



# The Tracker

CULTURE & PUBLIC POLICY



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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.

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## AT A GLANCE

Digital technologies are shaping culture and how we relate to culture. From 3D satellite imagery of World Heritage sites to virtual reality museums to digital arts, they are having an impact on the cultural sector. This month's Tracker focuses on the consequences of these technologies across all areas of cultural policy, including for the UNESCO 2005 Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which celebrates its 15th anniversary this month.

The **Cultural Policy Highlights** section features the latest measures at the national level, many of which strengthen cultural policy frameworks in the digital environment.

In the **Cutting Edge** section, we delve into the state-of-the-art applications of digital technologies in the cultural sector, uncover the challenges of this new technological landscape and debate what values should be at the heart of designing cultural public policies.

Regional and sub-regional organizations, as well as regional development banks, continue to strengthen cooperation in the cultural domain: the **Regional Perspectives** section covers the latest developments.

The section **Culture in the 2030 Agenda** examines initiatives from Voluntary National Reviews that harness digital technologies in their cultural sectors, in heritage management, the expansion of access to culture and cultural education.

See **Find Out More** for the latest publications from UNESCO. Also, discover a new awareness-raising campaign on the illicit trafficking of cultural property, to highlight the role the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property has played during the past 50 years.



filipefrazao, 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 are transitioning from recovery measures to longer term strategies to build resilience in their cultural sectors.

The **Bahrain** Authority for Culture and Antiquities has announced that a new school to support young creatives will be housed in the Manama Industrial School, which will be rehabilitated for this purpose. The project is part of the country's strategy to develop infrastructure supporting traditional handicrafts and industries. The school will welcome those working as fashion designers, photographers, cinema directors, and architects.



Bahrain-Confidential

The National Arts Council of **Zimbabwe**, supported by the EU/UNESCO Expert Facility, has launched a survey on regular modes of music consumption. The survey is addressed to any music consumer or musician living in Zimbabwe, as well as members of the Zimbabwean diaspora living abroad who regularly listen to Zimbabwean music.

The Minister of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth of **Cyprus** has set up an advisory committee of experts from various fields of culture in order to guide the formulation of a policy proposal for the creation of a Ministry of Culture, as well as to bolster the policy framework on the status of the artist and cultural professionals.

**South Africa's** Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan contains plans to safeguard almost 30,000 jobs in the cultural and creative sector, as part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus. The Department of Sports, Arts and Culture will oversee measures to boost the resilience of the cultural sector, including through supporting digital creation and e-commerce. Further public employment opportunities will also be provided through digitizing national archives and artists' residencies, as well as incentives for marketing graduates to support creative industries.

The Ministry of Culture and Sports of the **Republic of Kazakhstan** has launched a cultural and educational project, "Ulagatty Urpak", aimed at expanding school children's knowledge of national culture and 'masterpieces of world culture'. The project provides short video lessons for the children to be able to take virtual tours to the sacred places of Kazakhstan, and experience examples of opera, ballet, music dramatic art, as well as Kazakhstani and foreign films and cartoons.



Ministry of Culture and Sports, Republic of Kazakhstan

The Minister for Creative Industries of **Saint Lucia** has announced that the country will review its National Cultural Policy (introduced in 1999) in order to adapt its vision, content and implementation modalities, in line with the country's priorities for sustainable development, particularly through the development of its creative sector.





# CULTURAL POLICY HIGHLIGHTS



AlHarby, Getty Images

The Ministry of Culture of **Saudi Arabia** has announced it will set up the Red Sea Museum in the port town of Jeddah, which will be inaugurated in late 2022. The museum will contain artworks, manuscripts and books that tell the story of the contact between residents of the Red Sea coast and the world. It will also launch educational programmes for all age groups.

The Congress of **Peru** has approved a bill that encourages reading and promotes the book industry, including by extending tax benefits for that sector for a period of three years. The new legislation aims to boost the Peruvian publishing industry and promote public libraries.

The Ministry of Culture of **Estonia** has launched a process for a report on economic models and social protections for freelance artists. Acknowledging that the incomes of freelance artists tend to be irregular, and that they are very directly affected by both socio-economic and cultural policy changes, the Ministry has allocated 4.2 million euros (USD 4.9 million) for such creative professionals.



Debashis RC Biswas, Unsplash

The capital of New Dehli, **India**, has set up an advisory panel for the promotion of art, culture and languages to help draft a "cultural policy" for the city. The panel is reported to be working on a set of recommendations on various aspects of cultural policy like community outreach and participation, inclusiveness, infrastructure, publicity, financial assistance, arts, education, research and development, documentation and archiving, the promotion of languages, festivals and events, art forms, and both tangible and intangible heritage.

The Ministry of Culture and Heritage of **Oman** has adopted a new law on protecting and safeguarding national cultural heritage, in line with the 2040 Oman Vision Strategy. The new law covers cultural heritage within the country, heritage created by Omanis outside of the country and foreign nationals within Oman.



Oman Observer

In **Japan**, the first provisions of a recently revised copyright law came into force. The national Copyright Law, which was updated in June, includes revisions that strengthen copyright protections from illegal download and the establishment of a new certification system.



Bulat Silvia, Getty Images



# CULTURAL POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

The Ministry of Culture of **Jordan** has decided to reorganize its publishing policy in order to promote philosophy among Jordanian and Arab youth. The plans aim to increase knowledge but also improve abilities to collect and critically assess contemporary knowledge, though Islamic, Western, ancient and modern schools of philosophy.



