can be grouped into [3] natural deterioration/degradation - caused by the action of climatic factors, normal physical, chemical and biological factors, or natural disasters (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, lightning, etc.) and, conscious (anthropogenic) deterioration/degradation - caused out of ignorance, negligence, carelessness or inattention by anthropogenic catastrophes, such as vandalism (due to war, fanaticism, architects and developers, large-scale tourism and people's inappropriate behaviors based on educational deficiencies, etc.) [4].

To stop and prevent these processes, as well as to valorise the cultural heritage and to preserve its historical messages from the past for the future generations it is necessary to intervene efficiently and effectively with conservation processes. In a broad sense, the term conservation includes investigation/research activities, preservation, restoration, valorisation and hoarding [3, 5].

Adopting a participatory approach, community members can be motivated to redefine their individual roles and responsibilities consciously, voluntarily and creatively [1, 6, 7], taking an active stand in the conservation processes of cultural heritage.

2. Volunteering for cultural heritage

The European Union since many years and especially in 2011 (the European Year of Volunteering) engaged local administration representatives responsible for cultural and educational policies, trainers from public and private structures,

cultural associations and non-governmental organizations in actions promoting (young) citizens' (active) participation.

In 2012 the Volunteer Service Center Tuscany (Servizi Volontariato Toscana) - Cesvot from Italy and Promo P.A. Foundation issued The Magna Charta of volunteering for cultural heritage (La Magna Charta del volontariato per i beniculturali) and Guide to the use of voluntary informed (Guida all'uso del volontario informato) aiming to create practical guides and framework for recognition, scheduling and organization of the volunteer work in cultural heritage [8].

In the same direction, the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions has presented in 2014 an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe, stating that cultural heritage as a shared resource and a common good offers important educational and volunteering opportunities for young people beside promoting inter-cultural and inter-generational dialogue [9].

At the present young people across the world are increasingly involved in cultural heritage preservation, valorisation and promotion [2] and their participation is based on cultural rights to access and participate freely in cultural life, to express their views on all matters affecting them and to participate in the cultural life of the community, developing and sharing knowledge and cultural expressions [10, 11].

Enabling youth to contribute with their participation to the promotion of cultural heritage in creative and innovative ways has many benefits: it strengthens one's sense of identity and belonging, supports personal development of potentials, resources and competences (individual well-being) as well as active citizenship (civic engagement) and inclusion in the (trans)cultural communities and in the (multicultural - intercultural) society (societal well-being).

Youth are a bridge between past, present and future generations and key agents in promoting heritage values that can favor intercultural understanding and respect for cultural diversity [2].

Considering the fact that young people represent the 25% of the world's population, involving them in the cultural heritage conservation means to develop attitudes and practices based on transmitting and promoting civic, cultural and participatory values such as [2, 12, 13]: respect for history and cultural diversity, loyalty, honesty, intercultural understanding of the social usage of cultural property and its preservation, teamwork and accessibility – equal rights and opportunities for informed engagement (access and participation) in the cultural life of a community, responsibility and voluntary participation and transparent dialogue.

These values, promoted in connection with new technological developments, have stimulated new ways of interpreting knowledge, a better understanding of the importance of both tangible (monuments, historical centers, natural reserves, etc.) and intangible heritage (traditional know-how, music, literature, etc.). By exploiting the benefits of online information and internet access, skills development training courses are also being integrated, whenever possible, into the agenda of youth forums, teacher-training seminars, workshops and volunteer action camps [14].

The World Heritage Education Programme of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) strives to involve youth with many different projects and activities such as Youth Forums, skills development training courses, educative workshops and seminars, the World Heritage Volunteer Programme and its main tool, the World Heritage in Young Hands, an educational resource kit for school teachers, existing in 37 national language versions that has reached at least one million young students [15].

2.1 Creative involvement of young people

Engaging youth through volunteer work, employment and local entrepreneurship, recreational, and educational (and training) initiatives is vital for achieving sustainable, whole-community (pro-active and citizen-centered) and long-term development with partnerships between different stakeholders and actors, between non-profit and for-profit organizations [16].

Several projects can be mentioned as good examples regarding involvement of young people directly both as target group and giving them active roles recognizing them as resources and added value.

