Support to Cultural Heritage Monuments of Great Importance for Cyprus, Phase 7

Reporting period: 29 November 2019 – 28 January 2024

Executive Summary

The cultural heritage of Cyprus emanates from diverse and rich cultures and civilizations which have populated the island throughout history. It constitutes the common heritage of all Cypriots and of humanity regardless of its origin. Since 2010 the United Nations Development Programme and the European Commission have been assisting the bi-communal Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage (TCCH) to preserve the island's cultural heritage.

The overall objective of the project is to support the reconciliation process and to increase the levels of trust between the two main communities on the island – the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot. This overall objective will be achieved through the implementation of confidence building measures as agreed by the TCCH. The TCCH is dedicated to the identification and safeguarding of the rich immovable cultural heritage of Cyprus, and of all its communities. The Committee works towards providing a mutually acceptable mechanism for the implementation of practical measures for the proper maintenance, preservation, physical protection and restoration of cultural heritage throughout Cyprus.

The specific objective of the project is the preservation of Cypriot cultural heritage monuments of great importance. This is pursued by supporting conservation and/or emergency safeguarding measures for high importance cultural heritage sites. Confidence-building measures will be further strengthened by the participation of bi-communal teams during project implementation and through the inclusion of community engagement, awareness raising and educational components in the project.

This seventh phase (2019-2023) of the programme "Support to cultural heritage monuments of great importance for Cyprus" aims to extend the support to the efforts of the bi-communal TCCH thus contributing to the ongoing peace and confidence building process by bringing communities closer to their shared heritage through conservation and emergency safeguarding projects. This will be achieved through the following expected outputs:

Output 1: Designs for conservation works of selected cultural heritage sites.

Output 2: Conservation works for selected cultural heritage sites.

Output 3: Communities engaged in the protection and preservation of Cyprus's diverse and shared cultural heritage and awareness raised through awareness raising activities

Output 4: Maximise visibility & raise awareness about the work of the TCCH and EU funded related projects.

The duration of the programme period was 50 months of which 38 months for the implementation activities and 12 months for defect liability period.

Background

On the 21st March 2008, an agreement was reached between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot community leaders on the establishment of working groups and technical committees as mechanisms

created with the purpose of developing confidence building measures that could improve the peace talks atmosphere and demonstrate that the two communities can work together on issues of common concern. Within this framework, in April 2008, the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage (TCCH) was established. The Committee works to provide a mutually acceptable mechanism for the implementation of practical measures for the proper maintenance, preservation, physical protection and restoration (including research, study and survey) of the immovable cultural heritage of Cyprus. The establishment of the Committee has provided an important mandate, as well as, impetus for the protection of the rich and varied cultural heritage of the island.

The project's strategy builds on the strong partnership between the European Commission, UNDP, and the TCCH for cultural heritage protection which goes beyond the physical preservation of historic sites to increasing dialogue, building confidence and social engagement.

These elements find resonance with UNDP's strategic frameworks at the corporate level where the work in Cyprus contributes to the global mandate in conflict prevention with an emphasis on governance and peacebuilding and SDG goal 11 Cities and Communities and goal 16, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

Key Results Achieved

The project delivered comprehensive results across all outputs, contributing to the preservation of Cyprus' shared cultural heritage while strengthening bicommunal cooperation, community engagement, and public awareness.

Conservation designs

Conservation designs were completed for 30 cultural heritage sites, including monuments such as churches, mosques, aqueducts, and fortifications.

These include the Agios Georgios in Genagra/Nergisli, Agios Georgios in Vatyli/Vadili, Tuzla hamam and Tuzla fountain in Larnaca, Agios Georgios in Prastio/Dörtyol, Panagia Chryseleousa in Sysklipos/Akçiçek, Agios Georgios in Avlona/Gayretköy, Panagia Chrysopolitissa in Acheritou/Güvercinlik, Agia Marina in Acheritou/Güvercinlik, Profitis Elias in Stylloi/Mutluyaka, Agios Georgios in Agios Georgios/Aygün, Agios Georgios in Goufes/Çamlıca, Panagia church in Gypsou/Akova, mosque in Kalo Chorio/Vuda, Hamidiye mosque in Lefkara, Maroni, mosque in Alektora/Alehtora, mosque in Avdimou/Evdim and mosque in Terra/Tera, the perimeter wall of Panagia church in Assia/Pasaköy, Agios Sergios and Vakhos church in Neta/Taşlıca, aqueducts in Lefka/Lefke and Afania/Gaziköy, Agios Theodoros–Agia Marina church in Kormakitis, Diamante Bastion in Famagusta, Agios Ioannis Prodromos church in Argaki/Akçay, Agios Georgios church in Limnia/Mormenekşe, Agia Paraskevi church in Famagusta, Agios Georgios church in Flamoudi/Mersinlik, Agios Elias church in Agios Elias/Yarköy, and sections of the Nicosia Walls at Quirini Bastion.

Conservation Works

Conservation works were successfully carried out at 45 sites, covering monuments such as churches, mosques, aqueducts, fountains and fortifications.

