



UNESCO Chair on Threats to Cultural Heritage
and Cultural Heritage-related Activities
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Chair

THREATS

MARCH 2023

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Quarterly Briefing on Cultural Heritage Security

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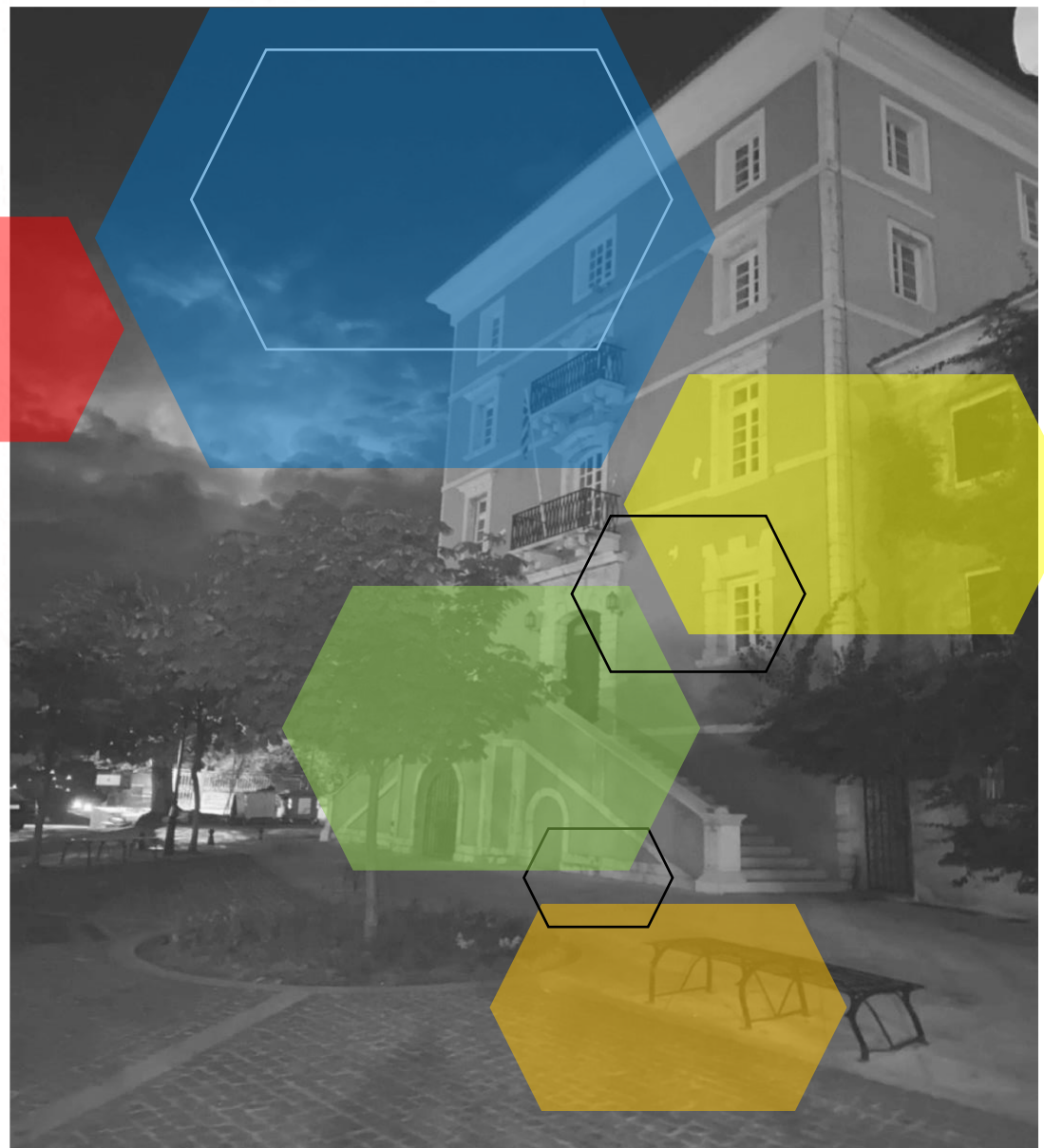
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Editor's note

