Supporting the digital transformation of Ukraine in the field of culture

Concept Note

Context

Since the outbreak of the war on 24 February 2022, cultural heritage in Ukraine has been under threat of damage, theft, looting, and destruction. Cultural heritage sites have experienced extensive damage. To date, UNESCO has verified damages to 235 cultural sites, including 104 religious sites, 18 museums, 83 buildings of historical and/or artistic interest, 19 monuments, and 11 libraries. Numerous movable cultural properties and collections have been damaged, or moved to safer locations. Many living heritage elements are at risk due to human loss, massive displacement of populations or the destruction of traditional places of practice, such as workshops of artisans or cultural houses.

Ukraine holds over 12 million artefacts spread in over 970 museums and 2,500 public collections. According to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy (MCIP), there are 120,000 immovable cultural properties on the territory and 400 historic cities. Moreover, the MCIP has 52 elements registered on its National List of Elements of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Ukraine.

The lack of complete inventories in Ukraine

Damages to museums and looting of collections have shown that in many cases, inventories are not available and, when available, still on paper. In addition, the existing inventories do not follow the same standards. Several emergency response projects are assisting museums to draw-up their digital emergency inventory, using different software and adhering to different standards. So far, immovable cultural properties are not mapped with Geographic Information System (GIS) georeferencing.

Indeed, the war has highlighted the lack of a complete and centralized national inventory of cultural heritage in Ukraine to register built heritage, museums and inventory their collections, archival and library holdings, accounting documents, blueprints, photos, and 3D-scanning of buildings and cultural objects.

The importance of digitalized inventory and documentation to safeguard and manage cultural heritage in Ukraine

Inventories and documentation are an essential basis for the responsible authorities to combat thefts, illicit trafficking, and the circulation of fakes, and to protect, safeguard and restore cultural heritage in all its forms.

As per the 1954 Hague Convention, obligation to respect cultural property during armed conflicts requires its effective identification. If the military do not dispose of adequate information for identifying cultural property in the course of the planning and execution phases of their operations, they will run a high risk of causing damage to cultural properties. In this regard, one of the challenges for the military to better discharge their obligations to respect cultural property is to identify cultural properties and to facture them in during planning processes prior to operation. Thus, the compilation of adequate geographic and attribute data on cultural property in areas of operation and the establishment of digital inventory database is essential.

Inventories are a crucial provision of the UNESCO 1970 Convention to prevent and fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property. A standardized knowledge documentation system is essential to the

efforts of national and regional institutions to meet the challenges of safeguarding and protecting cultural property in conflict situations – including the design of effective protective measures against potential risks – and to plan for recovery and reconstruction. In the case of movable and immovable property, in particular, the lack of inventories is a major impediment to the development of safety and emergency preparedness plans and the prioritisation and planning of recovery actions. The lack of complete inventories and archives of living heritage present on the territory of Ukraine can lead to partial or total loss of living heritage elements during the war and thus prevent their revitalization and safeguarding after the conflict.

The setting up of a centralized GIS- database would also contribute to the implementation of the Construction bill that requires that cultural heritage is mapped and recorded on a digital layer of the construction registry before 1 January 2025, to serve as a reference for granting or vetting construction permits. There is hence a need to support the conceptualization of this centralized tool, and to enforce a core team in initiating the creation of the digital layer mapping cultural properties, and to train regional and local staff at *hromada* level to feed and maintain this tool updated.

MCIP has started to develop national accounting systems for both immovable heritage and museum heritage data. The Ukraine Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment report jointly prepared by the World Bank, the Government of Ukraine, and the European Commission published in August 2022 recommends the development and use of digital infrastructure (e.g., electronic library, digitization of documents through electronic archives, media, online museums, etc.) and mentions that 'UNESCO will provide extensive support' to the development of Ukraine's national platform of cultural heritage.