The project implemented an integrated set of interventions across conservation, emergency stabilisation, and maintenance, ensuring both the preservation and long-term sustainability of Cyprus' cultural heritage.

Conservation interventions were carried out at the Afendrika archaeological site (Panagia Afendrika, Asomatos, Agios Georgios), Panagia Kyra in Livadeia/Sazlıköy, Agios Antonios in Massari/Şahinler, Orounda mosque, Martinengo Bastion in Famagusta, and the Salamis archaeological site (Kampanopetra Basilica, Agios Epiphanios Basilica, and the Early Christian Basilica of Saint Barnabas). Additional works were implemented at Zouhouri Tekke in Larnaca, mosques in Maroni, Kalo Chorio/Vuda and Hamidiye mosque in Lefkara, Agios Synesios in Rizokarpaso/Dipkarpaz, two fountains in Kyrenia (Hasan Kavizade fountain and Esseyit Emin Efendi fountain), Tuzla hamam and fountain in Larnaca, as well as a series of sites; Agios Georgios in Avlona/Gayretköy, Agios Georgios in Genagra/Nergisli, Agios Georgios in Vatyli/Vadili, Agios Georgios in Prastio/Dörtyol, Agios Georgios in Agios Georgios (Ammochostou)/Aygün, Agios Georgios in Agios Georgios Goufes/Çamlıca and Church of Agios Georgios in Ardana, Panagia Chrysopolitissa in Acheritou/Güvercinlik, Agia Marina in Acheritou/Güvercinlik, Panagia Chryseleousa in Sysklipos/Akçiçek, Panagia church in Gypsou/Akova, Profitis Elias in Stylloi/Mutluyaka, Soli archaeological area - St. Auxibus Basilica and Soli theatre and Vouni archaeological site, and the Arif Bey Aqueduct in Afania/Gaziköy.

Emergency Works

Moreover, emergency interventions were undertaken to stabilise and safeguard monuments at risk, including Agia Marina in Gialousa/Yenierenköy, Agios Charalambos in Neo Chorio Kythreas/Minareliköy, Agios Georgios in Morphou/Güzelyurt, Agios Ioannis in Argaki/Akçay, and Agia Paraskevi church in Famagusta, Panagia Sykada in Karpasia/Karpaz and Agios Ioannis Prodromos in Karpasia/Karpaz, Agios Georgios Sakkas in Gialousa/Yenierenköy, Agios Prokopios in Sygkrasi/Sınırüstü, Agios Marina in Skylloura/Gürpınar, and Agios Georgios in Agios Georgios (Ammochostou)/Aygün, Agia Marina and Agios Theodoros chapel complex in Kormakitis, and sections of the Nicosia Walls at Quirini Bastion within the buffer zone.

Maintenance, Inspection, and Capacity Building

Maintenance and preventive conservation actions supported the durability of interventions and ensured continued site protection at key locations, while capacity-building and preventive conservation activities strengthened long-term maintenance practices. These combined efforts enhanced preventive conservation, and supported the long-term preservation of cultural heritage across Cyprus.

Community engagement

The project promoted community engagement, education, and capacity building through a combination of physical and digital activities. As part of its continuous efforts for community engagement, a series of community engagement activities were organised with relevant stakeholders and key partners, in order to exchange lessons learnt, experiences and share best practices in the protection, promotion and maintenance of cultural heritage. A series of community involvement visits were also organised at the ongoing and completed projects.

Moreover, two educational events were organised with participation of approximately 200 students, researchers and educators from both communities. The events took place on 18 and 28 April 2022 as part of the International Day of Monuments and Sites. Students, researchers and educators learnt about the work of the TCCH through a presentation and gained insight on the restoration and conservation projects through guided project site visits to Othello Tower/Citadel, Martinengo, St Mary of the Armenians, St Mary of Carmel, St Anne church and Tanners` mosque. The participants also had the chance to learn about

the TCCH digital heritage projects. In addition, UNDP continued to provide opportunities for the Heritage Youth Ambassadors (HYA) to engage in activities and events of the TCCH.

Digital Heritage, Virtual Tours for the completion of the completed TCCH projects

The Digital Heritage component project for Famagusta aims to enhance community engagement and raise awareness through digital tools. The case of the Othello Tower was selected as a pilot. This pilot project entailed a first phase of 3D documentation, immersive visualization, 360 demo video, game design and prototype of the "Othello Tower".

As part of the digitalisation efforts, selected TCCH projects were documented through 360° photographic surveys, enabling the creation of immersive virtual tours. These tours incorporate informative text and audio narratives at key points of interest, enhancing accessibility and educational value for a wide audience. The virtual tours cover a diverse range of cultural heritage sites across Cyprus. These include the Mosque in Deneia/Denya; the Hamam (near Hasan Aga) and Hamam Agia Kyriaki in Paphos; and key monuments within the Afendrika archaeological site in Karpasia/Karpaz, including Panagia Afrendika, Agios Georgios, and Asomatos. In Famagusta, the initiative includes a number of sites;Martinengo Bastion, St. Anne Church, Tanner's Mosque, the Church of St. Mary of the Armenians, the Church of St. Mary of Carmel, the Salamis archaeological area, including the Kampanopetra Basilica, Agios Epiphanios Basilica, and the Early Christian Basilica of Apostolos Varnavas. Additionally, Zouhouri Tekke in Larnaca is included in the digitalisation effort, further reflecting the diversity of Cyprus' cultural heritage.