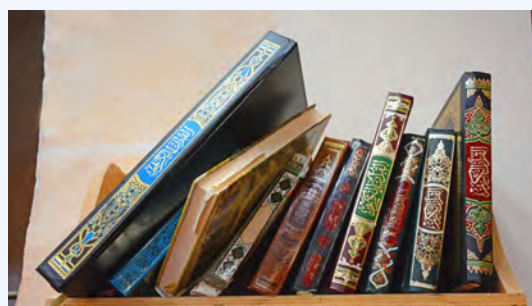
Ayman Yusuf, Unsplash



African Way, Getty Images Pro

The Cabinet Secretary at the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Heritage of **Kenya** expressed her gratitude on receiving the final Recommendations for Resilience and Sustainable Growth for the Culture and Creative Industries in Kenya. The recommendations were presented by the UNESCO Nairobi Office, in partnership with several other organizations, following a series of ResiliArt|Kenya debates between May and July, and include measures such as strengthening data collection and legislation to protect artists.

In **Algeria**, the Ministry of Culture and Arts has unveiled plans to revive the National Foundation for Typographic Arts. The plan aims to reorient the distribution strategy and ensure that all readers can access newly released book series at affordable prices.



IMNATURE, Getty Images

The Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism of **Burkina Faso** has launched the first call for projects in the performing arts, film and audiovisual, crafts and design sectors to help boost tourism and the creative sector. Some one billion CFA francs (USD 1.8 million) are available through the Cultural and Tourism Development Fund for such initiatives, thanks to the bilateral assistance of the European Union under the overall Support Programme for Creative Industries and Cultural Governance.



The Prime Minister of **Viet Nam** has announced the establishment of a National Council for Cultural Heritage. This new body is designed to provide advice on issues related to national monuments and artefacts with a view to facilitating cultural exchanges with other countries and establishing specialised museums within the country.

Nam Nguyen





# CULTURAL POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture of **Namibia**, in partnership with the Business Intellectual Property Authority and with the support of the EU-UNESCO Expert Facility, has launched the Intellectual Property and Local Content Project. The project aims to contribute to developing a measure to boost local content production and revise copyright legislation to adequately address the new challenges presented by the digital environment.



One Africa TV

The National Assembly of **France** voted unanimously on 6 October a bill on the restitution of cultural goods to the Republic of Benin and the Republic of Senegal.

The Education, Culture and Sports Commission of the National Assembly of **Panama** approved the draft General Law of Culture in the first debate. The draft law includes provisions for a competitive fund for artists of 5 million balboas (USD 5 million).



DebraCarrPhotography, Getty Images

The recently published **Canada** Council for the Arts annual report shows that the country has doubled its investment in international cultural activities, including through cooperation with cultural leaders and artists abroad. The report shows that funding to Indigenous artists, groups and arts organizations has tripled, meeting its budget target to contribute to the fostering "a shared future free of discrimination".

The Ministry of Culture of **Argentina** has announced its Federal Plan to Strengthen Culture. It aims to "strengthen the various expressions of culture to contribute to the reconstruction of the country". With an additional investment of 2 billion pesos (USD 25 million), the extra funding is mainly designed to support the cultural industries, as well as to support individual artists and other cultural professionals financially through October, November and December. It supplements the 1000 million pesos that have already been allocated, particularly to protect cultural spaces and organizations.



Eduardo Sánchez, Unsplash



# Protecting and preserving cultural diversity in the digital era



teamLab

**W**e are already living in the digital era. In the past few years, the digital technologies that have shaken up many aspects of our daily lives – how we relate to each other and experience the world – have begun to also have a profound impact on the cultural sector. Cultural institutions and individual cultural professionals in many parts of the world are busy enlisting digital technologies to make up for lost time. Increasingly, culture fans can watch theatre productions or concerts, or explore the cultural riches of a museum or heritage site of another country from their homes. Cultural institutions are changing how archivists and curators work due to digital platforms, while social media has opened up opportunities to reach new audiences. For craftspeople, artists and numerous other cultural professionals, transformations to the cultural value chain have transformed their daily practices. This “cultural digitization” does not stop at the more familiar technologies of web platforms and social media but also extends to the rapidly emerging technologies of artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, as well as robotics, which all have the potential to revolutionize the ways in which we preserve, create, access and experience culture. The deployment of 5G, artificial intelligence and big data are projected to prompt greater changes in the next 5 years than any other technology in the past 30 years.



**The global shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic also accelerated the rate of change.** By one estimation the COVID-19 pandemic has condensed 5 years of progress into 3 months. At a meeting of some 130 Ministers of Culture convened by UNESCO in April 2020 – itself in an online format – the question of maintaining access to culture via digital platforms was one of the highest priorities. Indeed, during the pandemic, there was a rapid spontaneous increase in the use of digital technologies, from famous artists performing for free from their living rooms to local groups practicing living heritage traditions of dance, music, crafts and cooking. Major institutions also made content available online, with concert halls and theatres streaming performances. The Louvre in Paris – in normal times the world's most visited museum – saw an increase in traffic to its website of 10-fold.

**However, not everyone is currently included in this digital revolution.** The Broadband Commission, of which UNESCO is an active member, estimates that 53.6% of the world now has access to digital technologies, meaning that almost half of humanity is still being left behind. There are also glaring inequalities between and within countries: digital penetration drops to 19% in the Least Economically Developed Countries, whilst there are 12% fewer women who use the internet globally than men. Clearly, the extent of the inequalities in access to digital technologies has profound implications for culture: while online cultural consumption has increased massively in most countries, the digital divide is clearly reflected in cultural production and consumption patterns. For example, only 5% of museums in Africa and the Small Island Developing States have an online presence.

