



Cultural Heritage Agency
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

Looking for Faro

*A personal voyage of discovery into the meaning of
a European treaty*

Blogs by Alma Hoekstra, *de Erfgoedstem* (Heritage Voice)

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Foreword

The Netherlands is on the eve of signing the Faro Convention. This 2005 Council of Europe Convention bears the intriguing title ‘The Value of Cultural Heritage to Society’. But what exactly is the thinking behind the convention? What does it mean in practice? Alma Hoekstra, a 24-year-old aficionado of all things old, went in search of answers. Open-minded and curious, she travelled paths that were unknown to her, encountering a wealth of fascinating projects and interviewing all kinds of interesting people along the way. This publication is a compilation of the blogs she wrote about her quest.

Initially, she viewed the reports about the Netherlands’ intention to sign the convention with some suspicion. What changes would the convention bring? And how would they affect the expertise and status of her profession? The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands invited her to put her questions to fellow heritage professionals and outspoken citizens alike. In her conversations with them, Alma discovered the social relevance of the convention. She also became aware of just how much the ideas behind the convention are already alive and taking shape in the way



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heritage is practised on a daily basis. The spontaneity of her search is an invitation to readers to think about their own views and values. And to ask, “What does Faro mean to me?”

Happy reading!

Michaëla Hanssen
Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands



Blog 1

Faro, where are we going?

Photo: Erfgoedstem

Dear blog readers,

Unexpected but true: even heritage moves with the times. The world of cultural heritage began coming down from its ivory tower some time ago. Dutch heritage organizations have been working to broaden their outlook through participation and discussion. One way of achieving this has been to embrace different ideas about heritage when making decisions. These days it's not only the professional perspective that counts, but also the views of the local resident.

As an undergraduate studying Urban Planning, I learned all about this 'bottom-up' trend. I began my Bachelor's degree with the idea that I would soon be designing entire cityscapes from the drawing board. But by the time I'd finished, it looked more like my core business would be organizing barbecues to get the locals on board with the new plans for their neighbourhood.

I made the move to heritage, only to discover that the cultural heritage sector appears to be heading in the same direction. This shouldn't come as a huge surprise: after all, there's a general trend towards giving citizens more responsibilities and therefore a bigger say.

In 2005, this trend was reflected in a European convention that was drawn up in the Portuguese city of Faro. [The Faro Convention](#) emphasizes the connective value of heritage, its significance to society and the importance of participation. Faro has already been signed by a host of European countries. The Netherlands is also gearing up to sign the convention. At the request of Culture Minister Ingrid van Engelshoven, an expert panel is currently looking into what Faro can mean for our country.

As a lover of all things old, I must admit that I eyed this new convention with some suspicion at first. Does heritage really have to go chasing the latest trends? I thought sadly. What about all those heritage professionals? Will they soon be joining the urban planners and firing up the barbie for the locals?

But the more I looked into this convention, the more relevant it became. It seems to resonate with the current cultural debates I follow as editor-in-chief of Erfgoedstem (Heritage Voice), from statues of controversial figures to whether Zwarte Piet should have a place in the Netherlands' festive traditions. Heritage is no longer restricted to old churches or the country homes of the aristocracy. It has become far more personal, a means to preserve a beloved object or tradition.

Even so, Faro still presents me with a series of questions. What would it mean for the heritage sector if the Netherlands were to sign the convention? How would it impact the job of the heritage professional? Should they start stocking up on charcoal for the next neighbourhood meeting? And to what extent do we already comply with the convention's recommendations?

These are the issues I plan to explore in this blog. In the coming weeks, I will be reading, researching, conducting interviews and going out to meet heritage enthusiasts... as far as possible in these strange times we're living through. I hope you will join me on my quest, a nostalgic soul in search of the new and as yet uncharted land of Faro.

See you next time,
Alma



Photo: Erfgoedstem

Blog 2

Why do we protect heritage?

It's Week 2 and here I am on my laptop tracking down information on the Faro Convention. On YouTube I came across a useful video posted by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, in which Michaëla Hanssen explains the agreement to 'the layperson'.

According to Michaëla, one of the questions Faro focuses on is: Why do we need to preserve cultural heritage?

Yes, well why?

How about because many of our old buildings are so incredibly beautiful! That's the first answer that springs to my mind. There's nothing I like more than enjoying the beauty of art nouveau façades, medieval streets and baroque squares. The faceless blocks that tend to dominate our towns and cityscapes nowadays irritate me. To say nothing of the lack of fountains in urban development plans (I'm a big fan of fountains: they look lovely, sound good and also help with water storage). But at the same time I think it's important to protect heritage from the period of post-war reconstruction, architecture I wouldn't exactly class as 'beautiful'. So the heritage issue is a bit more complicated than I first thought.

Beauty

Beauty turns out to be a sensitive subject in the heritage sector. I'm a student at VU Amsterdam, and in one of my tutorials we were discussing the Frauenkirche in Dresden. This church was bombed in a World War Two bombardment and completely rebuilt after the war. I mentioned how delighted I was that they had done this, as it's such a beautiful church. But my comment fell on stony ground. My lecturer insisted that beauty was not a reason for rebuilding and certainly not for giving a building listed status. 'After all, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.' I could see her point. I think chandeliers and lace are beautiful, yet

many of my contemporaries would dismiss them as kitsch. But I also think heritage professionals needn't take such a hard line when it comes to the subjectivity of beauty. Certainly not in the context of the Faro Convention. I'm sure many people would agree with me that, whether it's down to design, nostalgia or age itself, old buildings tend to be much more beautiful than new ones. In fact, that's the main reason why so many people are interested in heritage in the first place.