The digital transformation of heritage management is among the priority areas of cooperation between UNESCO and the Government of Ukraine, as reflected in the letter of intent signed on 30 August 2022 between the MCIP and UNESCO. It has been under discussion between the two parties since almost the beginning of the war.

Consequently, in support of Ukraine's ambition and efforts to establish a digital inventory of movable, immovable and intangible cultural heritage of Ukraine, UNESCO is ready to support the digital transformation of the country's heritage management with a view to properly prepare for its integration and interoperability with international databases. The project aims to assist in the development of a vision for the digital transformation of the culture sector in Ukraine, the establishment and training of a dedicated core team within the MICP and its specialized institutions, the development of standardized methodologies for the digitization of different types of cultural heritage (immovable, movable and intangible) and their practical application in pilot cases of digital inventory or digitization of existing inventories.

Objectives

The project's overall objective is to support MCIP's efforts in developing a comprehensive digital inventory system of cultural heritage. It will be used to assess, reduce and mitigate potential impact and damages of the war on different types of cultural heritage and to prioritize cultural properties/elements for urgent interventions (preservation, conservation, and safeguarding). In the longer term, the project aims to establish a digital infrastructure maintained by MCIP for cultural heritage management and the planning and implementation of the overall recovery process.

The expected results of the project are the establishment of resources and instruments for the protection of tangible (movable and immovable) and intangible cultural heritage. They can be defined as follows:

- A dedicated team within the MCIP established.

- A strategic vision and a roadmap for digital transformation established and a guiding policy framework developed and approved.
- Standardized methodologies for the digital inventory of cultural heritage developed and adopted by the MCIP.
- A full set of updated guidelines and tools for inventorying cultural heritage in Ukraine corresponding to international standards available in Ukrainian.
- A core group of key stakeholders trained on inventorying cultural heritage using the new standardized methodologies.
- The technological capacity to maintain the digital platform established at the MCIP.
- Pilot projects on developing inventories using the new methodologies or digitization of existing inventories conducted.

Project description

The project includes short-term and medium-term activities to improve the national policy framework and establish the operational setup.

1) **Improving the national policy framework**

- Support the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine in the development of **a strategic vision and roadmap for digital transformation** in the field of heritage management based on existing registries and resources.

- Define a **guiding policy framework** in the form of protocols for digital data creation and management, establishing the characteristics of digital data according to their type (ownership, accessibility, usage, etc.).

- Coordinate **joint work of the different stakeholders** that are and will be active in the digitization and digital presentation of cultural heritage assets of Ukraine.

- Facilitate consultation of cultural institutions involved in cultural heritage management across the country for the definition of the inventory system, methodologies, and guidelines

2) Establishing an operational set-up for Ukraine's digital infrastructure

This activity comprises the following major components:

- Identify, localize and map **existing inventorying guidelines** and tools for all kinds of heritage, identify gaps and update existing (including translation) and develop missing guidelines and tools, adapting them for the digital environment.

- In close cooperation with key stakeholders **develop the structure for a national digital inventories** system to safeguard cultural heritage, including the structure for the individual databases/inventories.

- **Build capacities** of dedicated teams within the MCIP and its specialized institutions on inventory-making and 3D documentation (including community-based inventorying of living heritage).

- Support in hardware provision to **establish and operationalize the server centralized room at the MCIP**.

- o Implement a **series of pilot projects** to complete/develop selected inventories and digitize individual data sets of built heritage, movable cultural property, historic archives and documents, and existing inventories (including of intangible cultural heritage and museum collections). Digitization efforts should take into consideration the following scenarios:
    - Already digitalized inventory cards/entries with different systems to be standardized so as to provide centralized access to decentralized inventories. These will be mainly based on specific standardized systems.
    - Paper cards to be converted into digital data.
    - No pre-existing inventory records and collections, full digitization needed.

BUDGET: Approximately USD 1 – 1.5 M

TIMEFRAME: 24 months