**53.6%** of the world now has access to digital technologies

The Broadband Commission

**Digital infrastructure remains a barrier in some parts of the world** but even among countries with strong digital infrastructure, very few have developed a comprehensive national digital culture plan that goes beyond initiatives taken to digitalize or strengthen certain facets of their cultural sectors. Yet, adapting to the new digital landscape is one of the main frontier issues for the development of national cultural policies that will ensure that culture remains a common good for all. Robust public cultural policies are vital in ensuring the safeguarding of heritage for future generations; developing diverse, vibrant and prosperous creative ecosystems and ensuring that expanding access to culture is a vehicle for more peaceful and tolerant societies.





## Cultural heritage for future generations



Ubisoft VR Experience created with IconemMAFLDOA data

**Digital technologies have a significant role to play in safeguarding cultural heritage**, including in the wake of conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies. In Syria, for example, UNESCO has been working with UNITAR-UNOSAT, to produce an assessment of damage to the Ancient City of Aleppo, using satellite imagery and a detailed SD model of the Citadel, developed by the French start-up Iconem. Similar initiatives are underway in Yemen where UNESCO is training heritage professionals in the knowledge of 3D documentation of buildings, monuments and sites, and also in Iraq where UNESCO is collaborating on the use of drone technologies and photogrammetry to document the scale of destruction of the Old City of Mosul, as part of UNESCO flagship initiative "Revive the Spirit of Mosul". Such information can serve as the crucial foundation for the recovery of countries and communities in rehabilitating the edifices of their shared identity, or in ensuring the transmission of memory in the case of irreversible damage. Digital technology can also help in the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property. With looters exploiting tools such as social media, online forums and the deep web, public authorities can deploy remote sensing to detect and monitor excavations; as well as machine learning and 3D-imagery-fed blockchain technology to trace provenance records. The sharing of data between countries, through the use of technologies, is also vital.

**Threats to cultural heritage can also strike in other forms**, such as the devastating fire that hit the Brazil National Museum in Rio de Janeiro in 2018. The fire is estimated to have destroyed some 80-90% of the museum's 20-million piece collection. The fact that at least part of the museum's inventory was digitized will play an important role in the recovery process. Indeed, the digitization of museum's collections – repositories of some of the unique and vital objects of our common story – is vital for ensuring that content can be





shared across museums. Interestingly, a 2016 report by the Economist Intelligence Unit showed that many developing country institutions - such as in China, Indonesia, Mexico, Peru and Thailand - do better at archive digitization. The report concludes that "it is perhaps no coincidence that these countries, prone to natural disasters, have felt a greater sense of urgency to preserve their cultural assets." New technologies can also enhance disasters risk reduction strategies. For example, the tsunami early warning systems - developed through UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission - are important for preserving cultural heritage, particularly of the Small Island Developing States. Whilst there is widespread recognition that digital technologies offer new ways to produce, store and share museum and heritage assets, the framework for doing so is yet to be fully defined. UNESCO is supporting the Reproduction of Works of Art and Cultural Heritage (ReACH) initiative, led by the Victoria & Albert Museum of the United Kingdom, which aims to detail a roadmap for how museums can engage with these technologies, particularly in relation to scientific challenges such as the restoration and reconstruction of cultural heritage, as well as preserving memory in the case of fragile heritage.

**Digital technologies can also be harnessed for documenting, transmitting and revitalising intangible cultural heritage.** As intangible cultural heritage cannot be seen or held in physical form, documentation particularly through media production projects, allows us to understand the evolutionary trends of a certain element of intangible cultural heritage and formulate measures for its safeguarding. A project by a UNESCO category II centre, for example, is supporting Asia-Pacific Member States to digitize damaged analogue audio-visual resources so that these may be preserved and managed. It must be noted, however, that digital tools are not without their complications in relation to intangible cultural heritage, as they particularly raise questions of local cultural property rights. The UNESCO 2003 Convention on living heritage clearly places communities at the heart of safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage practices and the community-based negotiations for the documentation and digital circulation of representations of local intangible expressions remain key in ensuring that digital technologies are harnessed correctly.

**In addition, an increasing part of the world's cultural heritage is being produced, distributed and accessed in digital form.** Cultural and educational resources "born digital", such as electronic journals, web pages or online databases constitute a substantial repository of human knowledge with the potential to facilitate intercultural dialogue. However, they are particularly vulnerable to the risk of technical obsolescence and physical decay. The UNESCO Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage (2009) provides guidance on what texts, audio, film and image files should be preserved.



### Preserving cultural diversity as a common good

**Digital technologies are also having a profound impact on the creative sector**, with many burgeoning opportunities. Many artists and creative practitioners have altered the ways in which they work, pushing the limits of experimentation, opening new opportunities for collaboration and finding new audiences. The Ker Thioossane villa for art and multimedia based in Dakar, Senegal (also a UNESCO Creative City for Media Arts) is an example of an arts space that facilitates experimentation with the integration of digital technologies into traditional artistic practices. Cultural and creative industries and sectors that distribute cultural goods and services have been empowered to generate new products, access new markets and build innovative business models. The volume of data circulating on the internet is growing exponentially and revenues are also increasing. For example, in 2016, digital music revenues for the first time made up 50% of the recorded music market globally. As well as the diversity of cultural expressions, linguistic diversity is impacted by mass digital technologies. Currently, just 10 of the world's estimated 7,000 languages are used to access 77% of the 1.8 billion websites on the internet (according to Internet World Stats); meaning that 95% of languages are practically excluded. Particularly the development of artificial intelligence potentially provides opportunities for automatic translation to expand the linguistic reach of the internet and increase access.

