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## The IBC for Europe - Cultural heritage: an opportunity for Europe

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Today, globalization has produced marked contradictions in almost every area of human activity. The fact - often neglected - that many African, Asian and Latin American countries lack basic infrastructures such as electricity and telephony actually confines globalisation to slightly more than half the population of the earth. Notwithstanding this, modern information technologies permit interactions we couldn't have thought of only ten years ago. The economy has greatly benefited from these interactions, and so have trade and science. Unfortunately, the same is not true for the dissemination of culture: despite great financial efforts, cultural organisations operating in the most developed countries in the west as well as in the east cannot reach the citizens effectively and get them involved, partly because all information is normally supplied in English.

A future of technological benefits is ahead of us, if we consider that, in a few years, even more powerful means of communication will be available, like for instance a single integrated tool that will put together the functions of a television, mobile phone and PC with a modem. But how are we going to develop this huge potential? Are the TV, mobiles and internet really providing us with any substantial solutions? If we examine attentively many of the programmes broadcast, be they of general interest or targeted, many of the chat lines and newsgroups that can be found on the Internet, as well as SMS messages, we are led to the sad conclusion that the power of the means of communication is being wasted, at least in the field of culture!

Is there a role for Europe in the spreading of culture? We love to say that culture is "at home" in Europe, that the differences between member countries are a wealth that is never to be lost in the name of unification. But do we act in accordance with such statements? Are we really committed to the safeguard of those different cultures? We are now confronted with two remarkable and contrasting phenomena: on the one hand, European nations are transferring to an ever greater extent their right of sovereignty to Community authorities, including the Commission in Brussels, the Parliament in Strasbourg and the European central bank in Frankfurt, while on the other those same nations have already devolved, or are going to devolve, wide powers to regional authorities, so that in Germany and Austria there are as many Ministries of culture as are the *Länder*, whereas the Spanish autonomous provinces have the right to opt for local languages in school teaching as well as in television programmes.

In conclusion, as regards culture, decision-making centres in Europe are multiplying rapidly: we are aiming at a new Tower of Babel and I do not believe there will be the opportunity to come to a "single cultural currency", as was the case for the Euro in the realm of finance. In this respect, our country represents an exception to the rule in Europe. Although Italy is generally lagging behind the other member countries in statistics, we can claim that it has, especially in the last few years, invested considerable amounts of money and energy in the preservation of its cultural heritage. This has been possible - although it is everyday practice to play havoc with the environment - thanks to the Ministry of cultural heritage and activities, to the regions and municipalities and with the scientific support of the academic world and of research centres as well as with the essential aid of banking institutions and of a few private citizens who prefer the modern definition of "sponsor" to the latin "mecenate".

Certainly, our cultural heritage is so vast that it is not easy to preserve it. Suffice it to say that the over eight thousand Italian municipalities are to be considered as many open air museums, that require protection from natural damage, such as earthquakes, as well as from environmental damage caused by citizens. With reference to this, let me now introduce an unanswerable question, namely that concerning which and how many are the monuments and documents to be protected and restored. Who selects them and according to what criteria? Many different solutions to such problem have been adopted throughout Europe. In the UK, for instance, a list has been drawn up of the architecture and art works whose conservation is to be state-funded, while other countries have chosen to rely on the UNESCO world heritage list; in Italy, many would simply opt for the preservation and restoration of whole cultural heritage.

Maybe no solution can be found to this problem simply because the question is ill-formulated; maybe we should not reflect upon "which and how many" monuments we want to preserve, but rather on "why" we want to do so in the first place. Unfortunately, the reason given by public authorities is frequently that our heritage attracts tourists from both Italy and abroad, thus increasing the country's revenues. Therefore, it will always be profitable to restore castles because then millions of tourists will flock to this country, producing enormous earnings. With a view to this, a great number of monuments have been restored in Italy, with the consequence that maintenance costs are now exceeding the profits deriving from their fruition.

From early schooldays, citizens should be made aware of the fact that a country's cultural heritage ought to be safeguarded because it is a wealth *per se*, something to pass down to our children as it makes up the very roots of our identity. The inhabitants of a village should decide to preserve a church for reasons other than tourism; maybe simply because its bell has marked the happy and sad moments of their lives, and in spite of the fact that probably

no Japanese tourist will ever so much as take a picture of it and no work of Caravaggio is there to attract thieves.