Professor Stavros Katsios, Chairholder
Director, Laboratory for Geo-Cultural Analyses (GEOLab)
DFLTI, Ionian University



Welcome to the first issue of “THREATS” a quarterly briefing by the UNESCO Chair on Threats to Cultural Heritage and Cultural Heritage related Activities at the Ionian University in Corfu, Greece. Following the imperative of the UNESCO Program our Chair functions as a “think tank and bridge-builder between the academic world, civil society, local communities, research and policy-making” contributing to UNESCO’s priorities to Agenda 2030.

THREATS Quarterly (TQ) aims in line with the mission entrusted to our UNESCO Chair on Threats to Cultural Heritage and Cultural Heritage related Activities to contribute to identifying the multifold threats that are posed to cultural heritage and cultural heritage-related activities, and enhancing our ability to deal with them effectively promoting measures and policies, that will contribute to ensure the sustainability of societies and human security; this is pursued through collaboration with governmental- and non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders on a training and policy level as well as with other UNESCO

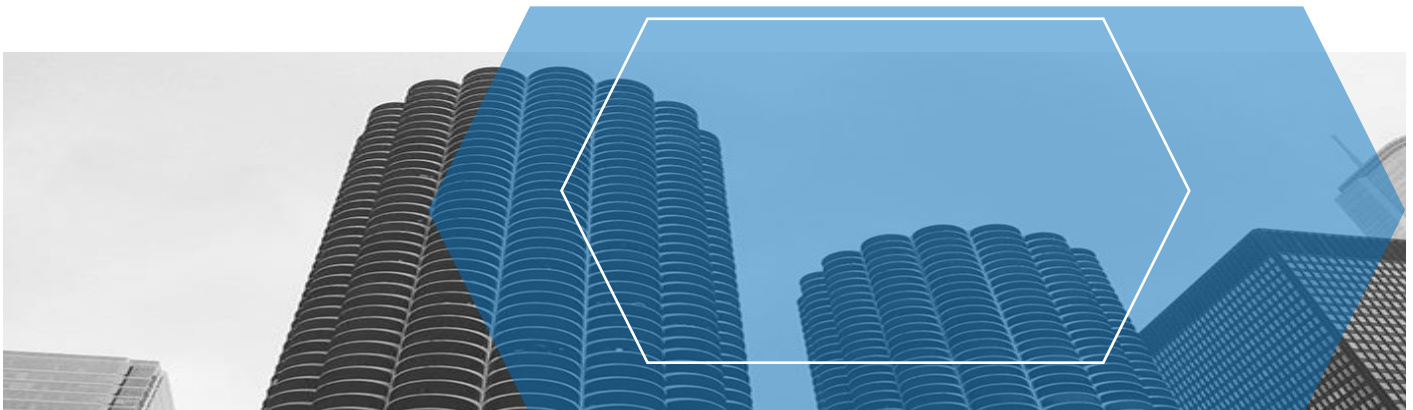
Chairs, as part of a strategy for developing policies and functioning mechanisms to protect cultural heritage.

From looting and illegal trafficking to the impacts of human conflict, climate change and urban development TQ will explore the challenges and efforts being made to protect and preserve our shared cultural heritage.

THREATS Quarterly outreach goes beyond scholars, experts and governmental functionaries working in the field of Cultural Heritage and related activities. TQ is addressed to everyone who is concerned about the various threats that tangible and intangible cultural heritage can face and the importance of taking action to protect and preserve cultural heritage for next generations, getting acquainted with the possibilities and trends of the future.

Thank you for joining [us](#) on this important journey.

