



Pontignano
Conference
XXIX

UK and Italy
Building Back Better: Seizing the
opportunities to shape the future
while strengthening our resilience
at a time of rapid change

In this 2021 Year of Presidencies - G7, G20 and COP26 - the UK and Italy are working hand in hand, at both the bilateral and the multilateral level, to navigate a period of rapid change and uncertainty. We are living with the pandemic, while rolling out vaccines and working to build back better with a focus on people, prosperity and the planet. We are making the ecological transition to a zero carbon world amid great geopolitical flux, while adapting to successive waves of rapid scientific and technological change. All this will have a dramatic impact on how we live, work and defend our security, in ways we do not yet fully understand. Leading our societies through this volatile period will require vision, courage and the readiness to seize opportunities, manage risks and learn lessons quickly. We must strengthen our social and economic resilience in order to respond creatively and sustainably to the challenges we face and shape a better future. At Pontignano, these themes of sustainability, resilience and new technologies will inform all our discussions, as we explore the opportunities before us to build back better and the skills, preparation and forms of cooperation we need to make the most of them.

Workshop themes

In the light of the UK Government's Integrated Review, how can democracies best work together to strengthen our collective security?

The UK Government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (March 2021) concludes that we are moving towards a more multipolar world, with the geopolitical and economic centre of gravity moving towards the Indo-Pacific. It describes China as a systemic competitor, whose increasing power and international assertiveness is likely to be the most significant geopolitical factor of the 2020s, and with whom we must cooperate to tackle the transnational challenges we face, not least climate change. It concludes that the importance of science and technology are key for sustaining national strategic advantage, that we must proactively shape the open international order of the future and that we must strengthen our defences against terrorism, organised crime and weapons proliferation. It also highlights the need to strengthen national and international resilience to respond to the new challenges we face, including on cybersecurity, health security and energy security. How can democracies best work together, in the light of this analysis, to strengthen our collective security?

How can we build and maintain green, resilient, secure and ethical supply chains, which integrate UK and Italian components effectively?

The pandemic has shown the critical role of supply chains for the economic resilience both of companies and of countries. How can we use our G7 and G20 Presidencies and the WTO to promote the smooth functioning of global supply chains, while promoting the development and application of effective Environmental, Social and Governance standards to manage ethical and sustainability concerns in the way that customers and investors increasingly demand? The UK's departure from the EU has brought changes for the supply chains between the UK and Italy, many of which are highly integrated. Both UK and Italian industrial strategies recognise that supply chains are crucial for supporting and growing SMEs as we seek to build back better. How can we best invest in and promote the development of green, resilient, secure and ethical supply chains, which integrate UK and Italian components effectively? The workshop will consider the lessons learned from the pandemic and will look at potential solutions, including blockchain and the issues around trade financing and insurance.

How can Science and Technology, and a culture of innovation, help the UK and Italy build back better and develop the resilience to respond to future shocks?

New technologies – from vaccine development to Zoom – are proving critical to our ability to overcome the pandemic, connect families and friends and keep the everyday business of government and industry - including the creative industries – functioning. They will be equally vital in enabling the green transition to a more sustainable and resilient economy, which safeguards biodiversity, both at national and at global level. Innovative technologies to tackle problems in one field – e.g. air quality – can build our resilience in others, such as health and energy security. To manage new risks to our resilience - e.g. cybersecurity – we need to stay at the cutting edge of technology. How do we promote the necessary culture of innovation - both in the short term and in terms of long-term investment to nurture the next wave of technological transformation? Where do we most need innovation at present? And how can we support commercialisation and timely uptake of new innovations, without a pandemic to compel us?

The Culture Sector – interdisciplinary approaches for a healthy recovery

There is a shift underway in the culture sector, as it finds itself preoccupied with its own survival while examining the lessons learned from the pandemic. The C19 crisis has exposed the vulnerability of the sector, whose presence was compromised by prolonged closures. At the same time, it continues to play a crucial role in supporting community resilience and individual wellbeing, and in providing the creative input needed to inspire progress in priority global issues such climate change and sustainability. Could it learn from tech giants in order to help it be more resilient in the face of future crises? Do the critical voices from the sector have a valid point when suggesting that the closure of museums (whilst universities for the most part remained open) demonstrates their lesser role in our societies? What innovative business approaches can it adopt to ensure its sustainability? And what does the future hold for cultural philanthropy?