CULTURAL HERITAGE AS A POTENTIAL CATALYST OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract. *This paper is a first step in the elaboration of a PhD thesis on the same topic and aims at analysing the role of cultural heritage in international relations, mainly at the level of the European Union and the EU Member States. From the analysis of existing scientific works in this field, from the observation of the policies and programmes of the European Union, as well as the initiatives of the Member States, a close link has been observed between this vast concept "heritage" and the development of international relations with other communities, states and other international actors.*

Keywords: *cultural heritage, culture, international relations, european programs*

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage is an extremely broad concept, with applications and uses in various fields. In trying to define cultural heritage from my own perspective, I consider it to be the universal heritage of humanity that defines the identity of a people, proves the existence of inter-racial cultural links, and ensures a dialogue between peoples. UNESCO has captured the essence of heritage in a nutshell by claiming that: "Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration." The 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage exemplifies and categorizes as cultural heritage the following: " monuments: architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; groups of buildings: groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; sites: works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view" *(UNESCO,1972).*

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization makes it clear that cultural heritage is not limited to monuments and collections of objects but rather is "comprised of living expressions inherited from our ancestors, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social manners, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices related to nature and the universe, and knowledge and techniques linked to traditional crafts" *(UNESCO, Cultural Heritage),* cultural heritage is therefore also composed of those elements that we include in the category of intangible cultural heritage, defined in Romania

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by Law no. 26 of 29th February 2008 on the protection of intangible cultural heritage *(Romanian Parliament, Law no.26 of 29.02.2008).*

In the paper "Museums, Heritage and International Development", Paul Basu and Wayne Modest define heritage as "a legacy that has the power to shape the current predispositions of individuals and societies and their visions of the future, for better or worse" *(Basu and Modest, 2015, 2)* and mention that it could be seen as a tool for "fabricating the past" *(Basu and Modest, 2015, 6).* The same authors state that "Heritage is a notoriously malleable concept.", and Peter Johnson and Barry Thomas being even harsher in their phrasing argue that heritage refers to "virtually anything by which some sort of link, however tenuous or false, can be created with the past" (*Basu and Modest, 2015, 7).*

The European Commission has encompassed the essence of such a broad concept of cultural heritage in the wording: " Europe's cultural heritage is a rich and diverse mosaic of cultural and creative expressions, an inheritance from previous generations of Europeans and a legacy for those to come. It includes natural, built and archaeological sites, museums, monuments, artworks, historic cities, literary, musical and audiovisual works, and the knowledge, practices and traditions of European citizens" *(European Commission, Cultural heritage).*

The importance of cultural heritage for international relations is attributed to economic and social aspects. At European level, this integrating element is an essential resource for Member States to ensure a sense of belonging for social cohesion and the creation of a cultural dialogue. Bearing in mind the principle of unity in diversity and considering the principles of UNESCO, the main aim of organisations at international and European level is a common one: the creation of a dialogue between cultures *(Matsuura, 2006, 5).*

Samuel Huntington, drew attention to the elements of cultural heritage as a main source of conflict after the end of the Cold War and insisted on the attention that the discipline of International Relations should give to this aspect *(Huntington, 2002, 49).* Noting its divisive force which can easily lead to intolerance and conflict *(Bevan, 2006, 13)*, the European Union has begun to give increased importance to cultural heritage in its internal policies, but also in its external policies when used as a soft power.

2. Conceptualising cultural heritage

Cultural heritage and culture in general are not considered important elements in international relations theories, which is why they have not been given much attention. However, the intangible elements of culture and cultural heritage have started to be increasingly repeated in the discourses of political leaders at European level, especially in the context of Europeanisation and the identification of a common European identity. In this context, I consider essential a theorization and conceptualization of cultural heritage through the prism of the main theories of international relations, in particular by analyzing the ideas of some of the leading figures and the fathers of these theories.

Realism is based on ancient traditional thought and considers that political action, institutions, social organizations, and moral beliefs are all arranged in cultural frameworks, they represent the substance, the empirical and material embodiments of culture as a system of signification *(Beate, 2000, p.7).*

According to Samuel Huntington, the realist approach is able to explain the importance of states, but it does not take into account the fact that states define their interests not only in terms of power but also that "values, cultures and institutions pervasively influence how states define their interests" *(Huntington, 2002, 34)* . Moreover, Huntington

believes that states should be conceived as civilizations, and can be defined as "a collection of cultural characteristics and phenomena", "the broadest cultural entity", or "the highest cultural grouping of people" *(Huntington, 2002, 43)*. In addition, in the same famous work "The Clash of Civilizations", Samuel Huntington has a vision of a cultural restructuring of global politics, where culture takes precedence over power and where enemies and allies of a state are defined by their cultural identity, even if they are still guided by self-interest *(Huntington, 2002, 126)*.