Stavros Katsios



4Q*i*INTERVIEW

Krista Pikkat

UNESCO Director Emergencies Culture



Krista Pikkat joined UNESCO in 1997 through the Young Professionals Programme. She worked for the Programme for Central and Eastern European Development (PROCEED), Sector for External Relations, Office for the Director General and the Bureau of Strategic Planning at UNESCO Headquarters (Paris). From 2013 to 2017, she was the Head of the UNESCO Tashkent Office and UNESCO Representative to Uzbekistan. From April 2017 until her appointment as Director for Emergencies and Culture, Ms Pikkat served as Director of the UNESCO Almaty Office and UNESCO Representative in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

01

After a successful career in UNESCO in Paris and Central Asia, since last year you are leading the UNESCO Culture and Emergencies Entity. What are the highlights till now?

In recent years, the deliberate attacks as well as the impacts of natural and human-made hazards on culture have steadily increased. In response, UNESCO has built significant expertise and operational experience in safeguarding culture in emergencies, particularly over the past two decades.

At the Culture and Emergencies Entity, we take action at multiple levels during all phases of crisis – before, during and after. Throughout this process, multi-stakeholder engagement and dialogue between cultural heritage professionals, scientists, communities, armed forces, and law enforcement personnel for the protection of cultural heritage is essential.

Rapid intervention at the onset of a crisis is critical in order to mitigate the impact of conflict or disasters on all dimensions of a country's cultural heritage. UNESCO has the proven capacity to act and is present to support its Member States in all major crises – from Ukraine to the Sahel, from Iraq to Chile and the Philippines. Since its creation in 2015, UNESCO's Heritage Emergency Fund has supported 80 countries and intervened in 54 different locations in preparation or response to an emergency affecting cultural heritage.

02

What are your priorities in the new position and what do you hope to achieve?

Africa and **Gender Equality** are UNESCO's global priorities. They are certainly reflected in the core programming for the Culture and Emergencies Entity, in particular the Heritage Emergency Fund.



Another priority is the **enhanced and strengthened preparedness** among our Member States. Globally, there is a persistent lack of awareness on the importance of investing in preparedness and risk reduction, which results in reliance on emergency responses when a crisis strikes. We are intensifying our efforts to build capacities of our Member States and spread a culture of prevention.

Through the training of experts and the development of Disaster Risk Management plans, UNESCO works to share appropriate tools and means to national professionals and institutions, thereby enhancing national ownership in addressing emergencies.

Additionally, the impact of **climate change** on cultural heritage worldwide, particularly in African countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), is a pressing issue for which we are identifying new partnerships and tools.

The Culture and Emergencies Entity will continue to respond to future crises with speed and efficiency to support our Members States to strength their resilience and protect their culture and cultural heritage.

03

Tell us about your strategy and plans, and what the UNESCO Chairs, in particular, can do if they want to get involved?

The 2020 Evaluation of UNESCO Action to Protect Culture in Emergencies, conducted by its Internal Oversight Service (IOS), reaffirmed the importance of partnerships for sustainable actions. In this regard, UNESCO works to forge partnerships with external actors, national and local partners, as well as existing network of UNESCO Chairs and Category 2 Centres and Institutes. As centers of excellence for research and capacity-building, the UNESCO Chairs are called upon to enhance the impact of the Culture in Emergencies programming. These collaborations include initiating research, collecting good practices, raising awareness, and supporting the Member States to enhance their preparedness, response and recovery capacities. This echoes the very fruitful discussions during the thematic session on “Rethinking interdisciplinary cooperation for Culture in Emergencies” held on 3 November 2022 during the International UNESCO Chairs Conference.

04

Do you think that AI technologies can fill in the gaps to secure access to and safeguard cultural heritage in other ways than the ones provided by the existing UNESCO Conventions or the Council of Europe heritage Conventions?

Indeed, new technologies, including AI, can enhance the implementation of UNESCO’s cultural conventions and other standard-setting instruments. They carry tremendous potential to assist practitioners in the inventory of cultural assets, the acquisition of data concerning their state of conservation and vulnerability to natural and human-induced hazards, as well as access to diverse communities of cultural heritage.

