

## Defending Art: Italy and the International Security of Cultural Heritage (DEFART.IT)

DEFART.IT looks at processes related to the destruction and reconstruction of cultural heritage (CH), and Italy's involvement in the multidimensional field of cultural heritage protection (CHP). The project is premised on the assumption that the international protection of CH and its legal and political mechanisms represent relevant entry points to understand broader dynamics of world politics, such as: the changing forms of conflicts and political violence; the changing nature of international interventions and missions, as well as of multilateral instruments; the political use and misuse of transnational identities and collective memories; the relations between the military and the civilians as well as conservation professionals and humanitarian actors. In other words, the project moves from the idea that the management of CH at risk, foreign policy-making, security concepts and practices are interconnected, at different latitudes, and for Italy in particular considering its endeavour to play a leading role at the international level. All in all, DEFART.IT looks at why and how CH is increasingly being considered by the international community a catalyst of societal resilience and intergovernmental cooperation, problematising this deep-seated narrative. To unpack these aspects, DEFART.IT will develop different and yet complementary lines of research, each one benefitting from a multiplicity of methodological tools and disciplinary insights:

1. As a starting point, DEFART.IT intends to analyse the role of Italy in the construction of a model of regional and global governance for CHP in contexts of crisis, armed conflict, emergencies, disasters, instability and socio-political fragility.
2. In the attempt of offering possible generalisations at the European level, DEFART.IT aims at building a comparative analysis of the drivers and conditions of other EU member states' engagement with the international protection of endangered CH in third countries and in their external actions: why and how EU MSs, individually or acting under the EU aegis, manifest an international commitment to this topic.
3. Proceeding from this, DEFART.IT will also study how different schemes of cooperation and governance models co-exist and overlap in the field of the international protection of CH: how can variations in their design be explained? How can variations in their local translation/implementation as well as reception/perception be explained? In which context(s) is CH a vector of recovery and reconciliation or a trigger for the reproduction of insecurities?
4. To this end, DEFART.IT will focus on how non-European actors (i.e. Russia, China) contribute to the debate around the international protection of CH within UNESCO, regionally-based institutions (i.e. OSCE; Shanghai Cooperation Organisation...), and specialised bodies. This last aspect will be developed also considering Italy's commitment to engage in political dialogues with non-EU actors.

### *State of the Art*

In March 2022 the Russian Armed Forces bombed the Donetsk Academic Regional Drama Theatre in Mariupol, in the context of their full-scale military operation in Ukraine. Attacks on historical buildings, museums, archaeological sites, and the destruction of cultural artefacts and monuments are not new phenomena: throughout history cultural heritage (CH) has repeatedly been endangered by wars, conflicts and political violence, either as collateral damage in military operations or as the intentional targets of insurgents, criminals and terrorists; armed conflicts can themselves generate CH by creating ruins, relics, memorials, that undergo a process of "heritagization" (Sjöholm 2013, p. 9).

The purposes of the destruction of CH range from exploiting the strategic position of certain facilities and sites to financing further operations by looting and smuggling antiquities, to erasing symbols of collective identities and memories. In parallel with the subsequent securitization of CHP as a

transnational and non-traditional security issue (Russo and Giusti 2018), a heritage governance took shape and a heritage diplomacy started assuming a distinct character from the public and cultural diplomacy domains (Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas 2022; Winter 2015). Gradually, CH reconstruction and recovery, too, began attracting the attention of the donor community and other international stakeholders, and the deployment of conservation aid gained traction in the form of technology transfers, capacity building programs, urban planning assistance, tourism development and site management projects (Labadi2020). On the other hand, the weaponization of CH, i.e. its use for military purposes especially in the context of urban warfare (Viejo-Rose and Sørensen 2015a; Kaldor and Sassen 2020) brought about an emerging scholarly interest in the involvement of military actors in the field, i.e. through the incorporation of a cultural component within peacekeeping operations and stabilisation operations (Foradori 2016; Foradori and Rosa 2017; Leloup 2019).

### *Detailed Description*

UniTrento research unit will address the following research questions:

1. Why do states (in particular, EU MSs) and international/regional organisations (in particular, the EU) engage in the reconstruction of cultural heritage in third countries?
2. How do these actors contribute to the construction of a model of regional and global governance for the protection of cultural heritage in situations of emergency (encompassing armed conflicts, disasters, and instability/fragility)?
3. In which contexts and due to which factors can the protection of cultural heritage become a vector of recovery and reconciliation or a trigger for the reproduction of insecurity and instability?

In particular, we will study the emergence of a model for the promotion of a global cultural heritage governance; and investigate its hallmarks (how it has been developed and why according to certain principles and organisational features). In our project, the study of the positioning and agendas of political leaders, policy-makers and officials will be complemented by an innovative analysis of practices and routines of different professionals and sectoral experts.

In order to comparatively review and explain how different states engage with the international protection of endangered CH in third countries, we will consider a number of cases of recipients of conservation aid / beneficiaries of protection and reconstruction projects deployed by international donors and stakeholders. The case-based component of DEFART.IT will be investigated through a bottom-up approach, that is, using qualitative instruments such as the “biography of place” (Sørensen and Viejo-Rose 2015b), that situates cultural heritage also in its social and interactional frameworks, as well as consulting with local communities and the wide gamut of actors involved in the protection, restoration and recovery of specific cultural heritage sites.

### Methodologies

Enhancing the contribution of International Relations and Security Studies to the understanding of cultural heritage as “a social and cultural process that mediates a sense of cultural, social and political change” (Smith, 2006, p. 84) entails interdisciplinarity and methodological innovations. Disciplinary contaminations will lead to the development of three specific toolkits to reply to research questions addressing different levels and units of analysis.

The first toolkit lies in document and textual analysis: policy documents and legal texts will be screened through content and discourse analysis techniques, in order to unveil what international protection of cultural heritage means for different actors. This will be complemented by the analysis of the practices: the ones emerging from the current legal frameworks (both international and domestic), as well as the ones emerging from practitioners’ repertoires of actions and routines when CHP governance schemes are articulated and produced. In particular, the UniTrento research unit will analyse “political and

security practices” through different rounds of observations, to be organised possibly intercepting practitioners’ gatherings (policy fora, outreach events) in order to look at how CHP activities and projects are conceived, negotiated and discussed by professionals and experts. Similarly, we will closely monitor meetings and sessions of international and regional organisations as well as of specialised agencies, collect their minutes and agendas to understand how interventions and actions are debated and reviewed. The second toolkit consists of a tentative large-N analysis aimed to identify the main drivers of cultural heritage protection’s missions and their impact on regional security.

The third toolkit relies on site-intensive methods, case-based data collection and analysis and the development of context-sensitive instruments that will bring some of the researchers involved in DEFART.IT to carry out fieldwork research and interact with local actors and stakeholders on selected cultural heritage sites, in particular in selected countries that are recipients of conservation aid / beneficiaries of protection and reconstruction projects deployed by international donors and stakeholders. This will be done mainly through interviews and focus groups (and if not feasible, through videoconference tools and remote distribution and administration of questionnaires), in order to survey the multi-faced landscape of institutions, agencies, organisations and donors engaging with cultural heritage initiatives and projects; and, on the other hand, to gain deeper and thicker insights on how cultural heritage sites are transformed by the uses that people make of them, changing meanings associated with them, their impact in both their material dimension (i.e. spatial configuration, resource distribution) and the symbolic-narrative one.

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