**77%** of the 1.8 billion websites on the internet are consulted in just 10 languages  
Internet World Stats

**New technologies have, however, reconfigured the entire value chain:** from creation to production, distribution, access and participation, posing a new challenging landscape. This new digital model is not merely a modernised version of a traditional one but is qualitatively different and requires a new approach. No longer does each actor in the chain contribute to adding value to a product or service and then pass it on to the next stage, like a pipeline. The digital model is a more networked one, with data at its heart, in which all five processes are taking place almost simultaneously. Understanding this underlying change in the economic model is vital for understanding how best to design public policy to make the most of the creative sector, which contributes some 3% to global GDP, providing some 29 million jobs worldwide.





**This significant shift in the structure of today's digitized global economy, and the repercussions for the creative scene,** has given rise to very powerful online platform giants whose growing influence poses certain risks. The strength of a global platform like YouTube is so large that other actors, including the creators themselves, face difficulties in negotiating fair remuneration. The pandemic has also exacerbated this phenomenon as many of the large platforms saw an increase in the number of subscribers whilst artists such as musicians were increasingly reliant on record sales due to the cancellation of concerts, yet the benefits do not necessarily filter through to producers.

**Furthermore, rather than expanding the scope of the diversity of cultural expressions globally, production and distribution are increasingly concentrated in the global North to the detriment of the global South,** as illustrated by the fact that 95% of the app market is concentrated in just 10 countries. Such imbalances pose the risk of a homogenisation of culture at the global level, whilst at the same time that digital divides within countries can lead to the dominance of certain cultural practices or expressions to the detriment of valuing all cultural diversity.

**Further complex issues arise from the rise of artificial intelligence and the use of big data.** Artificial intelligence (AI) now has the capability of creating cultural content such as music and in 2018, the first ever artwork created by AI was sold at auction for \$432,500. This raises fundamental questions about copyright and ownership, and is part of a larger question on the ethics of AI, which UNESCO is currently examining through its initiative to develop an international Recommendation on the ethics of artificial intelligence.

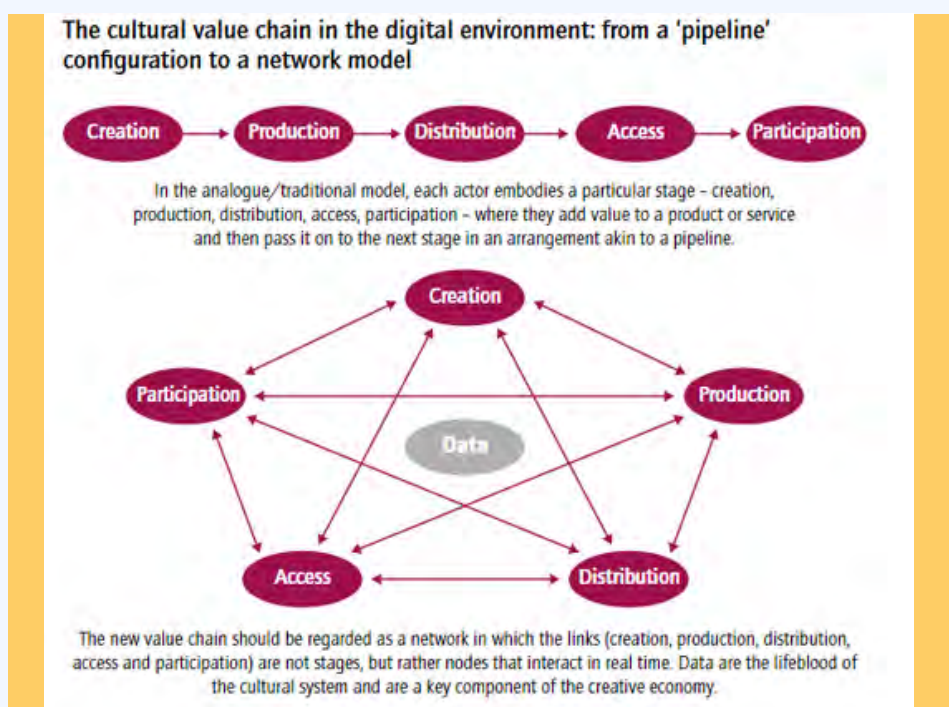


Diagram extracted from UNESCO publication "Reshaping Cultural Policies"(2018)



Even the lines between producers and consumers have blurred, leading to the concept of “prosumers”. The changing nature of the availability of content have raised expectations of access to cultural content for minimal or low cost, putting the livelihoods of artists and creative professionals at risk. Furthermore, the huge volumes of data circulating on the internet are susceptible to censorship and audiences may have their personal data misused. There is a further danger that virtual communities create “echo chambers” that distort perceptions and that algorithms tailor cultural content to the extent that they undermine the notion of culture as a common good.

**The regulation of global cultural platforms is thus a critical challenge which requires concerted and coordinated policy dialogue**, with a view to strengthen online cultural diversity, as well as to better protect copyright and cultural professionals' livelihoods, and protect human rights in this new digital environment. The pandemic has in many ways highlighted the role of public authorities as guarantors to ensure access to cultural content online, paving the way for such policy dialogue. In response to these challenges, UNESCO developed in 2017 digital guidelines that also call upon Member States to supply the necessary digital equipment to public institutions such as schools, libraries, museums and cultural centres, as well as set up digital literacy programmes. These guidelines - adopted so far by 145 Member States and the European Union, as part of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions - is also supported by an “open roadmap” for their implementation.