Satellite imagery is one such example. By collating drone videos and photographs, laser scanning, photogrammetry and crowdsourced data through sophisticated software, the cutting-edge



technology enables the faithful documentation of heritage assets. Such documentation is a precondition for any conservation and management policy, not to mention rehabilitation or reconstruction plans. For researchers, archaeologists or conservationists, these accurate and detailed virtual models not only open a wide array of possibilities, but also reduce the need for on-site missions. This virtual “access” is particularly useful when assets concerned are located in otherwise inaccessible areas.

For several years, UNESCO has deployed new technologies in its emergency operations. In Ukraine and elsewhere, satellite imagery acquired through a partnership with UNITAR/UNOSAT has enabled the verification of damage to cultural property. In Beirut, after the explosions of September 2020, UNESCO led an emergency documentation in partnership with ICONEM to develop a three-dimensional geo-referenced model of the damaged area. During UNESCO’s capacity building activities for museums, digitization of collections and inventories are fully integrated in view of heritage safeguarding and community access.

While these new technologies offer benefits to culture in emergencies, we must thoughtfully reflect on ethical questions – especially concerning Artificial Intelligence. New technologies, including AI, have an important role to play, insofar as they are guided by informed, transparent and inclusive decision making. This standard applies to the future of culture within societies, including strategies for the social, economic and cultural reconstruction of the society following a disaster or a conflict.

As a leading institution in the ethics of AI, UNESCO advocates for international and national policies as well as regulatory frameworks to ensure that these emerging technologies benefit humanity as a whole.



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Chair on Threats to Cultural Heritage
and Cultural Heritage-related Activities

Έδρα για τις Απειλές κατά της Πολιτιστικής
Κληρονομιάς και των σχετικών με την
Πολιτιστική Κληρονομιά Δραστηριοτήτων

Fit for Purpose

The purpose of the Chair on Threats to Cultural Heritage is to promote an integrated System of research, training, information, and documentation on the protection of cultural heritage. It will facilitate collaboration between high-level, internationally recognized researchers and teaching staff of the Ionian University and other HE institutions in Greece, as well as elsewhere in Europe and North America, Africa, and in other regions of the world.

Situation Report

ENDANGERED WORLD HERITAGE: HAGHIA SOPHIA (ISTANBUL-TR)

Introduction: Hagia Sophia, located in Istanbul, Turkey, is an iconic world heritage site that has been a symbol of cultural and religious heritage for centuries. The site has been through several changes over the years, from being a Byzantine church to an Ottoman mosque and then a museum. However, recent developments have put this historic monument at risk, prompting concern from experts and stakeholders.

Threat Assessment: The recent decision by the Turkish government to convert Hagia Sophia back into a mosque has raised several concerns about the preservation of the site's cultural and historical value. The conversion process has involved covering up or removing the site's Christian mosaics and frescoes, which are an integral part of the site's cultural heritage. This has led to a significant loss of the site's historical value and has raised concerns about the preservation of the site's integrity. Additionally, the increased foot traffic and use of the site as a mosque have raised concerns about the site's physical degradation. According to a recent study, the site's marble columns and floorings are susceptible to erosion and damage from foot traffic and environmental factors, which could cause irreversible damage to the site's structural integrity (Gupta et al., 2020).

*When a site is lost,
not only the heritage is affected,
but also, the social system around it.*

Ann Bourges,

French Ministry of Culture Secretary-gen. of the
International Council of Monuments & Sites

Furthermore, the conversion of the site into a mosque has also raised concerns about the site's accessibility to non-Muslim visitors. This could lead to a decrease in tourism, which is a significant source of revenue for the site and could impact the site's overall sustainability.

Conclusion: The recent decision to convert Hagia Sophia back into a mosque has raised significant concerns about the preservation of the site's cultural and historical value, as well as its physical and structural integrity. The loss of the site's Christian mosaics and frescoes, along with the potential physical degradation from increased foot traffic, could cause irreversible damage to this iconic world heritage site. It is essential to take measures to protect the site's historical and cultural significance while ensuring its accessibility to all visitors.

