



United Nations
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
Secretariat, Geneva



Building Cities Resilience to Disasters in Europe: Protecting Cultural Heritage and Adapting to Climate Change

Doge's Palace, St Mark's Square Venice, Italy

19-20 March 2012

Why cities are at risk

While the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction for 2011 indicated that mortality risk to floods and tropical cyclones is decreasing, vulnerability to hazards rapidly increasing in Europe and generically in developed countries, with adverse impacts on their economy.

In 2010, the economic loss risk to floods in OECD countries, which concentrates about 53% of the global GDP exposed per year, is about 170% more than in 1990. Economic loss risk in the OECD countries is rising faster than GDP per capita meaning that the risk of losing wealth in weather-related disasters is increasing faster than that wealth is being created.

Disasters risk has become an acute and increasing urban problem. Poorly planned urban environment, weak urban governance, old and ageing and fragile physical infrastructures and gaps in basic services together with a rapid urban growth have increased pressure on the urban environment and thus also exposure to disaster risk. cities today are major engines of economic opportunity, education and cultural life: 100 cities today are in control of 30% of the world economy. The need for maintenance and upkeep of these cities are crucial safety measures for their citizens.

In 2010 the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) launched the campaign Making Cities Resilient- My city is getting ready! With the objective to enrol city leaders, local government and city councils as an integral and active part of building the resilience of their urban communities. The campaign objective is not only to promote awareness among citizens of the benefits of public investment in reducing disaster risk, but also to stimulate sharing of experiences and draw lessons from cities around the world which already joined the campaign. The city of Venice has been an example for its efforts to protect its cultural heritage from a changing climate. The event will be an opportunity for Cities to share experiences, to view good practices and to agree on emerging actions that are of key relevance in order to ensure that disaster risk reduction is part of local actions and disaster management policies.

The challenges posed by a changing climate in reducing vulnerabilities to disasters and protecting cultural heritage.

Evidence is mounting that climate change presents unique challenges for urban areas and their growing populations. Beyond the physical risks posed by climate change, characterized by increased incidence of extreme weather events and incidence of extreme high sea level, cities will have to face challenges related to water supply, physical infrastructure, transport, ecosystem goods and services.

Increasing risk could lead to a loss of cultural assets that are felt by the population of immense importance. In fact, as it has been already pointed out, "cultural heritage is a reflection of past lives, an

extension of efforts to save present lives”¹. The ability of affected individuals and communities to regain equilibrium in their lives after a disaster, depend very much on efforts to retrieve and strengthen those heritage elements and symbols that have traditionally given meaning, order and continuity to life.

Cities, as engines of cultural life, are hosts of important cultural heritage capital, serving as source of identity, which needs to be protected and managed for the future generations. Mr. Giorgio Orsoni, mayor of the city of Venice (inscribed at the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1987) states that “culture is the most important asset the world should defend, the most sustainable, as it can be increased with no limit and without any environmental impact, the most durable, as it can be shared with anybody without being fragmented and lost”². Risks from disasters have been identified as one of the most significant threats to World Heritage properties and their inhabitants.

Greece hosted in 2008 the International Workshop on Disaster Risk Reduction at World Heritage Properties. The workshop identified the exchange of orientations and guidelines as an important aspect to be developed with appropriate means of education and awareness to the importance of risk preparedness.³ As one of the recommended actions of the Olympia Protocol, it sought to hold international Workshops to introduce the Protocol, to identify pilot sites and facilitate the establishment of twinning arrangements.

Meeting objectives:

- Consider the key role played by disaster risk reduction measures and the protection of cultural heritage;
- Explore climate change adaption policies and plans at local level;
- Facilitate the sharing of good practices by Cities through direct exchanges;
- Build partnerships at local level, through the involvement of new actors.

Expected outcomes:

- Increased knowledge on measures to reduce vulnerability to disasters at local level;
- Sharing of disaster risk and adaptation policies among cities;
- Stimulate direct exchanges and learning between cities: city to city learning through twinning;
- Sharing knowledge and measures to safeguard cultural heritage in view of prospective risks;
- Stimulate engagement in the design and implementation of cities strategies and climate adaptation planning;
- Opportunity to collect information on good practices from Cities across Europe.

¹ “Risk Preparedness: a management manual for world Cultural Heritage” , ICCROM, Rome , 1998

² Official statement of pr. Giorgio Orsoni, Mayor of Venice at the Third Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, Geneva, May 11th (full text available here:

<http://www.preventionweb.net/globalplatform/2011/programme/statements/>)

³An electronic copy of the Olympia Protocol is available here:

http://www.iaa-conservation.org.il/images/files/pdf_docs/Olympia_Protocol.pdf