

Introduction to Session: Are We Ready

By Robert Palmer, Moderator

The title of this first panel session is “Are We Ready?”. I think I know the easy answer to that question: Are we prepared to prevent, mitigate and overcome the many different risks to our cultural heritage: risks such as neglect, pollution, natural hazards, and climate change that are causing immense damage to cultural heritage. Armed conflicts, illegal trafficking and pressures caused by the rise of tourism are other causes. My personal answer is: No. we are NOT ready, at least not ready everywhere, and certainly not ready to face up to many imminent and longer term risks to cultural heritage assets in each of our countries, and in our cities, towns and rural landscapes. No, we are not fully prepared. So, this conference is timely for that reason. Thank you to the Government of Croatia for taking this initiative, and for setting this issue as a priority for Croatia’s Presidency of the European Union.

We were helpfully reminded in the earlier welcome speeches this morning that:

- Much of our cultural heritage is irreplaceable, and some of it is currently very vulnerable. What we are protecting, we are protecting for future generations. We have a custodial role.
- There are many risks at play that now have a very high probability of happening; a large number are already happening
- The responsibility for assessing, preventing and treating risks is spread across different institutional and non-institutional bodies – at local, regional, national and supra-national levels. There are many different stakeholders; I question whether there is an adequate level of coordination between them to face up to the stark and worrying needs ahead of us.

More must be done to mobilise our citizens to recognise the dangers and take action, individually and collectively.

Given the scale of the current environmental, social and economic challenges we face, there is a critical need to explore subjects such as risk anticipation and risk assessment, and ways of taking action through sound decision-making by governments and other bodies to best utilise available resources have become urgent.

There are tools available. There are ways of collecting and digitalising data. There are model projects underway in many of our countries. The EU is playing its part through European Coordinated Action projects such as the FP7 projects for Climate for Culture, and the EU Cultural Heritage Identity Card scheme, and many different transnational Horizon 2020 projects. UNESCO has played its part through raising awareness. Professional bodies such as ICOMOS, ICCROM and ICOM have developed toolkits and training programmes. Organisations like Europa Nostra and others are working closely with civil society. So have national heritage agencies and government heritage departments and Ministries. Universities such as KU Leuven, and in particular through its well-known Raymond LeMaire International Centre for Conservation, and experts working in other universities have undertaken research and developed. Governments too have implemented some model initiatives, including here in Croatia.

All this still may not be enough, especially if all the individual efforts are not sufficiently coordinated.

The issue of 'readiness to act' is becoming increasingly urgent. In many parts of the world the state of *readiness* is already being tested with the need to take imperative and immediate action in the face of existing crises happening now as we speak, such as earthquakes, fires, flooding and destruction caused by war. Such crises, both existing and imminent, often come at a moment when communities are facing multiple challenges: health risks, economic hardships, social problems, and others. So, getting out houses in order to deal with

preventing, mitigating against and as necessary dealing with current and future damage to cultural heritage becomes essential.

Key players who are leading and managing strategies and tools for heritage risk management are with us here in Dubrovnik. This morning, for this panel, I am pleased to introduce some of these experts – also listed in your programme.

Lazare Eloundou Assomo, Director of Culture and Emergencies,
UNESCO

Andrew Potts, Coordinator, Climate Heritage Network Secretariat;
ICOMOS Climate Change and Heritage Working Group

Aparna Tandon, Senior Programme Leader, *First Aid and Resilience for Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis* Programme, Programmes Unit,
ICCROM

Goranka Horjan, Chair, INTERCOM International Committee for
Museum Management, ICOM

Koenraad Van Balen, Director of Raymond Lemaire International
Centre for Conservation at KU Leuven; UNESCO Chair on Preventive
Conservation, Monitoring and Maintenance of Monuments and Sites

Maria-Xeni Garezou, Advisor to the Minister of Culture of the
Hellenic Republic