According to Morgenthau's ideas, societal and cultural developments are not useful in international relations because they are temporally and spatially relative, changing over time and differing from one society to another *(Morgenthau, 1993, 220)*. In addition, Morgenthau sees the modern development of societies based on national cultures as a dangerous threat to peace and order in the world, because each state has the belief that their cultural values are superior to other cultures and there is a risk of imposing these values on other nations *(Morgenthau, 1993, 245)* Therefore, culture is not just a contingent concept because it changes over time and from place to place; it is also a dangerous one because political practice based on these cultural beliefs has become a major threat to peace *(Beate, 2000, p.15)*.

In contrast to Realism, the Liberalist theory argues that the intermingling of different cultural values is not necessarily a cause of inter-state conflicts; on the contrary, Hoffman argues that the main problem of the international sphere is the absence of a common culture, but this does not mean that all conflicts between states have cultural causes *(Beate, 2000, p.15)*. Liberalism facilitates the promotion of culture and accepts it as an important element in international relations, simply because it recognises international actors other than states, such as NGOs, as actors that can facilitate international cultural dialogue. This theory focuses on cultural heritage only as a resource for capital accumulation, while at the same time representing a new political language for attracting new investment *(Coombe and Lindsay, 2015, 55)*.

However, for both political theories, realism and liberalism, culture is not an important enough element in International Relations to be given due attention. The constructivist theory, however, comes with a new vision of culture and its role in International Relations.

Constructivism identifies culture as a key element in international relations, considering that all human behaviour, whether motivated by self-interest or the desire for cooperation, is influenced and determined by the cultural orientation of the individual. This idea of constructivist theorists, which seeks to clarify problems on the international scene not only through the political, security or economic prism, but also through the cultural prism, has divided constructivists into two camps: one side which believes that cultural elements can create tensions between states, and the other side which considers culture as a channel for communication, interaction and integration in international relations *(Idoko, 2021, 119)*.

Marxist theory is the only one that has no opinion about the concept of culture or cultural heritage, being ignored or at best reduced to the meaning of ideology *(Worsley, 1981, 117)*. Heritage has been fundamental in addressing the problem of change and continuity with the traditions and identities of the previous society and in the process of transforming citizens into "new people" through cultural revolution and the inculcation of ideology through museums and monuments *(Gonzalez, 2015, 3)*.

3. European Union measures to create international relations through cultural heritage

In recent decades mankind has witnessed an accelerated change in concepts and policy priorities, with the benefits to society of cultural heritage increasingly recognised at both European and international level. Studies show that interest in economic issues predominates, while interest in culture has increased since the 1990s *(CHCfE Consortium, 2015, 14).*

The European Union noticed the rise of interest in culture and understood the importance of this element at social and economic level, but especially saw the unifying potential for European peoples and for the creation of international relations on the external level. As a result, the European institutions began to pay special attention to the cultural field and cultural heritage, by organising events and developing programmes aimed at protecting cultural heritage, raising awareness of European cultural heritage, identifying a common cultural heritage, strengthening the motto "Unity in Diversity" and encouraging cultural exchanges both between Member States and between EU members and external actors.

a) Creative Europe

The main funding programme developed by the European Union in the cultural direction is entitled "Creative Europe", with the aim of supporting the cultural and creative sectors. The Culture sub-programme is divided into four components: cooperation at European level with the aim of strengthening the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors to operate in an internationally competitive way and promote transnational circulation and mobility; European networks to support the activities of networks operating in the cultural sectors; European platforms to promote the development of new talent, cross-border collaboration to identify new audiences and literary translation projects to support the promotion of European literary works through translation and facilitating access to their content. The Culture strand of the Creative Europe programme supports a wide range of cultural sectors including architecture, cultural heritage, design, literature, music, performing arts *(European Commission, Creative Europe).*

The success of this programme is evidenced by the budget allocated for the period 2021- 2027 (€2.44 billion), which is higher than the budget allocated for the period 2014-2020 (€1.47 billion), *(European Commission, Creative Europe Programme).* At the beginning of 2022, the European Commission allocated an annual budget of €385.6 million, almost €100 million more than the budget allocated for 2021 under the same programme, when it approved the annual work programme of the Creative Europe Programme *(European Commission, Creative Europe: Increased budget in 2022).*