References: Gupta, A., Das, P., & Chakraborty, S. (2020). *Structural Analysis of Hagia Sophia Using 3D Laser Scanning and Finite Element Method.* *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 42, 9-19.
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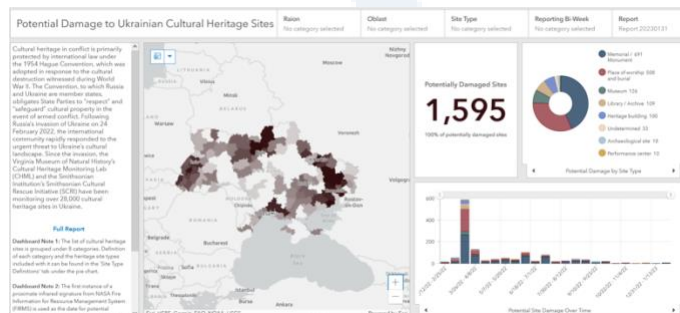
World Heritage Threats hiding in Plain Sight

THE RISK OF TRADE IN STOLEN UKRAINIAN ARTEFACTS

On Wednesday January 18, 2023 Poland’s culture minister took the floor at the opening of a UNESCO workshop in Warsaw entitled “Fighting the illicit trafficking of Ukrainian cultural property: sub-regional capacity- building training for law enforcement and the judiciary”.

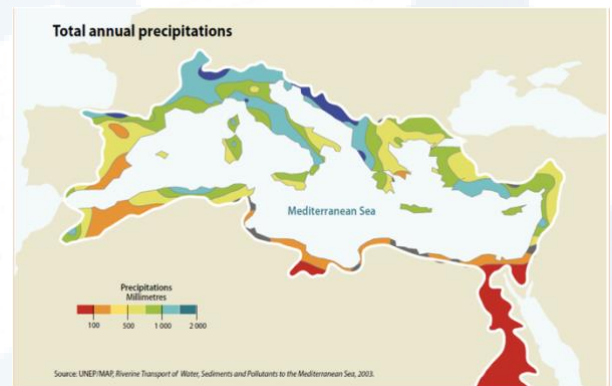
The culture minister warned that one of the threats faced in war- torn Ukraine is the illegal export, and more widely, the illegal trade in moveable monuments. Piotr Glinki pointed out that Polish experts were active in the recovery of stolen art given that Poland had an estimated 500,000 items stolen by German and Soviet forces during Second World War. Based on that Polish experts remain engaged in the protection and rescue of cultural heritage the world over.

The director of UNESCO’s Culture and Emergencies Entity, Krista Pikkat, in turn, included that since February 24, 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine, culture in all its forms is going through a crisis, in response to which UNESCO had been fully mobilized to protect the country’s rich cultural heritage in close cooperation with local and national authorities. Finally, UNESCO had so far verified more than 230 cultural items in Ukraine that had received the status of damaged or destroyed due to the war.



CLIMATE CHANGE THREATS TO CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE IN THE MEDITERANEAN

The Mediterranean region, one of the cradles of global civilization, is included among the most vulnerable regions to climate change for the decades to come. It should be noted that in warm and dry regions, such as the Mediterranean, there is a high risk of chemical degradation of the materials in the cultural sites (ICOMOS, 2019) which could be exacerbated due to climate change. The majority of heritage sites are under low or moderate climate change hazard.



The sites that are at higher hazard are mostly at coastal areas of the Mediterranean. It has been shown from many studies that the majority of UNESCO cultural and natural heritage sites in the Mediterranean will be increasingly threatened by man-made climate hazards. In this context, it is important to act proactively and design specific strategies for the adaptation of cultural and natural sites to climate change. In conclusion, what should worry us is that the majority of heritage sites in the Mediterranean are vulnerable to an increasing rate of threats from man-made global warming and extreme events.

