

# FOCUS ON PROCULTHER

Newsletter of the EU-funded Project on Protecting Cultural Heritage from the Consequences of Disasters

Considering the tough times we are all going through with respect to people's safety caused by the **COVID-19 health emergency**, PROCULTHER decided to dedicate the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue of the PROCULTHER Newsletter to the risk factors and impact on cultural heritage posed by COVID-19. This issue gives voice to experts from the PROCULTHER Consortium partners and stakeholder institutions that are interrogating themselves about the possible aftermath of an unwise management of our fragile cultural heritage, without forgetting the disastrous impact on the economies of those countries endowed with the richest historical and cultural assets, especially in terms of loss of revenues related to tourism activities. Finally, a special corner focuses on the action plan and tools for identifying risks, monitoring impacts and assessing needs caused by this global crisis developed and promoted by the main international organisations active in the safeguard of cultural heritage.

Next issue of FOCUS ON PROCULTHER in autumn 2020. Past editions are available through the section [NEWSLETTERS](#) of PROCULTHER web site.

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PROCULTHER is running from January 2019 to December 2020 and aims at contributing to develop UCPM and Participating States capacities to protect cultural heritage assets during emergencies by placing their protection at the top of national European agendas and making the enhancement of their resilience a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder goal.



PROCULTHER

PROTECTING CULTURAL HERITAGE  
FROM THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISASTERS

# HIGHLIGHTS

## Does COVID-19 Affect Cultural Heritage?

By Cristina Escudero, conservator of the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Coordinator of the Emergency Unit for Cultural Heritage of the Region Castilla y León (UGRECYL)

***"[...] In this highly dramatic context in which the focus is on the health crisis and the associated economic crisis, can we ask ourselves what is happening to cultural heritage?"***

I suppose more than one person will be surprised by this question since despite the evolving concept of "cultural heritage" that has considerably broadened particularly in recent decades, the general public still relates to cultural heritage in terms of the material components that form part of it, such as buildings, altarpieces, paintings, tapestries, old documents, and so on.

Starting from this premise, for example, nobody would ever imagine the damned virus penetrating wood, stone or a piece of fabric; that is to say, affecting the constituent materials of the works of historical artistic interest... or could such a nightmare be imaginable?

It is clear that the Coronavirus, by itself, does not have this counterproductive effect, but let us not forget that the pandemic has caused a state of health emergency at global level in which all countries are taking various measures focused, as could not be otherwise, on the top priority at this time: that is people's lives and safety.

Provisions aimed at saving lives – the first priority -, preventing the spread of the disease to mitigate the pressure and collapse of health systems, meeting the needs of the population or mitigating damage to the economic fabric of which heritage is also a part, even if some are often forgotten – indeed too often...

The pressure this crisis is putting on health systems, civil protection systems, emergency responders, FCSE (*Fuerzas y Cuerpos de Seguridad del Estado* – translator's note: "Bodies and Institutions in charge of Law enforcement" in Spain), members of the military, volunteer groups, companies, workers, self-employed and society in general is enormous and the effort will never be sufficiently appreciated. In this highly dramatic context in which the focus is on the health crisis and the associated economic crisis, can we ask ourselves what is happening to cultural heritage? [...]

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Clockwise, from left to right: 1. "Colacho" Celebration in Castrillo de Murcia Burgos, canceled this year because of the COVID-19 emergency. 2. Popular pilgrimage in San Juan de Ortega Burgos. 3. Medina de Rioseco (Valladolid) 4. Effects of COVID-19: Way of Saint James without pilgrims (Castrillo de los Polvazares - León Region).

## Negative Consequences of Covid-19 for Cultural Assets in Turkey

By Dr Deniz GÜNDOĞDU (ATASAGUN), Restorer Architect (MSc.) and Disaster Management (PhD) - Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism



Dr. Deniz GÜNDOĞDU

During these hard times for people's health and security, a major duty of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism is to consider the possible aftermath of this health crisis. Considering any unwise management of our fragile material cultural heritage caused by this worldwide crisis and facing its possible consequences is a good attempt at avoiding the worst outcome.

Studies show that Coronavirus has a limited survival time on various surfaces.

All museums and cultural institutions were kept closed and all cultural events postponed before the pandemic reached a crisis level in Turkey, meaning that any possible contact of cultural heritage objects with the virus had been prevented by March 2020.

Thus, it is clear that re-opening museums as well as libraries and historical sites after a few hours of natural ventilation should not pose any health problems.

***"[...] any chemical substance used for sanitation purposes can pose the risk of damaging the exhibited or stored cultural heritage objects and collections, especially if they are not protected."***

could possibly be subject to deterioration due to the alteration of atmospheric conditions, any such treatment should be approached with utmost care.

Of course, the risk of chemical reaction on building materials, murals and other decorative elements should also be carefully assessed. [...].

It is also true that any chemical substance used for sanitation purposes can pose the risk of damaging the exhibited or stored cultural heritage objects and collections, especially if they are not protected.

Considering that many art works of Ottoman Heritage, especially archival material have high bonding capacity with other atoms and



A unique collection of vulnerable textiles  
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# INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

## ICCROM's Tools for Identifying Risks, Monitoring Impacts, Assessing Needs caused by COVID-19 global crisis

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

COVID-19 knows no borders. The virus is already having devastating impacts in countries around the world, on lives of people and the social fabric of our shared existence. Hundreds of micro cultures and their bearers may also be at greater risk of loss.



This loss is even more concerning when we know that the ability to maintain and develop cultural identity and cultural knowledge in a time of adversity is essential to resilience, aiding both individuals and communities to respond, recover and prepare for future threats.

Unfortunately, the extent of the impact of COVID-19 on all types of cultural heritage remains rather unknown and has not been cohesively documented. [...]

***"[...] the extent of the impact of COVID-19 on all types of cultural heritage remains rather unknown and has not been cohesively documented."***

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## UNESCO COVID-19 Culture Response

"The global nature of the COVID-19 crisis is a call for the international community to reinvest in international cooperation and intergovernmental dialogue," said Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO. "UNESCO is committed to leading a global discussion on how best to support artists and cultural institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, and ensure everyone can stay in touch with the heritage and culture that connects them to their humanity."



***"[...]“ Now, more than ever, people need culture,” said Ernesto Ottone R., Assistant UNESCO Director-General for Culture.“ [...] That is why UNESCO is doing all it can to support culture, to safeguard our heritage and empower artists and creators, now and after this crisis has passed.”***

In response to this worldwide crisis, UNESCO is taking action in four key areas:

1. Sharing Culture
2. Assessing the Impact
3. Support for Artists & Cultural Professionals
4. Building Capacity

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# OUR CONSORTIUM

## Project coordinator



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