



Another important step toward disaster resilience and risk prevention was this week in Turin, Italy. The European Commission is financing the ResCult (“Increasing Resilience of Cultural Heritage”) project, which is aimed at protecting heritage sites – of historical, cultural and religious interest - from the risk of natural disasters.

It is no coincidence that this new drive was launched in an Italian city, since the central regions of the country were hit by a massive earthquake in August last year and by a series of both major and minor after-shocks that have caused distress among the affected population. The total damage from the 2016 earthquakes was estimated at 23.53 billion euros, of which 541 million euros was in damage to heritage sites. The destruction of a large part of the historical town of Amatrice - known for its “Cento Chiese” (“100 churches”) filled with art – and of the Basilica San Benedetto in the town of Norcia was emblematic of the extent of the damage to cultural heritage.

The ResCult project is a powerful tool specifically designed for heritage ministries, local governments, civil protection departments, European Union authorities, private investors and communities, that offers support for sensitive risk-related decisions when developing and

implementing strategies for the reduction of disaster impact; furthermore, it helps identify the right actions that can improve resilience capacities and the overall understanding of the risks that cultural sites face. It is also essential to mention that its principles conform with those of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, probably the three most important intergovernmental accords to combat climate change and conserve environmental sustainability.



“Cultural heritage is synonymous with cultural identity and job opportunities, both of which are crucial for the survival of local communities, as demonstrated by the earthquakes affecting central Italy over recent years”, said the head of the Italian Civil Protection Department, Fabrizio Curcio. Besides destroying sites of cultural interest, an earthquake or any other type of disaster can lead to a fall in tourism, which in turn leads to economic loss, and what is even more unsettling is the fact that the level of preparedness of cultural heritage sites regarding disaster risks is still very low in all regions of the world and their loss or damage can have a long-lasting effect on the community’s sustainable development.

Hopefully, the ResCult project will be an additional, indispensable response to the lack of coordination of action at European level when it comes to resilience to disasters of which Giuseppe Rinaldi, President of the Province of Rieti, spoke during the signing ceremony of the 2016-2020 Action Plan between the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) last October.