## Digital technologies: a gateway to culture

**New technologies also affect how we access – and participate – in arts and culture.** Firstly, digital technologies have applications in enhancing visitor experiences whilst conserving World Heritage sites for the future. For example, the Mogao Caves in China, a UNESCO World Heritage site that contains the largest collections of Buddhist cave painting in the world, were beginning to decay as a result of growing contact with visitors. A state-of-the-art visitor centre was built, featuring exact replicas of the caves and drastically reducing the time visitors spent in the original site. In a similar move to change the visitor experience of cultural heritage, the World Heritage Journeys in Europe platform features 34 lesser-known World Heritage sites from 19 European Union countries to reduce the pressure on Europe's most visited sites and share the benefits of cultural tourism more equally in way that is more environmentally and economically sustainable.





**Digital technologies also increasingly expanding opportunities for cultural mediation in museums and libraries.** In the future, virtual and augmented reality usage may be expanded to enhance the visitor experience, perhaps allowing visitors to explore World Heritage sites in their original state, or may one day even provide personalised virtual museums. UNESCO's 2015 Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and their Role in Society explicitly acknowledges the opportunities of information and communications technologies for museums in terms of "the preservation, study, creation and transmission of heritage and related knowledge" and calls upon Member States to support museums in using these technologies. Doing so could enable public authorities to overcome the paradox of the digital transformation, whereby certain populations suffer further exclusion from cultural life, for example by reaching out to new audiences, such as youth, or enhancing visitor spaces for people living with a disability to enjoy content. A 2016 report by the Economist Intelligence Unit concludes that museums galleries and theatres in many countries have made considerable strides, for example, in creating rich, user-friendly websites, and in using social media to expand their audiences. However, there is still progress to be made in terms of allowing patrons to interact with art and culture, as well as digital education initiatives. Crucially, the report notes that digital access boosts rather than reduces physical engagement with cultural content.



**Digital technologies also lie at the intersection between culture and education.** During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic global lockdown, with hundreds of millions of students worldwide confined at home, cultural materials proved to be vital to continue learning, stimulate the imagination and engage in critical thinking. The role of the publishing industry, artists' audio recordings of books, and the online resources made available by museums and other cultural institutions were brought to the fore. In addition, the internet provides opportunities for lifelong learning about heritage and the arts, opening up channels for intercultural dialogue. Digital technologies are also proving key in contributing to community-based education about intangible cultural heritage. For example, an innovative project to document indigenous knowledge of plants for medicinal, agricultural, economic and religious uses in the Subanen community of the Philippines ensured that this ancestral knowledge would be available to present and future generations in multimedia format.



### Pushing the boundaries of cultural policies

**Ministries of Culture and public cultural agencies around the world have made positive steps towards adapting their work to meet the demands of the digital age**, even if this work tends to fall short of a comprehensive national digital culture plan. Many of these initiatives have focused on the modernisation of specific sectors, such as books, music and film, as well as updating copyright legislation. Cultural statistics remain exceedingly scarce and very few countries collect information on culture in the digital environment, such as digital music revenues. Without data on the cultural sector, it will prove difficult to design policies that respond the real needs of the sector at national level, or even lead to counter-productive policies. Since the onset of the pandemic, there has been an acceleration in the collection of data, usually through online surveys. From a questionnaire by an Ethiopian civil society organization representing the music sector to a major sub-regional initiative between South American Ministries of Culture, such data strengthens dialogue with different actors and between ministries – or indeed countries – to create more agile context-specific policies.

**Adapting to the digital sphere requires deeper collaboration between the different actors in the cultural sector to co-construct solutions to local problems.** The UNESCO 2018 Reshaping Cultural Policies report, which focuses on cultural and creative industries, shows that there is "evidence that the most effective digital policies – that have achieved the greatest impact over the long term and with the lowest investment – have been those that have actively involved private companies and civil society organizations working with digital tools in their conception and implementation". Given the transversal nature of culture, there is great scope for cooperation with authorities responsible for education, tourism, commerce, innovation, health and social welfare, as well as diplomatic relations, through digital solutions.







**Digital technologies are here to stay and every day are pushing boundaries in the cultural sector.** They have the potential to power great leaps of progress for the cultural sector, particularly in heritage management, guaranteeing cultural diversity and expanding access to culture. However, the challenges posed by these technologies remain great. A lack of funding and of digital infrastructure is holding back cultural digitization in some countries, although a lack of awareness of the benefits of digitization, among both culture professionals and consumers, may also be a hindrance to progress. Even where the technical possibilities exist, the digital skills gaps remains a major barrier for such technologies becoming a powerful tool for all people. Furthermore, the heavy concentration of cultural content on some platforms and the threats posed to cultural professionals' livelihoods also risk impoverishing the rich cultural mosaic represented by all of humanity: a mosaic that must also be reflected in the digital world. Neglecting to address these key issues risks fundamentally undermining the principles of human rights and equal access to cultural life, as well as the protection of cultural and linguistic diversity - principles at the very core of the work of the United Nations.

**Only states can guarantee that digital technologies can work for the common good of all of society.** The pandemic has further highlighted the role of the state in addressing the crucial need to support leading-edge research, stimulate innovation in the education sector for the development of digital skills, ensure cultural diversity and access to culture in the digital world. This requires designing cultural policies and regulatory frameworks founded on fundamental rights: freedom of expression, respect for cultural diversity, the economic and social rights of artists and cultural professionals, the collective cultural rights of minority communities and access to culture for all, including the most marginalized. Finding truly robust and long-lasting solutions requires a collective reflection and effort, through dialogue within societies with all actors and through the multilateral system, so that new technologies are developed for all and by all.

