

The "Italian model" for the protection of cultural heritage in crisis areas: possible paths of cooperation in extended neighbouring regions

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The project aims to analyze Italy's role in the construction of a regional and global governance model for the protection of cultural heritage in contexts of conflict, instability, and socio-political fragility. In other words, it looks at the **intertwining of the management of sites and cultural assets considered at risk or in danger, foreign policy, and international relations**, considering cultural heritage both as a possible means, catalyst, and tool for resilience within local communities and as a vector for intergovernmental and transnational cooperation. In March 2022, the Italian Government established the "Caschi Blu della Cultura" (Blue Helmets of Culture) Task Force, an operational unit designed to intervene in areas affected by emergencies, such as natural disasters or crises produced by humans, in order to safeguard archaeological sites, cultural places, and cultural assets and counter the international trafficking of illegally looted cultural goods. Based on a specific agreement, the Task Force can intervene under the auspices of UNESCO using the designation "Italian Task Force at the invitation of UNESCO," as agreed during the G20 Culture held in Rome at the end of July 2021. The establishment of the Task Force represents a significant piece of **Italy's soft power**, projecting the country into multilateral forums and international contexts. Cultural issues, in fact, are a peculiarity of the Italian G20 Presidency, which has chosen to include them among the fundamental pillars on which to build strategies for the recovery and relaunch of the Italian system. Moreover, the Italian government has been proposing innovative ways to link the protection of cultural heritage with conflict prevention and conflict resolution, contributing to the diffusion of concepts such as **cultural diplomacy and cultural peacebuilding**.

Understanding the specific socio-political context in which both episodes of cultural heritage destruction and reconstruction initiatives occur requires a plurality of skills and analytical lenses, including those of the social sciences. The protection of cultural heritage, therefore, emerges as a field of action to be analyzed with a novel awareness sensitive to both the context and the impact, considering material (spatial configuration, distribution of resources, involvement of local actors) as well as immaterial elements (symbolic-narrative).

An **interdisciplinary approach** will be adopted during the course of the project to examine four case studies in the "expanded neighbourhood" - borrowing a category used by the European Union to indicate areas beyond the borders of Member States but within their perimeter of geopolitical interest and within the scope of their external priority actions. In particular, our case studies will fit into the **post-Soviet area** on one side and the **extended Mediterranean** on the other. Researchers involved in the research activities belong to different disciplines, such as Political Science/International Relations, Security Studies, Area Studies, Political Theory, Tourism Management. The analysis of the case studies will aim at describing the risks and opportunities for cultural heritage protection in conflict situation, envisaging specific measures for conflict resolution and post-conflict collaboration.

Working papers:

- Introduction to the topic, background information, conceptual framework
- The EU and the protection of cultural heritage in conflict situations
- Case study 1: Artsakh/Nagorno – Karabakh (conflict)
- Case study 2: Ukraine (conflict)
- Case study 3: Balkans (post-conflict)
- Case study 4: Lebanon (post-conflict)

Preparatory work for the working papers

- Literature review
- Organisation of fieldwork
- Fieldwork in Spring 2024

Occasions for working papers' presentation and discussion:

- Internal workshop (Spring 2024)
- Final Conference (Rome, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Autumn 2024)