

# ENHANCING DISASTER RESILIENCE IN CULTURAL TOURISM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RELIEF AND RECOVERY POLICIES FOR ARTS, HERITAGE, AND INTANGIBLE CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES AND ITALY

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## Abstract

*Disaster management policy in the US and Italy has historically focused on the relief and recovery of tangible cultural assets vital to cultural tourism, including cultural heritage sites and museums. However, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed how disaster policies can protect intangible cultural assets, including the performing arts and creative workers. This study conducts a comparative analysis of cultural disaster relief and recovery policies in the USA and Italy, specifically focusing on the 2017 earthquake in Central Italy, the 2021/2022 tornado and flooding events in Kentucky, USA, and the global COVID-19 pandemic. The research aims to identify the complexities and opportunities in governmental disaster policy related to intangible culture and how this particular area of cultural tourism can be integrated into broader disaster management frameworks toward greater resiliency. Through a review of governmental policy documents and primary as well as open-source data, the analysis reveals that pre-determined national governmental units dedicated to emergency response and recovery are critical for effective disaster management in cultural heritage, yet often lack the specialized knowledge and, to some extent, the resources, to fulfill long-term recovery, particularly with intangible cultural assets. Insights gained from this study contribute to developing recommendations for enhancing more inclusive disaster policy language that recognizes intangible cultural heritage and its role in sustainable cultural tourism in disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies.*

**Keywords:** resilience, disaster policy, cultural tourism, cultural heritage, intangible heritage

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## **Introduction: the importance of cultural heritage for tourism**

Cultural heritage is a fundamental aspect of tourism worldwide. Visitors to museums, monuments, historical venues, festivals, and live performing arts become immersed in a region's history, traditions, and identity. Their travel experiences and spending are critical to regional and national economies. Additionally, cultural heritage tourism boosts local employment opportunities and enhances local tourism infrastructure (U.S. Cultural & Heritage Tourism Marketing Council, 2013). The success of cultural heritage in tourism has also had negative impacts, including the degradation of historic sites due to overtourism and sustainability concerns due to the environmental impacts of maintaining cultural sites and the consumption habits of tourists that visit them (Richards, 2018; Boshier et al., 2019).

Cultural heritage in tourism can be identified in two forms: tangible and intangible. The United Nations World Tourism Organization's definition of cultural heritage tourism highlights these distinctions: „A type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination...“ (UNWTO, 2017, p. 18). Tangible heritage tourism pertains to physical, cultural, and natural sites, including monuments, museums, archaeological sites, parks, and landscapes. Intangible cultural heritage pertains to living expressions of culture, including festivals, performing arts, language, and other knowledge and practices that form traditions and rituals (UNESCO, 2022).

Both forms of cultural heritage in tourism are critical to Italian and American economies and national identities. For Italy, cultural heritage represents an economic resource of inestimable value. The country has the highest concentration of UNESCO sites in the world (55), with cultural assets present in every region; the cultural and creative industry in 2022 was worth 95.5 billion euros (+ 6.8% compared to 2021), corresponding to 5.6% of the Italian GDP and activated a total of 271.9 billion euros. The cultural sector offers work to almost one and a half million people (5.8% of total employment) (Symbola Foundation, 2023). Cultural heritage is intrinsically linked to Italian history, creating compelling attractions for Italian and foreign tourists. Archaeological sites, museums, monuments, and cities of art are globally recognized icons that define Italy's image in the world. Cultural tourism contributes to preserving and enhancing Italian culture, promoting the diversity and richness of the local heritage.

In the United States (US), the arts and cultural heritage sectors also have a significant economic impact, both nationally and within individual states. The arts and cultural industries in the US contributed 4.3 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), which equates to \$1.1 trillion, according to the US Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account (US Bureau of Economic Analysis,

2022). In the state of Kentucky, the arts and culture sector is also a substantial economic force, representing a \$6.49 billion industry. This surpasses other key sectors of the state's economy, such as agriculture and forestry, which contribute \$4.7 billion. Arts and cultural production in Kentucky accounts for 2.51% of the state's GDP and supports 50,526 wage and salary jobs, as reported by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA, 2024). Cultural tourism in the US is characterized by a rich mosaic of places, traditions, art forms, celebrations, and experiences that reflect the nation's diversity and character (Hargrove, 2017). The US, often described as a „melting pot,“ showcases its cultural plurality through community celebrations, festivals, music, and art. This is exemplified in Kentucky's unique Appalachian culture, which is the birthplace of bluegrass music and known for famous events like the Kentucky Derby. Kentucky is also home to Mammoth Cave National Park, one of the US's 24 UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Additionally, cultural tourism significantly contributes to local and regional development, with 76% of US leisure travelers engaging in cultural activities, spending \$171 billion annually, and taking more trips than general travelers (U.S. Cultural & Heritage Tourism Marketing Council, 2013).