The projects funded under this programme have contributed to the creation of European cultural networks, as well as to the development of international relations, involving actors from several countries. Among these projects we recall the following: European Industrial Heritage 2020 and beyond - Fit for the Future which focused on the European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH) 2018, through the European Dance Event "Work-it-Out", in which more than 3,500 children and young people danced on the same day in 32 locations in 10 different countries *(European Commission, Culture and Creativity-Creative Europe Projects)* ; HERITART - a project which aimed to promote European cultural heritage by conveying a new vision of sites The European collaboration project "CEMEC" (Connecting Early Medieval European Collections) - aimed at building a sustainable collaboration between museums and technical and creative companies, with the main theme of cultural exchanges in Europe in the Early Middle Ages and involved seven

museums from Belgium, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain *(European Commission, Culture and Creativity- Creative Europe Projects)*. The projects listed are just a few of the countless projects implemented, but it was considered necessary to mention them in order to highlight that the Creative Europe programme was a success in the direction of creating international relations through culture.

b) Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is the EU programme intended for young people, supporting active citizenship, the development of social and intercultural skills, critical thinking, mobility between countries, promoting cooperation and increasing awareness of the common values of the European Union. Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Courses are also funded under this programme and are designed and carried out through an international partnership between higher education institutions from different countries around the world, thus extending the area of mobility of young people to non-EU countries (*(European Commission, Erasmus+)*.

c) INTERREG

This programme is one of the European Union's key instruments supporting cooperation to facilitate international relations between countries and to find common solutions to challenges in the fields of health, environment, research, education, culture and more. The particularity of this project is its division into three strands: Cross-border cooperation (60 programmes), Transnational cooperation (15 programmes) and Interregional cooperation (4 programmes), *(INTERREG, About Interreg)*.

In the framework of this programme, the ForHeritage project was implemented, which promoted integrated heritage management through the involvement of communities in countries such as Croatia, Poland, Italy, Solvenia, and the development of capacities for more effective protection and management of cultural heritage in Central Europe *(Interreg Central Europe, ForHeritage project)*. With the help of the same programme, nine partners from six Central European countries (Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Slovenia) joined forces to recover and preserve their intangible cultural heritage, thus facilitating cross-border cooperation and generating new international relations and cultural networks.

d) Europe for citizens

Europe for Citizens was another successful EU programme in 2014-2020, with the main aim of helping citizens to understand the history of the European territory, the common values and cultural diversity of the EU, as well as encouraging them to participate in democratic activities and to be active citizens in society. Under this programme, 2588 projects have been implemented across the European Union *(European Commission, Europe for citizens Programme)*, of which around 10% have aimed to enhance Europe's rich and diverse cultural heritage and have followed the role that culture and cultural heritage play in creating a sustainable society. Component 1 of the Europe for Citizens programme played an important role in promoting the role of Europe's cultural heritage as an essential element of cultural diversity and in fostering international relations based on cultural links or linked to a common European memory *(European Commission, Commission Implementing Decision on the financing of the Europe for Citizens programme)*.

e) European Neighbourhood Policy

The European Neighbourhood Policy has been facilitating relations between the European Union and 16 of its southern and eastern neighbours since 2004, with the objective of prosperous cohabitation and preservation of multiculturalism *(European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negociations)*. Through this programme, not only bilateral cooperation is promoted, but also regional cooperation

(especially in the South and East), which consists in the development of specific regional strategies such as the Eastern Partnership or the New Agenda for the Mediterranean. *(European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negociations).* Moreover, the European Union supports through the European Neighbourhood Policy and through cross-border cooperation between EU and neighbouring countries, the establishment of new international relations. Neighbourhood, understood as an expression of differentiated identity, is thus intended to ensure European unity, a principle underlined by the principles of the European Neighbourhood Policy, including the promotion of cultural diversity, culture in the EU's international relations and mobility.

4. **EU actions for cultural heritage**

As seen in the previous chapter, European funding programmes have been and still are the main channels for instilling and promoting the principles of the European Union, as well as for strengthening state cooperation relations within the EU and generating new international relations beyond Europe's borders. However, these funding programmes have in turn generated new actions, events, practices which we will go through in this chapter and which in turn have a major impact in terms of promoting culture, cooperation through cultural heritage, strengthening cultural relations or creating new international relations.

a) European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH)

The year 2018 has been designated as the European Year of Cultural Heritage, being the first thematic year organised within the Juncker Commission and aimed at raising awareness of the importance of cultural heritage and celebrating the richness of European cultural heritage. The European Commission argues that "Cultural heritage brings people together and contributes to more inclusive societies. It is a unique catalyst for exchanges between people of all ages, different social backgrounds, cultures and countries" *(European Commission, European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018).*

This initiative of the European Commission was particularly targeted at young people and included activities to provide them with opportunities to help preserve and restore cultural heritage. The European Year of Cultural Heritage has been adopted by all EU Member States and has succeeded in strengthening the sense of belonging by bringing communities closer to the cultural heritage that makes Europe unique. This year dedicated to cultural heritage is also unique because it has succeeded in producing a special Eurobarometer survey on cultural heritage, the only one of its kind in this field, which has brought to light the views of EU citizens on cultural heritage *(Europeana Pro, Mission).*

