

Interreg



Alpine Space



Cheers

European Regional Development Fund

Cultural HEritagE

Risks and Securing activities

policy recommendations

Local strategies.

**The six pillars for salvaging
cultural heritage against
natural hazards.**

Premise

Due to their specific features, in terms of geographical position, geomorphology, and characteristics of the environment, the Alps gave shape to a very peculiar cultural heritage. In view of the sustainable development of the area, the Alpine heritage and its related system of territorial assets can be seen as a crucial resource for many reasons: an asset may represent the origins and the roots of local communities, their history, traditional arts and crafts, and can also be a source of economic revenues through manufacture and tourism activities, thus ensuring long term income. Because of its physical conditions and dynamics of the territory, cultural heritage is often threatened by a wide range of risks and natural hazards such as floods, earthquakes, fires, landslides, and avalanches. The protection of these assets and/or resources generates positive outcomes, hence it has become more and more important to identify and implement action programmes, guidelines, and tools able to enhance and increase knowledge, integrating the field of natural hazards with the one of cultural heritage in a more stable and effective way.

The CHEERS project “Cultural HERitagE. Risks and Securing activities”, funded by the European Commission as part of the programme “Interreg Alpine Space 2018–2021”, aimed to reach these goals by proposing a series of useful activities to prepare for emergencies involving cultural heritage; they include the enhancement of knowledge and the development of assessment tools for supporting decision-making processes to be used while planning safeguarding measures and during the interventions, so as to reduce the damage caused by disasters.

Taking into account

The pivotal priority of setting up coordinated resilience strategies, the CHEERS partners designed and applied these strategies to cultural assets in the Alpine area, to be used in emergency and rescue phases against the potentially devastating impact of natural hazards and climate change.

Agreed on the following policy recommendations

The CHEERS partners strongly believe in the urgent need to raise awareness of all relevant public and private decision makers, public administration managers, and local stakeholders: they must engage themselves in strengthening the resources and competences for the safeguard of cultural heritage in emergency situations. After having saved human lives, safeguarding cultural assets is a priority because of their significant meaning for the communities, both at the local and global level.

The development of capacity building initiatives, in peace time and in a permanent way, is increasingly important for implementing a holistic approach to enhance the resilience of cultural assets to multiple hazards, which nowadays occur more frequently in the Alpine area. Therefore, promoting capacity and readiness of the pertinent cultural heritage ecosystem, with a participated and inclusive involvement of all the stakeholders (policy-makers and decision-makers, cultural sites managers, local and regional authorities, civil protection and emergency teams, as well as local communities), would be our priority.

The morphological characteristics of the Alps, combined with the outstanding and fragile features of the cultural assets, requires specific, transborder, and tailored disaster risk management and safeguarding strategies. As a matter of fact, the same elements that shaped the alpine cultural heritage become threats when the assets are subject to natural hazards.

Thus, it becomes more and more important to identify and implement tools able to increase and improve knowledge, integrating the field of natural hazards with the one of cultural heritage in a more stable and effective way, enabling and encouraging mutual sharing and cooperation initiatives in peace and event time. In so doing, we must work on the hazards themselves and their characteristics in these specific environments, according to the peculiar features of the exposed cultural heritage.

To achieve a significant disaster risk reduction in the field of cultural heritage, responsibilities must be shared by all governments and relevant authorities, officers, and stakeholders, in line with their national, regional, and local characteristics, as well as their systems of governance, since the safeguarding measures need to be tailored and implemented at the appropriate level. It is also necessary to foster transborder civil protection and emergency management cooperation to optimise joint interventions in the case of extreme hazards that involve two or more neighbouring countries.