Cultural heritage is a driver of local development, promoting the economic growth of local communities, generating job opportunities, and creating related industries in sectors such as hospitality, catering, crafts, and trade. From a tourist perspective, cultural heritage promotes the rediscovery of villages and rural areas, helping to combat depopulation. In short, cultural heritage is a fundamental pillar of Italian and American tourism, with a significant impact on the economy, national identity, and local development. Its value and protection are essential to guarantee the competitiveness of each nation's tourism industry.

### **The growing threat of natural disasters and the fragility of Italian and American heritage**

The number and severity of natural disasters are on the rise worldwide. The 2020 World Disasters Report, produced by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, revealed that the number of climate- and weather-related disasters has been increasing since the 1960s and has risen almost 35% since the 1990s (IFRC, 2020). The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has also highlighted that economic losses from natural disasters have increased over the past 30 years. This data does not even include the untold losses from areas that lack consistent and reliable reporting data, like those in the arts and cultural heritage sector (IPCC, 2023).

Disasters are also a threat to cultural heritage tourism. The term „disaster“ is defined by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) as

„a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability, and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts“ (UNDRR, 2024). Highly contextual disaster research on cultural heritage reveals that heritage is uniquely vulnerable to natural disasters due to aging infrastructure, geographic locations near bodies of water and fault lines, and population growth (Jigyasu, 2016; Boshier et al., 2019; De Paoli et al., 2020). Additionally, these areas of vulnerability require specialized consideration and preservation knowledge for effective disaster risk reduction strategies, mitigation, and short- and long-term recovery (Boshier et al., 2019). Historically, disaster management policies have focused on safeguarding physical cultural assets vital to cultural tourism, including cultural heritage sites and museums (Markham et al., 2016). UNESCO brought global attention to this heritage differentiation during its 2004 „Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage,“ which recognized a „binding multilateral instrument [ ] yet exists for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage,“ whereas strong attention had been placed on natural and tangible cultural heritage since the „Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage“ in 1972 (UNESCO, 2022).

From the Global Vulnerability Index developed by the Joint Research Center of the European Commission (2022), Italy appears to be the most vulnerable country to natural disasters in Europe, along with Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece (Il Sole 24 Ore; 2023, July 19). According to ISPRA (2021), the Higher Institute for Protection and Environmental Research, 12,533 cultural heritage resources are potentially subject to landslides, and 33,887 monuments are at risk of flooding. The United States’ leading federal emergency management agency, FEMA, noted a 137% increase in major disaster declarations between 2016 and 2023 (FEMA, 2023) – thirteen of those major disasters occurred in the state of Kentucky alone. Between 2020 and 2022, the cost of each federally declared disaster was estimated at \$1 billion USD (FEMA, 2023).

### **A comparison between Italian and American relief and recovery policies after disasters**

This study identifies key differences and similarities between the US and Italy’s disaster relief and recovery policies in a cultural heritage context. It offers insights into the effectiveness of different policy approaches and frameworks used in the US and Italy, as well as challenges discovered in each country’s approach. The analysis also discusses recommendations and implications for

future strategies for enhancing tangible and intangible cultural heritage resilience in the tourism sector.

### *Aims and Methodology*

Four well-documented natural disasters were chosen for the analysis: the 2017 earthquake in Central Italy, the 2021/2022 tornado and flooding events in Kentucky, US, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a review of governmental policy documents and open-source and primary resource data, the analysis employed reflexive thematic coding to compare the response strategies, mechanisms, and policies implemented in the two regions and their effects on tangible and intangible cultural assets.

Data collected for the Italian disaster events included official government documents, data from non-governmental agencies, and press releases. For the disaster events in Kentucky, USA, the authors used primary data collected from a recent mixed-methods case study on the impact of tornadoes and flooding on intangible cultural heritage in 2021 and 2022 (Hamilton, 2024). The data included survey responses from affected artists and arts organizations as well as an interview with a spokesperson for the US Federal Emergency Management Agency. Additionally, information on the impacts of COVID-19 on the US arts and creative industries was gathered from official government documents and published research reports.