AFRICA >Focus Libya

One current heritage threat in Africa is the ongoing looting and destruction of cultural heritage sites in Libya. The country has a rich cultural heritage that includes ancient Greek and Roman ruins, medieval Islamic cities, and prehistoric rock art. However, since the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has been in a state of political turmoil, and many cultural heritage sites have been targeted by looters and armed groups.

According to UNESCO, the illegal excavation and smuggling of cultural artifacts from Libya is a significant problem, with looters exploiting the lack of security and instability in the country (UNESCO, 2021). In addition, many cultural heritage sites have been damaged or destroyed during the ongoing armed conflicts in Libya, including the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Sabratha, an ancient Roman city, which was heavily damaged by shelling in 2017 (UNESCO, 2018).

The looting and destruction of cultural heritage sites in Libya not only result in the loss of cultural artifacts and heritage but also contribute to the financing of armed groups and criminal networks. The illicit trade in cultural artifacts is estimated to be worth billions of dollars annually, making it a lucrative source of funding for criminal networks and armed groups (UNESCO, 2021).

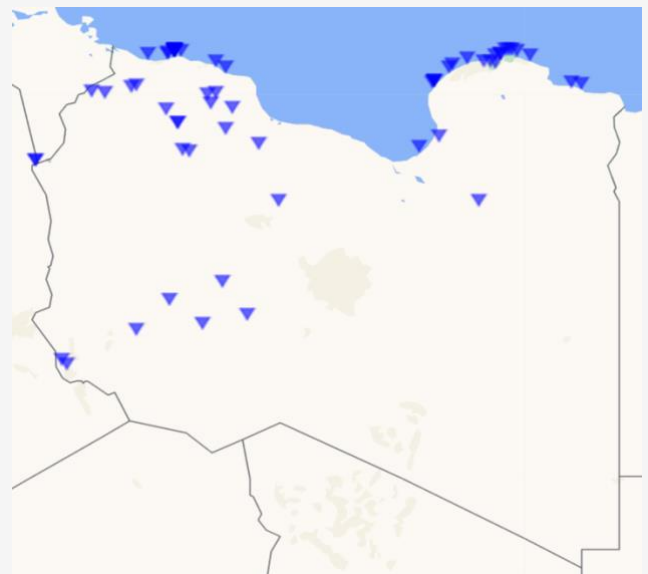
Efforts are being made to address this heritage threat, including international efforts to monitor and prevent the illicit trade in cultural artifacts, as well as local efforts to protect and preserve cultural heritage sites..

For example, the Libyan Antiquities Authority has been working to protect and preserve cultural heritage sites, including the establishment of a new museum in Benghazi to showcase the country's rich cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2021).

In conclusion, the ongoing looting and destruction of cultural heritage sites in Libya is a significant threat to the country's rich cultural heritage and contributes to the financing of criminal networks and armed groups. Urgent action is needed to address this heritage threat and protect and preserve Libya's cultural heritage for future generations.

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Chair News

WORKSHOP IN SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE STUDIES, PAFOS, CYPRUS

UNESCO Chair on Threats to Cultural Heritage, the Center for Security and Intelligence Studies (BUCSIS) at the Buckingham University and Pafos Neapolis University of Cyprus co-organized an intensive workshop on

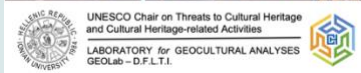


Security and Intelligence Studies. Three days of lectures (April 15-17, 2022) by international experts and discussions with participants provided a unique opportunity to reflect on contemporary security and intelligence issues in the Eastern Mediterranean and Europe. The Chair was

represented at the event by Professor Stavros Katsios. [More >>>](#)

30th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF UNITWIN/UNESCO CHAIRS PROGRAMME

UNESCO has convened a 30th anniversary celebration of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme. This anniversary conference celebrated the accomplishments over the last three decades and advance authentic interdisciplinary dialogues and the cross-sectoral mobilization needed to



confront complex challenges on the horizon. UNESCO Chair on Threats to Cultural Heritage of the Ionian University participated actively represented by the Chair holder Professor Stavros Katsios. [More >>>](#)