A major gap to be tackled is the relationship between heritage property management, the local communities, and the bodies in charge of territorial emergencies management and civil protection actions. That is why we feel the urge to include the safeguard of cultural heritage in the disaster management and civil protection plans in a permanent way, and in all countries. As a snowball effect, starting from national, then regional, and finally local level, it is crucial to add cultural assets both in disaster prevention and response plans, during the emergency and in the following post disaster scenarios. More precisely, cultural heritage sites should be included in the four main phases of intervention, which are fully recognised as a reference guide for civil protection, emergency management activities and their operational plans: Preparedness, Alert, Response, and Recovery. This gap is also reflected by the lack of specific skills of the vast majority of cultural heritage managers, who often have poor knowledge about the natural hazards to which sites, buildings, and assets are exposed, and about the potential impact of natural disasters on such heritage. They rarely receive a proper training to deal with emergency situations caused by natural events which may severely threaten the heritage, potentially leading to severe damages or loss of the assets (or sites) they are responsible of. That is why civil protection plans and the related training activities aimed to enhance capacity building should definitively incorporate the safeguard of cultural heritage, and permanently involve, according to country regulations, cultural heritage actors such as professionals, experts, disaster managers, civil protection volunteers who are specialists in cultural heritage, and the whole of the local site managers.

The CHEERS partners would like to draw the attention of policy makers to six main actions (or ‘pillars’) for maximising the effectiveness and efficiency of local strategies for the safeguard of cultural heritage.

1. Promoting the development of locally based civil protection plans or other emergency planning tools as a fundamental training and reference tool to enhance the emergency and safeguarding activities. Such plans, developed in peace time, provide guidelines and reference actions, pursuant to local needs; pinpoint the subjects and objects exposed to different risks in the area; identify the safeguarding strategy and the available resources which might be activated according to the typology of the event, enriching the local and extra local protocols with specific data on the territory in a stable and well-organised way. Offering these tools to the local communities and enable their improvement and update over time is therefore pivotal to enhance the safeguarding actions and support decision-making processes under pressure during emergencies.

2. Promoting cooperation and sharing by integrating cultural heritage assets and the related safeguarding intervention with civil protection activities and emergency planning in a permanent way. The integration of cultural heritage issues would enhance the mutual exchange of skills and knowledge, for example information about the exposure of local cultural assets and their vulnerability. This would generate an important increase, in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, in the use of territorial resources during the safeguarding operations.
3. Promoting and supporting as much as possible training activities in which to discuss cultural heritage and natural hazards, involving civil protection and territorial planning experts, as well as competent bodies and professionals, according to specific needs and local rules. Moreover, encouraging the participation of local and extra local subjects and stakeholders which might cooperate and share decision-making during future emergencies and safeguarding actions. This will not only improve capabilities and skills at the system level, but also enhance mutual understanding and allow for a more efficient organisation and management.
4. Supporting the development of knowledge and capacity building tools, and disseminating the culture of 'being prepared for an emergency' in peace time, in order to maximise effectiveness in action and at once minimise damages and losses of cultural heritage during emergencies.
5. Promoting programmes, tools, and actions to get the local population more actively involved in emergency activities, finding agreements between citizens and local/regional authorities, to raise disaster risk awareness and increase citizen engagement by relying on technologies, media, and tools, also using social media and crowd-sourced data to activate the prevention, preparedness, and response capacity of citizens in taking actions for the safeguard of their own cultural heritage.
6. Promoting and supporting the implementation of databases and digital repositories of information about cultural heritage at risk in the Alpine area, also referring to case studies and best practices which were proven successful or unsuccessful in the past. When cultural heritage is involved, such data on past natural disasters – which represent an internationally available know-how, or the 'lessons learnt' – are useful to collect, share and assess effective methodologies, processes, and technologies for emergency times, and improve safeguarding measures, as well as disaster management actions. This will set the fertile ground for further and mutually shared recommendations aimed at developing new policies, discussing governance issues, and promoting a culture of improved preparedness to safeguard cultural heritage.

The consolidation of a widespread culture of improved preparedness, adaptability, and resilience to risks involving cultural heritage and its related value, will be achieved in the medium and long term.