The research's limitations include generalizability. This study focuses on specific disasters, which limits the ability to generalize findings to broader contexts or different disasters. Lastly, governmental policies change over time, which should be noted when comparing historical data with current practices.

### *The case of Italy*

To understand the Italian context, its capacity for resilience, and the efforts of the Italian government in managing crises affecting cultural heritage, we can analyze two catastrophic events: the first national – the 2016 earthquake in central Italy – involving tangible heritage, and the second global – the Covid-19 pandemic – involving cultural workers.

#### *The earthquake's impact and the Government response*

On August 24th, 2016, a powerful earthquake of magnitude 6.2 struck Central Italy, impacting the regions of Lazio, Marche, Umbria, and Abruzzo. This seismic event resulted in a significant loss of life, with 299 fatalities and thousands of injured and displaced. Furthermore, the earthquake caused widespread damage to

cultural heritage structures, including churches, monuments, and archaeological sites. According to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, over 5,000 structures were damaged, and 30,000 artworks of historical, artistic, or religious value were recovered. The recovery efforts included placing vulnerable works in 34 warehouses, some to be directly managed by the Ministry and others by local Dioceses. The disaster's complexity was compounded by a series of tremors – the strongest occurring in August 2016, October 2016, and January 2017. This necessitated a continuous reevaluation of ongoing monitoring and initial intervention efforts following each seismic event.

After the first earthquake, the Temporary Commissioner approved the first installment of a Cultural Heritage Plan, which allocated 170 million euros for the reconstruction and consolidation of over 100 buildings – mainly churches and cathedrals – damaged by the earthquake. These buildings were identified by the CEI (Italian Episcopal Conference) in agreement with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage. Since the initial funding allocation, additional funds were approved to aid in the safety and reopening of 180 churches for worship, for a total commitment of over 200 million (Ministry of Cultural Heritage, 2016/2017).

To implement the reconstruction for the areas affected by the 2016 earthquake, the Italian government approved a Ministerial Decree, dated 24 October 2016 n. 483 of the MiBACT, which established a Special Superintendent Office. Furthermore, in 2019, an internal department within the Ministry was created called the „General Directorate for the Security of Cultural Heritage”. This permanent department was designed to safeguard cultural heritage, coordinate emergency responses and reconstruction, and enhance long-term resilience against future disasters. To encourage private investments in disaster recovery and relief after the earthquake, the Art Bonus program, an already existing mechanism to encourage private patronage of culture and entertainment in exchange for tax benefits, was extended. The program provided individuals with a 65% tax credit for charitable donations specifically for earthquake recovery. Quantifying the total funding allocated for post-earthquake recovery efforts remains challenging. Projects are ongoing, and new allocations occur annually.

### *The COVID-19 pandemic impact and the Government response*

The COVID-19 pandemic particularly affected intangible aspects of Italian cultural heritage, including vulnerable creative workers, musicians, artists, technical personnel, and small creative businesses such as independent theaters, art galleries, and bookstores. Restrictive measures, such as the closure of museums, performance venues, and cinemas, led to a significant decline in cultural activity and substantial job losses. At the time of COVID, the companies that are part of the Italian cultural system numbered over 291,000, corresponding to a 5%

share of overall registered companies in the country. Italy is the leading European country in terms of total share of cultural enterprises: 14.5% of European cultural enterprises are Italian, ahead of France (13.4%), Germany (10.5%), Spain (10.2%) and Great Britain (8.2%) (CDP Think Tank, 2020).

In Italy, according to ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics, 2020), in April 2020, the COVID-19 emergency caused a decrease in employment of almost 300,000 units, which led to an overall drop of 400,000 employees. The unemployment percentage rate fell by almost three points in just two months.

The Italian government implemented a series of measures to respond to the crisis, some with direct financing and others by expanding welfare tools for arts and creative industry workers. In 2020, the Legislative Decree 34/2020 established the Fund for Cultural Business and Institutions, with an endowment of €171.5 million, intended to support the continuity of operations for museums and other non-state cultural institutions, including theatres, cinemas, and the entire supply chain of publishing, e.g., bookshops and other workers in the book production chain. The same Fund was also allocated to the wage and salary losses that businesses and cultural institutions suffered due to sudden cancellations, postponements, or downsizing of cultural events, including shows, fairs, conferences, and exhibitions (Research Service of Chamber of Deputies, 2022).