WG ILLICIT ANTIQUITIES TRAFFICKING

Dr. Christos Tsirogiannis, a worldwide known forensic archaeologist and Associate Professor at the Aarhus University in Denmark (2019-2022) is appointed head of the Working Group on Illicit Antiquities Trafficking of the UNESCO Chair on Threats to Cultural Heritage at the Ionian University, Corfu. [More >>>](#)



INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON ECONOMIC CRIME, CAMBRIDGE, UK

The Chair participated with three speakers Professor Stavros Katsios, Associate Professor Dionisis Demetis and Dr Ioannis Blatsos at the Thirty-Ninth International Symposium on Economic Crime 4th-11th September 2022 at Jesus College, University of Cambridge: "Selling Status – insider crime and abuse of trust" [More >>>](#)

THESSALONIKI INTERNATIONAL FAIR-GR

The UNESCO Chair on Threats to Cultural Heritage of the Ionian University, participated at the Ionian University stand during the 86th Thessaloniki International Fair (Akademia), 10-18 September 2022. As the unique presence of a UNESCO University Chair and of UNESCO in general at TIF 2022, it was the focus of interest for visitors and invited guests. The Chair presented its structure, objectives and actions, highlighting the uniqueness of its role and especially as a Chair based in Corfu, a city included in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage list. [More >>>](#)



COLLABORATORY WITH THE INSTITUTE OF STUDIES ON THE MEDITERRANEAN RIM OF THE ZHEJIANG UNIVERSITY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

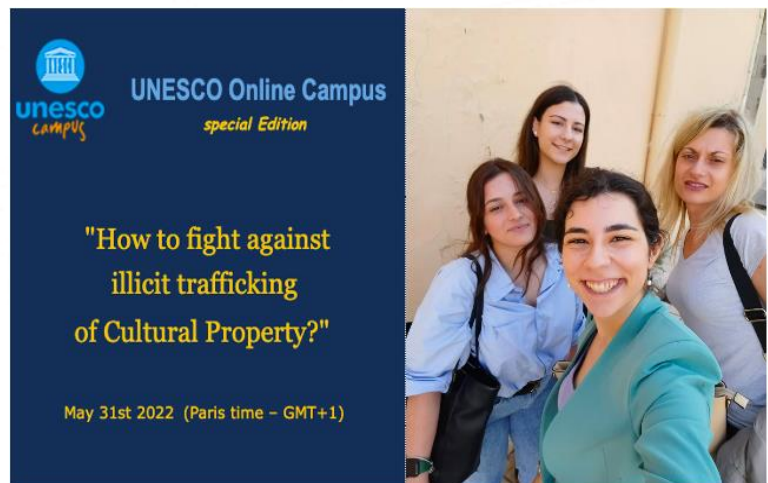
On August 11, 2022, took of the collaboration between the UNESCO Chair of the Ionian University with the Institute of Mediterranean Studies of China's Zhejiang University of International Studies. This is the first time that a UNESCO Chair takes part in such a wide-ranging program (research, teaching, exchanges and joint cooperation at the international level) with a Chinese University, and in particular with the unique Institute for the Study on the Mediterranean Rim (ISMR). During the event a Memorandum of Understanding between the Head of the ISMR Professor Ma Xiaolin and the UNESCO Chair holder Professor Stavros Katsios was signed. [More >>>](#)



Education

UNESCO CAMPUS is the result of a partnership between UNESCO and the Engie Foundation, which supports the actions of the CAMPUS in favor of young people in the defense of values that are the essence of UNESCO's mandates and at the heart of the Engie Foundation's missions.

At the 2022 event it is the first time that the institution is addressed to students of three universities and in which the Chair was honored to be invited to participate with a group of students, which was supported and prepared by members of the executive and scientific committee of the Chair. Professors St. Katsios, Chr. Tsirogiannis, K. Chainoglou and Dr. I. Blatsos.



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