

PilibosMUN

**United Nations
UNESCO**

Background Guide



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Committee Topic: Protecting Digital Cultural Heritage and Combating Misinformation

Committee Background and Historical Context

UNESCO has historically concentrated on the preservation of tangible cultural heritage through international agreements. However, in recent years, UNESCO has come to realize that a technological revolution is necessary in order for heritage to keep up with modern technological developments. Conflicts in regions such as the Middle East, natural disasters, and destruction related to climate change have proved the vulnerability of tangible cultural heritage. Therefore, digital record-keeping has become an essential part of recording and preserving cultural heritage under threat of permanent destruction.

Digital preservation strategies include high-resolution photography, 3D scanning, and digital archives. Digital preservation enables a community or researcher to record a protected site, even if it is damaged or destroyed. UNESCO executives have noted that digital preservation can aid in restoration and enable a community to have a memory when sites are destroyed. The digital preservation of sites is not without social implications because issues such as preservation, control, and representation can perpetuate inequality.

On the other hand, the information environment globally has undergone a revolution. The social media platform has become the most important source of news and information for people all over the world. Although this is an important factor in people getting access to information, this factor has reduced the importance of gatekeeping in terms of restricting information such as

fake news to a larger extent. The application of artificial intelligence in this context would make it simpler to produce fake images and audio records.

II. Introduction

The digital revolution has brought with it a complete paradigm shift in terms of culture conservation and information dissemination. Through digital technology such as digitization, artificial intelligence, and online media, information pertaining to culture can be recorded in a manner that would have seemed impossible just a short time before. Ancient texts can now be available in any part of the world, ancient monuments can be conserved through digital scanning, and epic tales can be put into record format for future years. However, in this same vein, a whole new set of dangers has emerged with digital technology, such as misappropriation of information and the quick generation of misinformation. Hence, a whole new realm of responsibilities has emerged for UNESCO.

Digital cultural heritage can be considered to include both digital cultural content and tangible cultural artifacts that have been scanned or digitized. While digital recording is a critical step in ensuring that cultural heritage is not lost because of war, climate change, and abandonment, among other factors, it is marred by issues concerning ownership, control, and consent, especially when it comes to indigenous populations.

Meanwhile, the digital information environment is becoming increasingly susceptible to such factors as misinformation and disinformation. The internet makes it possible for false information to spread on an unprecedented scale through various online platforms, which can amplify this information through algorithms meant to maximize user interaction. UNESCO delegates thus have to factor in a way to protect cultural heritage online amidst the global

problem of misinformation in a manner that respects freedom of speech and other international human rights.

III. Key Issues and Challenges

One of the major challenges UNESCO is currently dealing with regards to digital preservation of cultural heritage is ensuring a moral approach to such preservation. Often, digital preservation projects are driven by institutions in countries with more advanced economies. As a consequence of this, a form of digital colonialism arises, where institutions in other countries can end up with ownership of cultural content from other countries, leading to such content being used inappropriately or being commodified.

Access is another critical area of concern in this matter. Although digital technology efforts can achieve a sense of equalization in access to cultural knowledge, this can be constrained by imbalances in internet access and digital technology. For instance, some communities with digitalized cultural artifacts might not have access to the digital content in particular. UNESCO must address this challenge in an equitable manner.

Misinformation is another challenge. Misinformation can spread quickly in situations such as elections, health crises, as well as during armed conflicts. Disinformation campaigns are increasingly being used by both state and non-state actors. Additionally, algorithms used in social media sites prioritize information with a high emotional appeal, which in most cases may not be information but misinformation. Such information can end up being more visible than information.

In addition, any moves intended to counter misinformation will have to deal with considerations regarding censorship and freedom of speech. Those steps which are overly

restrictive in nature may end up being used by state leaders to muzzle opposition. UNESCO delegates need to examine ways in which accuracy can be achieved without undermining this right.

IV. Current International Frameworks and Initiatives

UNESCO has a series of actions to address digital challenges in culture and information. UNESCO has produced guidelines for digital preservation and facilitated international cooperation for the preservation of threatened cultural heritage through documentation. UNESCO has also underscored the need for community engagement in digital projects, encouraging member states to incorporate local and indigenous communities into decision-making.

To address this problem of misinformation, UNESCO calls for media and information literacy. Through this tool, people are armed with capabilities in order to critically assess information, thereby making them less vulnerable to information manipulation. UNESCO is also pushing for more transparent handling in digital platform companies concerning matters such as algorithmic decisions and content decisions.

Nevertheless, there is a mismatch in implementation when it comes to these efforts. The reality is, some countries do not have the capacity to implement effective digital preservation systems and/or large-scale media education programs. Furthermore, standards concerning online regulation of digital platform companies have yet to be synchronized globally.

V. Possible Solutions and Policy Considerations

Delegates should think about working towards an international standard for ethical digital preservation practices with a focus on consent, cultural sovereignty, and community control. They can set up guidelines for how digitization projects are carried out, how they will share resources, and how they will share benefits. They can work towards capacity-building programs in developing nations to make digital preservation inclusive globally.

To counter misinformation, UNESCO can urge its member countries to invest in media and information literacy education among people of all ages. Collaboration with educators, media practitioners, and civil society can help improve public awareness of digital media and make them less susceptible to misinformation. On a technology-enabled front, panels may discuss developing methods using artificial intelligence solutions to address misinformation, with a focus on ensuring transparency, privacy, and human vigilance.

Finally, cooperation with digital platforms is critical. UNESCO can intervene in this matter because it can bring governments, technology companies, and civil society together to achieve responsible platform governance. Any action towards making them accountable must be approached in a way that prevents abuse and protects freedom of expression.

VI. Conclusion

The issues of digital cultural heritage protection and misinformation are strongly interwoven because they represent broader effects of a digital revolution in society. Although technology provides efficient methods for both preservation and information transfer, these methods can increase dangers affecting cultural and information integrity. UNESCO's role in this case is invaluable because it shapes international cooperation concerning technological progress

and responsibility. Through inclusive heritage preservation, media literacy, and responsible digital governance, UNESCO can work towards ensuring digital environments function as a means towards cultural understanding rather than being a source of conflict and misinformation. While debating this matter, attendees need to come with an equal focus on equity, human rights, and collective global action in mind since their decisions will impact future preservation of culture and truth.

VII. Questions to Consider

- I. How can UNESCO ensure that digital preservation of cultural heritage is done ethically, with the consent and involvement of local and indigenous communities?
- II. What steps can be taken to prevent powerful countries or institutions from controlling or exploiting the digital cultural heritage of other nations?
- III. How can UNESCO help close the digital divide so that communities whose heritage is digitized can actually access and benefit from these digital records?
- IV. How can UNESCO address the spread of misinformation and disinformation online without violating freedom of expression or enabling censorship?
- V. What role should artificial intelligence play in protecting cultural heritage and identifying false or manipulated digital content, while respecting privacy and human rights?
- VI. How can UNESCO encourage cooperation between governments, technology companies, educators, and civil society to promote media literacy and responsible digital platforms?

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