### *American disaster relief and recovery:*

#### *Kentucky tornadoes/flooding and COVID-19 pandemic*

To better understand the US approach to disaster relief and recovery, including federal governmental involvement in safeguarding tangible and intangible cultural heritage, two catastrophic regional events – tornadoes and severe flooding in Kentucky, and the American response to the global COVID-19 pandemic – were analyzed.

Between 2020 and 2022, the US State of Kentucky experienced seven federally declared natural disaster events (FEMA, 2024). By receiving federal declaration status, Kentucky was able to access federal resources and disaster assistance relief. The two disasters analyzed for this paper occurred within seven months of each other – the Western Kentucky tornados in December 2021 and Eastern Kentucky flooding in July 2022. In December 2021, an outbreak of 18 tornadoes occurred in the central and southeast United States that became the deadliest December outbreak in U.S. History (National Weather Service, 2023a). The outbreak resulted in 57 deaths and catastrophic widespread damage (National Weather Service, 2023a). An estimated \$305 million was recorded in damages to homes, community spaces, and businesses (FEMA, 2022). The July 2022 Eastern Kentucky flooding was caused by several severe thunderstorms.

Deemed a 1,000-year flood, the disaster led to 600 helicopter and swift water rescues and in some communities, entire homes and buildings were swept away by the flood waters (National Weather Service, 2023b). The flooding resulted in 39 deaths and caused catastrophic damage to public, private, and residential areas (Dixon and Shelton, 2023).

Compounding these experiences were the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was declared a national public health emergency in March 2020 and significantly disrupted personal and professional livelihoods.

### *Tornado / flooding impact and the Government response*

The total number of artists and arts organizations operating at the time of the tornado and flooding disaster events and the total number of artists and arts organizations directly affected by the disasters is not known. This is because the United States and most of its individual states lack a centralized database or disaster reporting mechanism for arts and culture organizations (Hamilton, 2024). However, requests for assistance documented by both Kentucky's Arts Council and Humanities Council reflected that significant damage occurred to many arts and cultural heritage buildings, collections, artifacts, and workspaces critical to the state's history, culture, and tourism economy.

The two disasters caused losses in tangible cultural heritage, including structural and equipment damage varying from total to minor losses, affecting museums, historical societies, arts centers, and theaters. Examples include the cultural institutions of Appalshop and Hindman Settlement School in Eastern Kentucky, both dedicated to preserving and celebrating the Appalachian region's arts and cultural life. In Western Kentucky, examples include the African American Museum, which houses priceless artifacts of the African American community in the region, and the Ice House Gallery, which featured more than 100 pieces of artwork by local and regional artists. All experienced significant damage to their collections and facilities. The Ice House Gallery and Appalshop facilities were deemed uninhabitable after the disasters and considered total losses. There were also significant disruptions in intangible cultural heritage, including festival and show cancellations, as well as income loss from declines in ticket and artwork sales. Between the two disasters, countless cultural artifacts, archives, collections, educational materials, and artistic inventories were damaged or destroyed.

In response to the disasters, the US's Federal Emergency Management Agency worked with 62 national partner agencies (part of the nation's Heritage Emergency National Task Force (HENTF)), and both Kentucky's State Arts Council and Humanities Council to offer technical and funding assistance opportunities. For example, HENTF provided personal protective equipment and specialized consultations on emergency stabilization methods, particularly



at Appalshop and the Hindman Settlement School. However, FEMA's funding eligibility policies failed to adequately address most artists and arts organizations' specific needs, which primarily required immediate financial aid, equipment replacement, and relocation assistance (Hamilton, 2024). Of the 373 requests for public assistance from cities and nonprofit organizations, only six arts and culture nonprofit organizations applied for FEMA Public Assistance. Only three of those six were determined eligible – a mere 0.8% of total requests for Public Assistance (Hamilton, 2024). Instead, Kentucky arts and cultural organizations had to look toward private charitable foundations and individuals for a majority of their support in relief and recovery.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding long-term recovery from disasters, the US designates a different federal department, the Department of the Interior, to assist cultural heritage. Falling under the Natural and Cultural Resources (NCR) category, this Department provides technical, not financial, assistance for tangible and intangible cultural heritage assets. However, deficiencies in recovery capabilities for this Department have been noted, both by cultural heritage workers affected by the Kentucky disasters (Hamilton, 2024) and by the government itself (United States Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2023).

