



## How the global National Trust movement is rising to the C-19 challenge

*(This report is based on a Webinar held on 28 January 2021 with around sixty participants from INTO member organisations across the world and other stakeholders)*

### Introduction by Catherine Leonard, INTO Secretary-General

The world is changing, life is changing and how we run our National Trusts is changing too. I don't want in any way to diminish the human cost of the pandemic, but when I was asked by our National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago friends to be part of this project, they were keen to focus on the positive. To be inspired and uplifted.

We therefore drew very heavily on two surveys of the INTO membership. The first in July 2020, undertaken as part of our work on Sustainable Tourism / Sustaining Communities we're undertaking with the support of American Express. A summary can be found on our website [here](#).

I did the second, more informal poll when we started planning our Building Resilience webinar, focussing on three questions:

- How did you leverage technology?
- How did you engage the public during lockdown?
- How have you reconfigured your finances, strategy or staff?

From the responses received from the INTO membership, we extrapolated five main themes.

#### 1. Focus on our audiences

We often talk about our work being more about people than the places we look after, but it's definitely been true over the last year. We've all played our part, offering beauty, nature, wellbeing, learning, history, culture. And these are all values that people have really connected with.

There's been some surprises too, like the US National Trust for Historic Preservation, which has really opened up its landscapes this year. Their audience loves it.

In return people have engaged with us as organisations. We've seen record attendance at online AGMs and conferences this year. And successful fundraising, like the National Trust for Scotland's [Save Our Scotland](#) appeal or the growth in membership at [Heritage New Zealand](#) where they really zoned in on local tourism and staycations.

## **2. Working at pace**

Our sector is not famous for moving fast or breaking things (thankfully!) but we've been entrepreneurial and agile – and broken our usual moulds. We built online booking systems in record time. Something that would have taken years before.

Our new members in Poland, the [Chudow Castle Foundation](#), created a pre-paid discounted ticket which worked very well. People didn't just buy one or two, some even bought 50 tickets! And they received a special pin brooch in return. The money collected paid their electricity bills for 5 months.

Likewise, our Nigerian members, [Legacy 1995](#), organised photoshoots at their property which enabled them to pay the wages of their cleaners, gardener and building facility manager.

Colleagues at FAI – Fondo Ambiente Italiano (The National Trust for Italy) quickly evolved their successful [#ItaliaMiManchi](#) campaign (Italy, I miss you) into [#ItaliaMiPiaci](#) (Italy, I love you) changing tone to focus on greater awareness of their work, national pride and active participation. They are portraying FAI as a big family that has been apart but will reunite in the future.

Lastly, we've all learned that fast, crisis management is in many ways easier than longer term planning. But we've all just done something completely audacious in surviving this far. And I know the National Trusts of the world are ready to take on the next new challenges too now.

## **3. Engage and build relationships online**

With our audiences at home, online and looking for things to do, INTO members have been very creative with their digital content: virtual visits, heritage festivals, regular webinars.

The [Singapore Heritage Society](#) organised a very successful [webinar on 'Food Heritage at Home'](#), featuring a panel of established heritage food advocates, including cookbook writers and TV chefs. The ensuing discussion touched on issues of authenticity and cultural appropriation.

The [Saint Lucia National Trust](#) undertook a citizen scientist competition inviting people to share images and thoughts on the changes they had noticed in nature since COVID-19 began. Winners received a gift token and SLNT membership.

This type of engagement may not lead directly to money or sales, but it's all about deepening relationships, which will reap benefits in the long term.

(Although we've also heard that people are often quite happy to pay a small amount for special online content like workshops or events.)

And it's not just members and visitors. We're better connected to our partners and stakeholders as well. In Canada they hold regular 'Gatherings' – some designed to 'gather'

knowledge across the sector; others to 'gather' strength in numbers to make a case to government. Such as the successful "[Shovel Ready Heritage](#)" campaign – a countrywide effort to encourage governments to ensure that COVID-19 recovery funding and any economic incentives would expressly include (or at least not exclude) investments in heritage places, preservation, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse.

#### 4. Play the long game

National Trusts exist forever for everyone so, we've got time to play the long game.

Many of you have talked about COVID as a reset button. A chance to refocus on organisational purpose, values and origins. And a reminder to keep the local community at the heart of what we do. Those not rewriting business plans are undertaking other projects that it's sometimes difficult to find time for, like finalising documents, starting online shops, updating databases, writing grant applications.

#### 5. Everything has changed

We have accepted that we won't be simply throwing open the doors again and popping back to normal. Everything is new. As teams, 'normal' means more online meetings, more working from home, travelling less and watching what we spend.

At our sites, we'll be making the most of technology, like in the [Netherlands](#) and Italy where they are using smartphones to download property information and redeploying volunteer guides elsewhere.

Change has become normal too. There will always be more new ideas to try. And I know you'll continue to be resilient and audacious, testing out new approaches and sharing learning from each other. We'll be ready for the next crisis, and we'll keep supporting each other as a global National Trust family.

INTO itself has also developed new services, like our [INTO Places](#) reciprocal visiting programme and our [TAP-INTO COVID grants](#).

So, I know these are challenging times but there's also a lot to feel uplifted about. And I am, as ever, in complete awe of everything you've managed to achieve this year.

