ATTENTIVENESS TOWARD ALBANIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

Albania, a small country with many natural, archaeological, and cultural assets, has managed to become part of the world heritage and get the attention of millions of people worldwide.

Heritage includes tangible and intangible, natural and cultural, movable and immovable assets, and documents inherited from the past and passed on to future generations to benefit and learn from the legacy of the past. As a source of identity, our national heritage plays a significant role in its national and global recognition, appreciation, and preservation.

The inclusion of Albania’s material and non-material values in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, dates back to 1992 with the ancient city of Butrint. At the time, it was described as an 'outstanding universal value' with a unique atmosphere created by a combination of archaeology, monuments, and nature in the Mediterranean. Butrint’s interior is an extraordinary cultural landscape that has developed organically over centuries. As a microcosm of Mediterranean history, the city presents the rise and fall of the great empires that have dominated the region since the first Peloponnesian War in the 5th century BC until the Napoleonic wars in the 19th century. Its ruins, over 2,500 years old, within a magnificent green park of 30 km, are some of the most beautiful and well-preserved in Europe.

The historical town centers of Berat and Gjirokastër, of exceptional value in Albania, were listed as world heritage in July 2005. These two fortified historical centers are exceptionally preserved, especially the interior buildings, inhabited since ancient times until today. Both cities of Gjirokastër and Berat provide remarkable evidence of various types of monuments and countless urban shelters during the classical Ottoman period, carrying on with preceded diverse medieval cultures and in a state of peaceful coexistence with a considerable Christian minority, particularly in Berat. These two museum cities, with great values, would be considered cultural meeting point.
In 2016, alongside the rarest documents and unrepeatable cultural values of other countries of the world, the two codices of Berat, ‘Beratinus 1’ and ‘Beratinus 2’, were registered in the most important UNESCO register, the "Memory of the World” (Memoire du Monde), as unique values of humanity.

Once a place gets recognition as a world heritage site, it becomes more attractive to tourists, and therefore, travel writers and other news organizations help spread the word. All of a sudden, these places get different attention than they didn’t have before, bringing new economic benefits. Albania’s natural heritage with extraordinary beauty, such as Rrajca, Gashi River, and Lake Ohrid, is proof of the natural tourist growth, especially after their inclusion in the world heritage list.

Albania has also managed to attract world attention with its spiritual heritage. Albanian Folk Iso-polyphony, this unique form of art, considered as a masterpiece of UNESCO and also of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, is included in the 50 most exciting world elements.

Iso-polyphony has fascinated countless international authors, researchers, anthropologists, poets, and travelers. Through the verses and sounds of this singing form, each finds a piece of themselves and the dramatic stories of their countries. Lord Byron never ceased to describe this type of singing, and how spiritually involving it was, whenever he heard it. Iso-polyphony sings to the life and melancholy of love, suffering, and survival of the Albanian soul—an invaluable artistic value of our people and unchanged over the generations.

The inclusion of ‘Xhubleta’ (traditional Albanian clothing), in 2022 as part of the world’s intangible cultural heritage and thus protected by UNESCO will be remembered for a long time. The Albanian ‘Xhubleta’, with a history of over 4000 years, represents the earliest dress in Albania, but at the same time, also the typology of the oldest in the world. ‘Xhubleta’ is a characteristic garment made of black felt, thick, sleeveless solid, with a narrow waist and a wide finish. ‘Xhubleta’ worn by unmarried girls consists of black and white. It used to be worn by the females of the Great Highlands and Dukagjin region in northern Albania. This noble dress, thousands of years old, clearly indicates our national identity as one of the most ancient people of Europe.

Places of natural and cultural heritage, museums, libraries, and archives in Albania and around the world are increasingly becoming victims of natural disasters and conflicts. Heritage damage over the past decade demonstrates UNESCO’s continued importance in leading
international efforts to prevent looting and illegal trafficking of cultural property. Preserving heritage is a responsibility of all and is a powerful tool for uniting people and recognizing each other, promoting peace, and integrating future generations.

Our language, history, and heritage are essential to show the world we’ve been here for thousands of years. Including as many places or unique forms of inheritance in the world, heritage is the right way to prove the values and importance of our country.