### *Covid-19 Pandemic Impact and the Government Response*

Like in the Italian context, the impact of COVID-19 was devastating for the cultural and creative industries in the United States due to forced facility closures or postponements, which led to sudden income loss due to cancellation of employment contracts and sales opportunities. The performing arts, in particular, were significantly affected, joining oil drilling/exploration and air transportation as the „steepest-declining areas of the US economy in 2020“ (National Endowment for the Arts, 2022). The US government's response to support the creative industries, including non-profit and commercial sectors, was unprecedented. According to the SMU DataArts/Bloomberg Philanthropies report, „Following the Funding: Distribution of Federal COVID-19 Relief Funds for the Arts and Culture Sector,“ an estimated \$53 billion was spent on supporting arts and cultural organizations, self-employed creative workers, and creative commercial businesses.<sup>4</sup> \$17 billion of the government's relief aid, went

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<sup>3</sup> In the United States, nonprofit organizations are exempt from federal taxes, some state and local taxes. Additionally, the US federal tax code offers charitable tax deductions to private individual donors. These nonprofit charitable tax exemptions and deductions result in significant subsidies for US nonprofit arts and culture institutions.

<sup>4</sup> For this analysis, the authors used the most broad interpretation of arts, culture, and creative industries as defined by the US Bureau of Economic Analysis' Arts and Culture Production

specifically to nonprofit arts and cultural industries and independent cultural workers. There were four key emergency federal acts of legislation:

- The CARES Act, passed in March 2020, which allocated \$75 million to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and \$75 million to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). These funds aimed to provide emergency relief to arts organizations and cultural institutions facing forced closures and financial uncertainty.
- The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), administered by the Small Business Association's (SBA) Office of Disaster Assistance, which offered \$40.1 billion in loans to small arts businesses, including many nonprofit organizations, to help retain employees and cover general operational expenses.
- The Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG) program, also administered by the SBA, which provided \$11.9 billion in grants to live venues, museums, and theaters to offset revenue losses and support ongoing operations.
- The American Rescue Plan, passed in March 2021, allocated \$135 million to the NEA and the NEH. 60% of the allocated funds went to arts and culture organizations through a competitive grant process, and the remaining funds were awarded to state and regional arts agencies, like the Kentucky Arts Council, to redistribute through their own grant funding mechanisms (Fonner et al., 2023).

These direct funding policies underscored a unique federal commitment to ensuring the viability of American arts and cultural institutions nationwide. In fact, the amount of money that went to nonprofit arts organizations was more than 24 years' worth of government funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Institute for Museum and Library Services combined (Fonner et al., 2023). When comparing the COVID-19 response to that of the Kentucky tornadic and flooding disasters, federal resources were significantly more accessible and relevant to the losses experienced by both tangible and intangible cultural heritage providers. However, two years after the initial stages of the pandemic, it has been noted that long-term recovery has been difficult, particularly in the arts sector, as the large cash infusion by the government was not sustained over time (Fonner et al., 2023).

### **Discussion: analysis of Italian and American response**

The examination of case-specific disaster responses and a comparison of the relief approaches between Italy and the United States offer valuable insights

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Satellite, which is used by the US National Endowment for the Arts for its data collection and research analysis.

into cultural heritage disaster management policy between the two countries. Italy, known for its historical susceptibility to seismic events and dedication to preserving cultural heritage, navigates disaster management with a more centralized governmental focus on recovering and restoring cultural artifacts and historical sites. Kentucky, frequently challenged by severe storms, revealed how US federal response strategies to assist individual states utilize more of a public-private partnership model. These distinct contexts reflect overall cultural policy resilience strategies of cultural heritage resources in each region.

Italy's Ministry of Culture maintains a well-defined „Crisis Unit“ dedicated to overseeing and coordinating responses throughout all stages of a disaster, including long-term recovery, through the General Directorate for the Security of Cultural Heritage established in 2019. This unit assumes a proactive „architect“ role, directly involved in designing and implementing strategies to safeguard cultural artifacts and heritage sites. In contrast, the United States lacks a dedicated disaster management department within its equivalent of a Ministry of Culture, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Instead, the NEA fulfills a „facilitator“ role by collaborating with the Heritage Emergency National Task Force (HENTF), a coalition involving 62 public and private entities co-chaired by the US's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Smithsonian Institution. This collaborative approach allows governmental agencies and national advocacy organizations to support and coordinate efforts across various stakeholder groups, albeit in a less centralized and visible manner. The difficulty with this approach is the lack of centralized reporting to understand the losses from disasters in arts and culture communities.