**Digital technologies are tools that have the power to transform societies. Today we face an important choice: whether to invest in our new tools in a way that ensures that culture contributes to building open, equitable, inclusive, prosperous and pluralistic societies for the common good of generations to come.**

Time Machine





The African Union, at the 37th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council held virtually on 13-14 October, officially adopted the African Union theme for 2021 'Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want'.

The adopted concept note and roadmap on the theme for 2021 include activities in the following areas: arts and culture; health, wellness and post-COVID-19 recovery plans; African languages; history and oral traditions; heritage; and the restitution of cultural property and heritage. It also included the establishment of the [Great Museum of Africa](#), a flagship project of the AU Agenda 2063. (A [questionnaire has been opened](#) to obtain information from African Union Member States, Pan-African Cultural Institutions, museum personnel and the public at large on the establishment of this museum.)

UNESCO is expected to collaborate closely with the AU Cultural Directorate on the preparations for the celebration of this year, particularly on issues related to the restitution of cultural property and heritage, African languages and the establishment of the Great Museum of Africa, amongst others.

Furthermore, the 2nd Biennale on a Culture for Peace is included in the concept note on the theme of the year for 2021. This follows on from the [first edition of the Biennale](#) that took place in Luanda, Angola, with the Pan-African Forum for the Culture of Peace. The idea of launching the Biennale for a Culture of Peace draws its inspiration from the [Charter for African Cultural Renaissance](#) (adopted in 2006), which advocates that culture is the most effective means to empower Member States to strengthen their national policies to contribute to the achievement of the continent's socio-economic integration, fight against poverty, tackle the major challenges facing the continent and build sustainable peace.

narvikk, Getty Images Signature





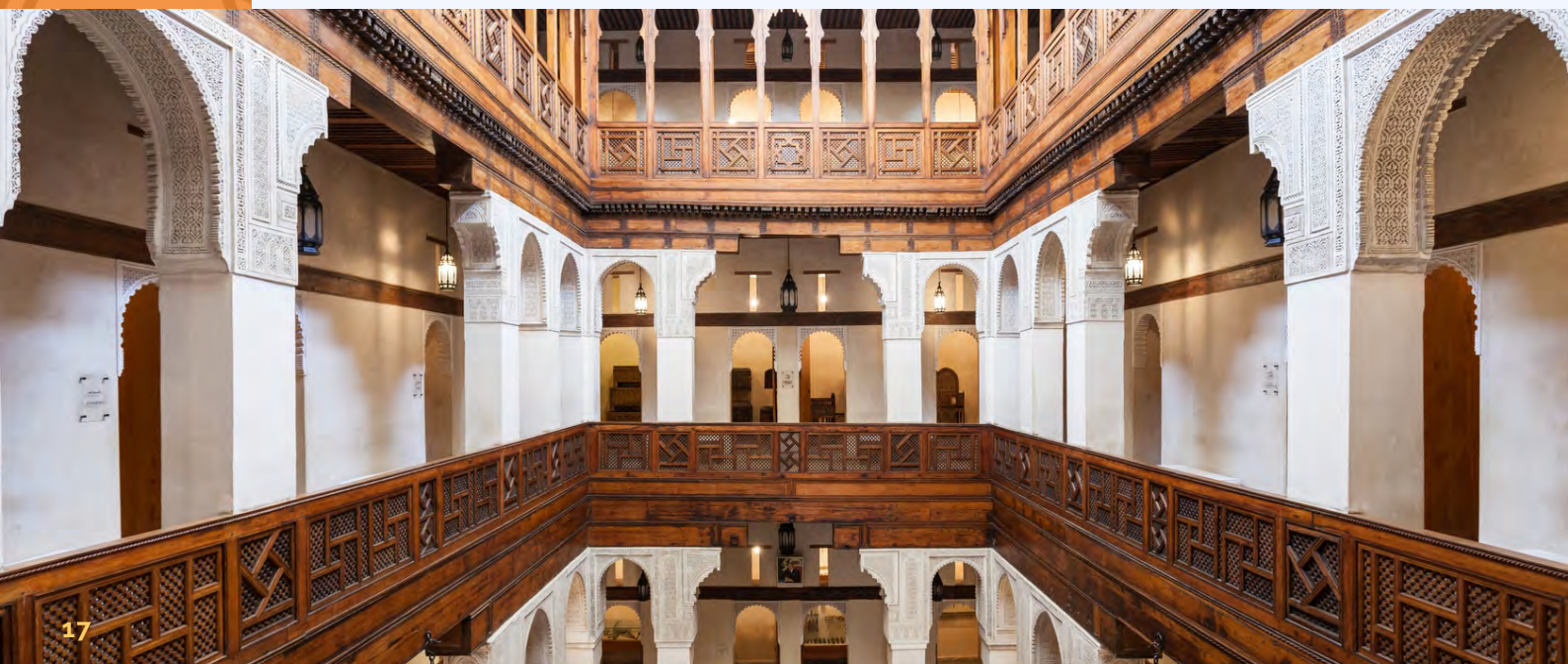


The Permanent Committee for Arab Culture of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) met on October 15, in an extraordinary session to jointly devise long term cultural strategies. The meeting was devoted to presenting a preliminary working paper for the project "Modernizing and developing the comprehensive plan for Arab culture". Opening the meeting, ALECSO Director-General, Mohamed Ould Omar, highlighted that updating the plan was key, particularly in light of the various difficulties and crises experienced by Arab countries, in order to 'bring the culture closer to the Arab citizen'. This meeting and working paper are concrete follow-up actions to the Conference of Ministers for Cultural Affairs that was held in Cairo (Egypt) in 2018.