All virtual tours are hosted on a unified online platform to enhance public access, visibility, and engagement, ensuring that cultural heritage sites remain accessible to broader audiences beyond physical visits.

Overall, the project demonstrates consistent and effective implementation, combining conservation achievements with strong community outreach, youth engagement, and innovative digital tools, while supporting cooperation and mutual understanding between the two communities in Cyprus.

Key challenges encountered

Project implementation took place in a complex political and operational environment, further compounded by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic introduced significant disruptions during critical phases of implementation, including lockdowns, restrictions on movement across the island, and limitations on gatherings. These measures affected site access, delayed field activities, interrupted supply chains, and reduced the availability of skilled labour, thereby impacting overall timelines and coordination between stakeholders.

In response, UNDP adapted its approach by shifting to remote coordination where feasible, maintaining continuous communication with partners, and introducing flexibility in scheduling.

Implementation was further influenced by limited contractor participation and fluctuations in the cost of materials and services, reflecting constraints in the local market. To address this, UNDP strengthened outreach to contractors, organised targeted information sessions, adjusted technical requirements where appropriate, and enhanced cost estimation practices to better reflect market conditions.

Rising operational costs across logistics, materials, and site management also placed pressure on available resources. These were managed through strengthened financial planning, regular cost monitoring, and prioritisation of activities to ensure efficient use of funds while maintaining quality standards.

Project Risks and issues

The project's risk profile remained manageable, though it required continuous monitoring, particularly in light of the additional pressures posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Movement restrictions, limitations on site access, and disruptions to coordination and supply chains affected timelines. These were mitigated through adaptive measures, including remote coordination, flexible scheduling, and justified contract extensions to ensure continuity of implementation.

Key operational risks included the potential for unsuccessful procurement processes for design services and civil works, particularly due to limited contractor participation and local market constraints. There was also a risk of delays in initiating designs and works. These were addressed through strengthened outreach to contractors, targeted information sessions, adjustments to technical requirements, and improved contract management practices.

The project also faced cost escalation risks in the post-COVID-19 context, with fluctuations in the prices of materials, services, and operational inputs potentially exceeding initial site estimates. To mitigate this, enhanced cost estimation practices, regular budget monitoring, and prioritisation of activities were applied to ensure efficient use of resources while maintaining required quality standards.

Another challenge related to the limited availability of locally qualified technical personnel to carry out specialised activities, partly due to movement restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. This was addressed through broader market engagement, the inclusion of capacity-building measures, and close technical supervision to ensure quality delivery.

Lessons Learned

UNDP Cyprus applies a structured learning approach to continuously strengthen the implementation of its cultural heritage programme. Lessons learned workshops are systematically conducted to capture key insights and inform the design and delivery of subsequent programme phases.

This learning process is further reinforced through bi-communal dialogue platforms, including the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage (TCCH) retreat, where TCCH members, the Advisory Board, the European Union, and UNDP jointly reviewed lessons learned and discussed future priorities. In parallel, independent final evaluations of Phases 6 and 7, completed in December 2020 and April 2023 respectively, provided evidence-based recommendations that have guided strategic improvements.

As a result, the programme has increasingly built on accumulated experience to enhance both technical delivery and stakeholder engagement. Strengthened coordination mechanisms between UNDP, the TCCH, and its Advisory Board have improved communication, streamlined decision-making, and facilitated more effective stakeholder participation.

Overall, the programme demonstrates a strong commitment to adaptive management and continuous improvement. By systematically capturing lessons learned and integrating them into future planning, it enhances effectiveness, strengthens stakeholder collaboration, and ensures that cultural heritage interventions contribute meaningfully to confidence-building and community engagement in Cyprus.

Conclusions and Way Forward

The TCCH continues to deliver meaningful results in preserving Cyprus' shared cultural heritage under an increasingly complex and resource-intensive environment. Significant progress has been achieved across design, conservation, and safeguarding interventions, alongside community engagement and awareness activities. Adaptive implementation responds to the growing technical complexity of sites, evolving local conditions, and rising costs.

Looking ahead, the cultural heritage programme will maintain a strong focus on prioritising interventions based on urgency, technical needs, and cultural significance, while further strengthening coordination among all stakeholders involved in project delivery. Continued investment in innovative approaches—including digital tools, documentation methods, and improved planning processes—will be essential to enhancing efficiency and maximising impact. Community engagement will remain a key priority, ensuring active participation of both communities and reinforcing cultural heritage as a platform for dialogue and confidence-building.

Future efforts will build on the programme's accumulated experience, with particular emphasis on addressing increasingly complex conservation challenges, strengthening cross-disciplinary collaboration, and improving cost-effectiveness. The continued application of adaptive management and innovation will be critical to sustaining progress and ensuring that cultural heritage interventions contribute effectively to reconciliation, mutual understanding, and the long-term preservation of Cyprus' shared heritage.