With the notable exception of the COVID-19 pandemic, neither country has formal organizational units or policies that specifically address relief and recovery needs for intangible cultural heritage, yet the pandemic response underscores what was discovered in the Kentucky tornado-flooding case study: *all* widespread disasters negatively affect intangible aspects of cultural heritage, including vulnerable creative workers, musicians, artists, and small businesses such as theaters, galleries, and bookstores.

Both Italy and the United States faced devastating impacts on their cultural and creative industries due to the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating substantial government interventions to mitigate the disaster's effects. These findings reveal the critical need for enhanced policy frameworks and organizational strategies to strengthen and build long-term recovery policies, not just short-term relief, particularly for intangible cultural heritage.

Table 1 illustrates the contrasting approaches discussed. The earthquake highlighted Italy's centralized disaster management framework as crucial in mobilizing resources and expertise to protect tangible cultural heritage assets with

a need for more private sector collaboration. Kentucky’s experiences underscored the need for more robust and centralized federal agency intervention, one that is dedicated to tracking losses and safeguarding the unique aspects of the arts and culture sectors, particularly in long-term recovery.

**Table 1: Summary of Disaster Response Policies**

	<b>Earthquake/Floods</b>	<b>COVID-19</b>
Italy	Strong role of Cultural Ministry in long-term and relief efforts Organizational innovations „thanks“ to the earthquake: Temporary Commissioner to offer a quick response; Special Superintended for reconstruction implementation, General Directorate for the Security of Cultural Heritage for long-term crisis management Management of great complexity and medium-long-term approach	Unprecedented federal allocation of funds to safeguard creative workspaces and workers’ income Short-term strategies for intangible culture to overcome the disaster Long-term recovery for intangible culture not a priority.
Kentucky	Strong role of public-private partnership (Heritage Emergency National Task Force) in short-to-medium-term relief and recovery Lack of centralized reporting for arts and culture recovery by federal agencies Long-term recovery provided by Department of Interior but lacking in sufficient capabilities	Unprecedented federal allocation of funds to safeguard creative workspaces and workers’ income Short-term federal strategies for both tangible and intangible culture to overcome the disaster Long-term recovery for intangible culture not a priority.

*Source:* Authors’ elaboration

## Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Italian and American cultural heritage disaster relief and response highlights the critical importance of a pre-determined emergency management framework with coordinated protocol on preserving and protecting both tangible and intangible cultural assets during disasters. Key findings reveal there is no universal success model for cultural heritage disaster response; however, certain critical factors consistently emerge.

Firstly, establishing dedicated organizational units for monitoring safety and emergency response before disasters appear to be essential for recovery and resiliency. Effective response in all of the disaster cases showed the need for

trained personnel with specialized knowledge of the unique nature of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. This, in turn, necessitates ongoing investment in all areas of disaster management, from preparedness to long-term recovery. Notably, long-term recovery policy strategies were a deficiency in both the Italian and American models, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Secondly, the disasters not only disrupted physical structures but also challenged living heritage, which highlighted a focus on disaster management policies that assist intangible cultural heritage, including supporting festivals, arts centers, artists, and craftspeople. The COVID-19 pandemic proved that national disaster response policies could encompass a broader spectrum of tangible and intangible losses, yet neither Italy nor the United States currently has permanent organizational units or specific policies addressing relief and recovery needs specifically for intangible cultural heritage. Adopting and adapting successful pandemic-era models could provide a framework for integrating intangible cultural heritage into broader disaster management strategies.

In conclusion, the study reveals that a more comprehensive approach to disaster policy—considering both tangible and intangible cultural losses, including artworks, films, costumes, and ongoing creative works—is needed for resilience in cultural heritage tourism to thrive. Future research in this area could explore the exchange of best practices and foster a more unified global approach, particularly in areas of intangible cultural heritage where best practices are currently lacking. While national governments retain primary responsibility, collaboration across borders could enhance the effectiveness of cultural heritage protection and recovery efforts. Additionally, more comparative analysis would benefit cultural and emergency managers as well as policymakers in terms of the resiliency of cultural heritage in tourism now and for future generations.

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