ALECSO also in October held a meeting between regional and international organizations - including UNESCO - to support the efforts of particular countries in the Arab States region to protect their heritage properties in times of crisis. Several governmental and non-governmental organizations presented updates of their work in countries currently facing a threat to their cultural property, namely Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, Libya and Sudan. The purpose of the meeting was to review current efforts in these countries in order to review action places and harmonise efforts.

Meanwhile, on September 30, Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) announced the allocation of USD 1 million to restore the collections of 30 museums in the Islamic world affected by crises. The funding announcement was accompanied by the creation of the Network of Islamic Art Museums, as well as the adoption of an initiative to make museums more inclusive and respond to the specific needs of people living with a disability, for example, the use of Braille labelling.

Andrey Khrobostov, Canva Pro







## EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

In her first ever State of the Union speech on 16 September, European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, announced a new European Bauhaus initiative. This initiative will be part of the broader NextGenerationEU recovery instrument that was proposed by the European Union in May and that is embedded in a long-term budget of some 750 billion euros. The new European Bauhaus is to be “a co-creation space where architects, artists, students, engineers, designers work together.”

Meanwhile, on 14 September, the European Parliament voted a resolution on the “Cultural Recovery of Europe”. The resolution recognises the importance of European cultural and creative sectors for economic reasons (around 4% of GDP), as well as for social cohesion. It further underlines that the 'post-pandemic recovery and revitalisation of European cultural policy are strictly connected to the other challenges that the European Union and the world are facing', including climate change and the digital transition, which are both major European priorities. It calls on the European Commission (EC) and the Member States to earmark for the cultural and creative sectors and industries, according to their specific needs, at least 2 % of the Recovery and Resilience Facility dedicated to the recovery, under the overall framework of the NextGenerationEU recovery plan.

The European Parliament also adopted a resolution on 15 September on measures to “green” some key cultural and youth programmes, including the Creative Europe programme, and contribute to the broader European Green Deal. The resolution calls on the EC to adopt further environmentally friendly measures in these programmes and also emphasises the enormous potential of the cultural and creative sectors in encouraging citizens to act sustainably.

Finally, organizers of a European Citizen's Initiative presented to Members of the European Parliament their proposals on how EU law could promote minority rights and cultural diversity in Europe. The Culture and Education Committee was one of the parliamentary groups at the hearing; at which language, education, culture and audiovisual media constituted an important theme.

RazoomGames, Getty Images





ASEANTA, the umbrella trade association for the 10 ASEAN countries has proposed the introduction of 'green corridors' within the region to encourage "risk-free travel between major destinations". This proposal includes standardizing COVID-19 screening and quarantine procedures for travellers across the ASEAN area. The call was made during a meeting of the ASEAN National Tourism Organization's mid-terms meeting held on the 14 October to review the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan (2016-2025) in which the regional bloc's culture is an important feature.

“Southeast Asia has rich and diverse set of natural and tangible and intangible cultural tourism resources located in both rural and urban areas. The region's 11 natural and 17 cultural heritage sites inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List highlight and reflect its unique heritage. Enmeshed with its natural heritage is a rich and diverse endemic ethnic culture with overlays of Arab, Chinese, Indian, and European influences. Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian religious traditions, and vernacular architecture, music, literature, and indigenous knowledge enrich the region and add to the appeal of its outstanding natural heritage, its rural landscapes, and its vibrant urban centers.

### **ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan (2016-2025)**

The Centre for Strategic and International Studies published in September a report entitled "Creative Economies in the Indo-Pacific and Covid-19: The Show Must Go On". The report examines the resilience of the Indo-Pacific creative sector, as well as its 'soft power' dimension. It concludes that "creative industries in the Indo-Pacific region demonstrates significant resilience and proves the central role of creative industries in driving the global recovery from Covid-19. The creative economy provides countries with a key source of soft power as it serves as a conduit for association and cultural connection, which are increasingly important in a socially distanced world."

Isarint Sangmanee, Getty Images







# LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Following a series of meetings with experts – including UNESCO representatives in Latin American field offices – the Inter-American Development Bank published a [report of recommendations](#) for supporting the cultural sector in the region. The report highlights the pre-existing structural challenges facing cultural and creative industries, new challenges created by the current crisis and the impact of the crisis on the sector. It particularly draws attention to the challenges of inequalities and social inclusion that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The main actions presented are the reactivation of culture and the creative industries, the digitization of business models and increasing the visibility of cultural and creative industries on public policy agendas.

The Council of Ministers of Culture of the Central American Educational and Cultural Coordination (CECC/SICA), [published a Collaborative Response for Culture Strategy](#) for the central American region in response to the current crisis. The Strategy is designed to increase institutional capacity to formalise the sector, including through strengthening the normative frameworks and general cultural policies, as well as the data systems on the artistic and cultural sectors, with the purpose of strengthening cultural governance. It advocates for increased regional cultural integration for greater economic resilience of the sector, including through the expansion of social security to cultural and creative professionals and the development of cultural tourism. Further recommendations include the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, especially of indigenous and Afro-descendant populations, whose heritage is under threat due to the vulnerability of older people to COVID-19. The Council of Ministers of Culture formally endorsed the strategy at a meeting on the 29 September.

The Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) has [launched the 3rd edition](#) of its 'Competition on Good Practices of MERCOSUR Civil Society in Audiovisual Accessibility'. Launched at a meeting of the MERCOSUR Film and Audiovisual Authorities (RECAM), the competition aims to reward and further disseminate successful examples that could provide inspiration throughout the region. Applications remain open until 15 November.