At a broad, international level, the World Heritage Volunteers initiative launched in 2008 to mobilize young people and youth organizations in World Heritage preservation and promotion consists of awareness raising youth action camps, involved so far over 2000 national and international volunteer participants [17].

Neighbouring countries also do cooperate. The project Living Fountains - Reviving Water Wells and Ponds, implemented within the 2007-2013 Slovenia-Italy Cross-Border Cooperation Programme, for example, envisaged the restoration and arrangement of 32 water wells and ponds as monuments of cultural heritage shared in the cross-border Karst area. It involved active participation of pupils from primary and lower secondary schools in creating material on the cultural and historical value of water wells, educational trails and revive events (with poetry, art, concerts, etc.) linked to the historical aspect of the cultural heritage represented by water wells [18].

At the national and local level involvement of youth in cultural heritage promotion is also vital, like for instance in developing countries, such as Albania, where youth, despite being a large portion of the society, often feel excluded from most of the political and societal processes. They face various challenges, such as unemployment, mobility issues, lack of updated educational resources, low living standards, corruption, juvenile delinquency, lack of consistent youth policies or programs to allow them participation [19]. Joint efforts of local and national organizations to raise awareness of youth civic engagement in cultural heritage protection are often successful in obtaining benefits for the youngsters and for the society.

The Ministry of Culture in Albania, for instance, lately aims to build a network called Friends of Cultural Heritage [20], involving 166 primary and secondary national schools to volunteer in maintaining heritage objects, on one hand saving on employed staff members in times of general economic crisis, on the other hand enhancing youngsters' accountability and contribution to the cultural heritage as they are themselves engaged in identification, protection, preservation and promotion of heritage buildings and cultural monuments in the vicinity of their schools.

Another project, titled From GjirokaStar, Made in Gjirokastra [19], aims to encourage young people toward cultural heritage market of crafts products for their permanent employment. The City of Gjirokastra promotes the development of youngsters' creative skills by supporting their employment in the field of cultural heritage and the production of souvenirs for the tourist market.

The Cultural Heritage Without Borders Regional Restoration Camps [21], winner of a 2014 European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Award in the category of "Education, Training and Awareness-Raising", represent another simple and successful training model, which developed and grew from a few national students in 2007 to multiple sessions in four countries in 2013, with a diverse array of participants in the Western Balkans. The main objectives were to use cultural heritage to build relations among young professionals, creating conditions for reconciliation as a prerequisite for peace and democracy, and to preserve traditional crafts and techniques.

Another example which aims to propose and promote actions and /or projects regarding restoration and heritage development in the context of local community can be found in the activity of the Union REMPART, member of the European Forum Heritage Association and of the CCSVI (international voluntary work co-ordination committee), recognised as a public utility organisation by the Ministries of Culture, Youth, Education, Environment, Social Affairs, and Foreign Affairs as well. By their concrete actions on cultural heritage assets, they contribute to the planning and local development. They are also in a process of awareness raising and training of young people about cultural heritage in a dynamic of citizenship education through participation in collective actions [20].

3. Conclusions

The potential of cultural heritage is a creative force that brings youth together in a process based on participation and the young creative generation is increasingly becoming a resource for amelioration of the status quo. Youth and creativity (including innovation to create youth-friendly accessible resources and methodologies) are valuable sources of help in actively overcoming challenges related to cultural heritage preservation, valorisation and promotion and general societal and economic challenges. With their active involvement society can foster inclusive and sustainable growth.

Cultural events and activities based on direct involvement of youth promote the basic rights to have access and to participate in the cultural life of a society. Engaging youth in different cultural projects and activities have the immediately effect to transform them from ordinary users of cultural heritage and cultural space in volunteer, spontaneous, self-mobilized, self-determined supporters who become part of a shared culture which respects their contribution. In this direction this short paper presented some examples of projects having young people actively contributing to the promotion and preservation of cultural heritage for future generations at local, national, cross-border and international levels.

Further research could focus and explore more in detail the added value and benefits at individual and collective level of engaging vulnerable and disadvantage youth through cultural heritage maintenance and promotion in ways that are inclusive and appealing to them: young people from historic and new minorities (from different linguistic, cultural, ethnic, religious backgrounds), those who face poor employment

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