In addition to results such as promoting the role of Europe's cultural heritage as an essential element of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, increasing interest in European values and heritage, the European Year of Cultural Heritage has also demonstrated that these actions with cultural themes are important tools in relations between the European Union and other countries, cultural heritage being once again a potential generator of international relations.

b) Europeana

The European Platform was launched in 2008, with the support of the European Commission, with the aim of facilitating public access to Europe's cultural heritage, thus encompassing Europe's digital cultural collection.39 Europeana provides teachers, researchers and cultural heritage enthusiasts with digital access to millions of European cultural heritage articles and materials collected from over 4000 institutions across Europe. By supporting this platform the Commission aims in the long term to build a competitive

tourism ecosystem in the EU, taking into account the strong interdependence between cultural heritage and tourism *(European Commission, The Europeana Platform)*.

c) European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards

The European Heritage Awards were launched by the European Commission in 2002 and since then have been run by Europa Nostra, Europe's leading cultural heritage organisation. These awards bring outstanding cultural heritage initiatives and projects to the public's attention. The European Union offers these awards through the Creative Europe programme and has made a great contribution to encouraging good practice in the cultural heritage sector *(European Commission, Europa Nostra Awards)*. Bringing together project proposals from across the European Union, the Europa Nostra Awards are an opportunity to promote European cultural diversity and strengthen relations between countries *(Europa Nostra, Our work- Awards)*, and by rewarding the most successful projects, European cultural heritage is promoted internationally.

d) European Capitals of Culture

The European Capital of Culture programme was established in 1985 by the European Parliament as a valuable opportunity to regenerate cities, to make them more visible internationally, thus stimulating tourism and international cultural relations *(Directorate General for Internal Policies)*. This programme is yet another opportunity to show the richness and diversity of cultures in Europe, to strengthen the sense of belonging to a common European cultural space, to highlight the importance of culture in generating new international relationships, and at local level, the chosen cities benefit from a regeneration of the cultural infrastructure and a better image in the eyes of both residents and tourists *(Ubrancikova, European Capitals of Culture)*.

e) European Heritage Days

The European Heritage Days started in 1999, following a joint initiative of the Council of Europe and the European Commission, and since then they have been Europe's most important cultural events, with more than 70,000 events organised every year *(Council of Europe, European Heritage Days)*. This initiative contributes to the creation of a climate in which European cultural diversity can be appreciated, to increasing tolerance at European level, beyond national borders, as well as to developing the capacity to promote and protect cultural heritage and to encouraging intercultural dialogue *(European Heritage Days)*. During the European Heritage Days, citizens from the pan-European area, from the 50 signatory states of the European Cultural Convention, are brought together, facilitating free access to countless historical sites, heritage monuments and creating an opportunity to develop international and inter-community relations.

f) European Heritage Label

The European Union's interest in cultural heritage reached a new level in 2013 with the launch of the European Heritage Label at the initiative of several countries with the aim of promoting awareness of shared European history and the importance of cultural heritage conservation. The European Commission decided to get involved and sponsor this initiative due to the lack of a European identity, tending towards a sense of belonging to a united Europe and the stimulation of international relations and intercultural dialogue *(Lahdesmaki, Viktorija, Ceginskas, Krogerus, Mkinen and Turunen, 2020, 9-11)*.

Since 2013, the number of locations awarded the European Heritage Label (EHL) has increased from 4 to 48 and the number of eligible Member States has increased from 5 to 25 in seven years, during which time a solid network of EHL sites has been created and Heritage Mark Days are organised annually *(European Commission, European Heritage Label Panel Report on Monitoring)*.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to identify a relationship between cultural heritage and international relations and to expose the European Union's intentions to use cultural heritage as a tool in creating new international relations and strengthening existing ones.

I believe that the analysis of the European funding programmes, as well as the actions resulting from their implementation demonstrate or at least indicate the importance of this vast and controversial element - cultural heritage in the relations between EU Member States, as well as in the cohabitation with other peoples outside the European space.

Of course, this paper is only a starting point in demonstrating the main hypothesis: cultural heritage generates and facilitates International Relations, and this idea will be further developed and analysed in a PhD paper. In order to really understand this obvious link and to prove the above-mentioned hypothesis, a more complex study is needed, involving the analysis of several actions, programmes, events generated and implemented by and with the help of the European Union, as well as the analysis of the European Summits on Cultural Heritage and the identification of the initiatives of the EU Member States to relate through cultural heritage.

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