Lunamarina, Canva







## DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND CULTURE IN THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

Culture is not only a sector of activity in itself but also a transversal, intrinsic component across other public policy areas, acting as an enabler to accelerate sustainable development processes. This transversal dimension of culture in public policy making is increasingly reflected in the Voluntary National Reviews submitted by Member States to monitor their progress in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Each month, this section presents a selection of initiatives on a particular theme to highlight the transversal role of culture in public policy. This month, we focus on countries that are using digital technologies to enhance their cultural sectors.

### DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO ENHANCE CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

**Lithuania** is seeking to create a centralised electronic portal to enhance public information and participation in decision-making about land-use and construction processes, including in sites where there is cultural heritage. The country reports that "conditions are improved constantly for public participation in the public management processes of cultural heritage protection, newsletters are issued, and internet websites publish information for managers of cultural heritage sites on various funding opportunities for the management of cultural heritage sites. The public have an opportunity to access electronic services of cultural heritage (KPEPIS Information System)."

In addition to investing in cultural infrastructure such as the National Library, the Museum of Islamic Art and the Arab Museum of Modern Art, **Qatar** also reports that it is embarking on the process of digitizing hundreds of valuable and rare books, maps and manuscripts. In its National Growth Strategy, **Greece** recognizes "its rich cultural heritage as one of its competitive advantages." As such, it is linking cultural heritage with tourism and new technologies as a key driver for economic growth and sustainable development.

Leonid Andronov, Canva Pro





## DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOR CULTURAL EDUCATION RESOURCES

**Indonesia's** Ministry of Education and Culture has launched an online learning platform called 'Rumah Belajar', which "aims to provide comprehensive learning for students and teachers through more interesting and interactive media". The platform provides interactive learning materials such as images, animations, videos and simulations, as well as digital books, and features rubrics related to, for example, 'Community Work' and 'Language and Literature Work'. One rubric - the Cultural Map feature - provides a variety of cultural learning materials in Indonesia so that students can better know and appreciate the diversity of customs and culture. All resources can be downloaded for free and stored offline, which is useful in areas where there is no internet connection in the school.



Rumah Belajar

## DIGITISATION OF MEDIA FOR GREATER ACCESS TO CULTURE

The Government of **Zimbabwe** has embarked on the process of migrating from analogue to digital television broadcasting "in line with developments across the world and the renewal of the country's radio transmission network to ensure universal access to broadcasting services". This project is expected to increase the number of television channels delivered to the public from one to twelve, improve television reception and picture quality, provide value added services to the television set and generally improve both radio and television coverage from the current 55 per cent to at least 80 per cent of the population.

The digitalization project also presents business opportunities to the country's creative arts industry in the production and supply of content to the digital platform, resulting in employment creation and reduction in poverty, growth of the creative arts industry and contributing to the economic growth of the country.



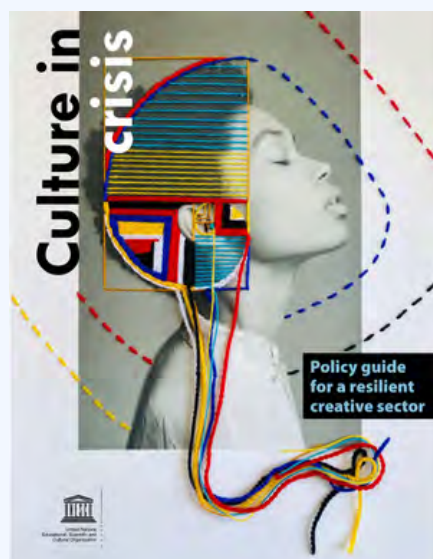
RECENT PUBLICATIONS



**World Heritage Magazine: Interpretation and COVID-19**

This issue focuses specifically on the immediate experience of dealing with the pandemic, including through the voices of heritage site managers themselves who explain how they have coped in these exceptional circumstances.

Magazine available in English, French & Spanish



**Culture in Crisis - Policy guide for a resilient creative sector**

Drawing on policies and measures adopted during the crisis, this practical guide highlights emergency measures that have been deemed effective and beneficial, assesses emerging trends, identifies new and existing gaps and offers practical advice to help policy-makers position the cultural and creative industries in social and economic recovery plans.

Policy guide available in English, French & Spanish



**UNESCO Courier - Special edition on the illicit trafficking of cultural property:**

This special issue of the UNESCO Courier is devoted to the challenge of the illicit trafficking of cultural property, as part of UNESCO's campaign that marks the 50th anniversary of the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, adopted in 1970.

Report available in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Arabic







## CAMPAIGN AGAINST ILLICIT TRAFFICKING

UNESCO has launched 'The Real Price of Art' campaign to raise awareness about the devastation wreaked by the illicit trade in cultural goods on the history and identity of peoples. The trade is estimated to be worth nearly \$10 billion each year. The looting of archaeological sites - which fuels this illicit trafficking - is highly organized and constitutes a major source of financing for criminal and terrorist organizations. The campaign marks the 50th anniversary of UNESCO's Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, adopted in 1970.

[Discover the campaign](#)



## MAJOR RESILIART DEBATES

In March, UNESCO launched ResiliArt, a global movement joined by cultural professionals worldwide to shed light on the current state of creative industries through virtual discussions. There have now been 208 debates and there are over 70 countries with ongoing movements. The web page now features videos of the major international debates.

[Watch past debates](#)



This Tracker is produced by UNESCO, in English and French. We are counting on partners to support its production in other UNESCO official languages, to expand the global discussion on culture and public policy.

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