

## **An Overview of Croatian Efforts in Cultural Heritage Risk Reduction**

The Republic of Croatia has established a normative framework for the protection of cultural heritage – mainly through the Law on Civil Protection System and the Critical Infrastructure Act, which emphasise the importance of protecting cultural heritage - from prevention and risk management to the operational segment and activities in the protection of cultural (tangible and intangible) heritage. In strategic documents such as the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Croatia, it is highlighted that culture is the foundation of the state and society.

In addition to the existing normative framework, there is a recognised need to promote the security of specific objects, such as museums (with movable cultural property) and immovable cultural heritage. A significant challenge, both national and global, is lack of awareness of the importance to engage and think of cultural heritage objects in risk reduction plans, such as an adequate construction of buildings where heritage is stored. Climate change is an additional challenge, as extreme weather events are increasingly destroying cultural assets. In terms of cultural heritage and natural hazards, Croatian heritage is exposed mostly to fires, earthquakes, and floods. According to Civil protection Law and Critical Protection Act Civil Protection Plans, Security plans and other documents must be prepared to minimise the risk to ensure fewer damages or at least adequate response and recovery.

One of the priorities in the Republic of Croatia is to improve the capacity to cope with the effects of natural disasters by applying scientific and technical knowledge and developing protection measures. In that regard we attempted to strengthen the link between the scientific community and decision-makers some 10 years ago through a national disaster risk reduction coordinating body – National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Besides that, one of the major activities that Croatian Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction has, is coordinating the activities of several ministries responsible for individual hazard. National Risk Assessment is one of the results of multisectoral cooperation in the National Platform. This document was ex-ante conditionality for withdrawal of funds from the EU Structural and Cohesion Funds. Total of EUR 260 million was allocated for thematic objective Promoting investment to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and developing disaster management system. These funds provide Croatia with the opportunity to finance more projects aimed at reducing disaster risk and further developing civil protection systems. The Ministry of the Interior, through the Directorate of Civil Protection, is responsible for 18 projects with a total value of 200 million euros. Also, Risk Assessment is our starting point for developing other strategic documents. The most important of these is the Disaster Risk Management Strategy, which will focus activities and investments in the field of risk management for all three phases - disaster risk reduction, disaster response and disaster recovery.

1. **Coordination sphere:** The Platform has evolved throughout the years and is now an active body effectively connecting all levels and all sectors as well as the scientific community and decision makers to use science and engage it to answer the politician's problems. The system is however as good as its parts are and issues have to be identified by the sector representatives as well as the community as a whole. One of the areas this system can be used and well implemented is in connecting expert knowledge in preventing and reducing possible damages to cultural heritage in a disaster.

2. **Technical sphere:** the location (planned construction) of the cultural heritage object and the objects where the cultural heritage is preserved (museums, archives, libraries, archeological sites); construction in accordance with regulations, EU norms and standards; reconstruction and adaptation of existing cultural heritage objects; and

2. **Organizational sphere** - regulated by various legislation such as: the **Law on the Civil Protection System**, related to the response of

operational forces and establishment of a Crisis Headquarters which can be activated for the purposes of the operation of the civil protection system in a major accident and catastrophic events; the **Act on the protection and preservation of cultural goods** which defines measures and protection in the extraordinary circumstances (earthquakes, floods, fires, disasters, etc.); The **Fire Protection Act**, which stipulates that local and regional self-government organizes fire protection in the area of their responsibility, and that owners or users of facilities and premises, including facilities representing immovable cultural objects, are obliged to organize fire protection.

It is also important to invest in staff education (seminars, workshops, simulation exercises and other training) which is mainly organized by experts in cultural heritage such as National and University Library in Zagreb, but there are more actors that recognized the importance of cultural heritage protection in terms of crisis management. In 2019 seminars titled "Protection of Cultural Heritage in Crisis Situations" and "Protecting the Cultural Heritage of the City of Zagreb in Crisis Situations" organized by the City Office of Emergency Management were held. In the previous years, there were also various formats of sharing experience and gathering knowledge, such as the 2017 national workshop "Managing Disaster Risk in UNESCO Designated Sites" that gave conclusions that could be universally utilized, and summoned to: Understanding of Disaster Risks to Heritage; Strengthening Disaster Risk Management of the Heritage Sector; Investments in DRR for Heritage, Enhancing Disaster Preparedness for Effective Response and to Build Back Better. The Croatian Platform for DRR had the pleasure of welcoming representatives of the Heritage Sector present their knowledge and suggestions at several annual DRR Conferences.

It is also necessary to identify material and human resources of the Republic of Croatia in the protection of cultural heritage. It is the role of the management of cultural institutions, as well as each expert, to be individually active in preventing and reducing existing disaster risks. Form the governmental level, with the establishment of

Department for Critical Infrastructure and Cultural Heritage within the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia (Civil Protection Directorate), the role of civil protection in the protection of cultural heritage and possibility for fostering cooperation and interoperability among all relevant national actors is more emphasized. Also, in the Republic of Croatia, the protection of cultural heritage is implemented in accordance with the international requirements of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which clearly emphasizes the importance of reducing disaster risk in cultural and natural heritage sites and the UNESCO Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction for World Heritage properties.

Systematic analysis, planning and reduction of cultural heritage exposure to various hazards minimizes the loss and damage to cultural heritage. In that sense it is also important to identify exactly what we are protecting and to prioritize the assets. Identification of critical cultural infrastructure, if any in this sector, is part of this process which is accompanied by the necessity of compiling a cultural heritage inventory. There is also a particular emphasis on the multidisciplinary work of civil protection experts and experts from heritage institutions. The common goal is to ensure maximum security while avoiding possible damage to cultural objects whose special (higher) level of the protection is prescribed.

To conclude, Cultural Heritage in terms of disaster risk management should comprehend: **prevention** (risk assessment, plan of action, standard operating procedures, the formation of expert teams, accident prevention measures, implementing risk reduction measures and identifying financial sources to do so); **defining priorities** (what is in the context of the protection of cultural property the primary focus of protection, etc.) and **training** (risk reduction training, understanding the vulnerability of the heritage, exercises and simulations, formation of expert teams and operational forces and their training) - as prior activities that ensure timely and adequate risk reduction and, if need be, response in crisis situations.