So, dear heritage professional, don't forget about your fan base!

Nostalgia

Frans Schouten had a similar message for his readers. In September 2020, he wrote an interesting article on nostalgia for the magazine *Heemschut*.

Ah, nostalgia! Another subjective notion that the heritage professional would rather avoid. But Schouten cites a study by the Netherlands Institute for Public Opinion in which 70 percent of heritage lovers expressed a nostalgic attitude towards the past. Which leads Schouten to conclude, 'It looks like nostalgia is something we'll have to learn to live with.' The heritage professional will also have to live with the heritage lover's subjective answer to the question: Why do you think heritage should be protected? No two people will have exactly the same answer.

My boyfriend Jasper likes the atmosphere that heritage creates. My neighbour, a medical student, says she 'doesn't really know', while the owner of the café on the corner replied, 'You need to look after what is scarce.'

Why do you think heritage should be preserved? Let me know at alma@opzoeknaarfaro.nl

See you next time,
Alma



Blog 3

This is my heritage

Photographer: Jasper van Doeselaar

In her Cultural Heritage Agency [video](#) on the Faro Convention, Michaëla Hanssen says 'the idea is to give heritage back to the citizen.'

Great! Drop me off at Het Loo Palace, and I'll pick out the bedroom of my choice. But I'm pretty sure a royal sleep-over is not what she was getting at. The palace probably doesn't have a bedroom for every Dutch citizen, and I'm not about to share my palatial four-poster with anyone.

Heritage as a 'means to an end'

So what exactly is Michaëla getting at? How do we give heritage back to the citizen? It's a question that reminds me of recent news stories with angry crowds milling around statues with colonial connections. Statues of 'the great and good' that no one gave a second glance a year or so ago. Yet suddenly they have become integral to one person's identity, while someone else is determined to see them torn down. Is this battle really about statues? Or about something much bigger? Colonial era statues – along with Zwarte Piet, paintings of nudes and depictions of slaves on the Dutch monarch's ceremonial coach – seem to have become symbols in a battle for Dutch identity. It's heritage as a means to an end, a means to achieve social goals... which brings us right back to the Faro Convention!

Buildings that matter

But what about heritage that's more robust and enduring? How do we give built heritage back to our citizens? I found inspiration in an idea expressed by Gertjan de Boer, policy officer for cultural history in the municipality of De Ronde Venen.

When the Cultural Heritage Agency asked me to do twelve [interviews](#), he was the first person I called. Gertjan believes that, often without being aware of it, we all have some connection with built heritage. Why else would we flock to historical cities when we go on holiday? Yet it's something we engage with without fully realizing it. Partly to raise our awareness, Gertjan has launched a project in which he asks residents to designate listed buildings for the municipality.

Identity seems to play a major role here as well: people often opt for a building they live or work in or buildings from their own village. Wiesje, a non-professional heritage expert for the project, believes residents are perfectly capable of identifying buildings that matter: 'We feel a connection, they have an effect on us.'

I must admit, this got me feeling a bit uneasy: as an architectural historian of the future, where does that leave me? Thankfully, Gertjan has a few reassuring words up his sleeve: 'It takes a professional to know what people will value years from now.' Whew, thank goodness for that! Life as an architectural historian has a sense of purpose after all.

Do we really need to give heritage back to the citizen? Everyone already has their own treasured building, village or city, or their own tradition to be proud of. Heritage is already ours, if only we stopped to think about what that means.

See you next time,
Alma



Photographer: Jasper van Doeselaar

Blog 4

What is heritage? Or, what can it be?

Researching the Faro Convention involves all kinds of phone calls, consultations and meetings. These online sessions leave me tired-eyed and saddle sore, but happily I am often rewarded with new discoveries and valuable information.

Kama Sutra

At one of the meetings we not only discussed what heritage actually is but also what it *can* be. Before we knew where we were, the conversation had hopped from policy and conceptual notions to speculations about rolling a joint and positions in the Kama Sutra. 'I never thought we'd be talking about topics like this', someone remarked. Me neither! I am regularly amazed by the extraordinary examples of intangible heritage I come across. How about eating *stampot*, traditional Dutch fare of potatoes mashed with veg such as kale or endive? Or the tradition of *tonknuppelen*, in which the villagers of Noordwijkerhout take it in turns to whack a barrel with a bowling pin till a ball or a knitted cat falls out? And last but not least, a group of campers in Wijk aan Zee who have had their campsite designated as intangible heritage in protest at property development plans in the area. 'Seventy-seven families have been coming to this campsite since 1947', is their proud claim. Quite an achievement! But does that make it heritage?

Misused?

Is the concept of cultural heritage in danger of being misused? That's something I've been wondering lately. On Twitter I regularly see tweets about the Dutch festive celebration of Sinterklaas and the fact that Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet were given intangible heritage status in 2015. There are even tweets from people who propose that smoking and prostitution should be regarded as cultural heritage. Their reasoning? These activities have been around so long that they cannot simply be allowed to vanish.

So is 'having been around a long time' the decisive factor when it comes to achieving heritage status? Chinese-Indonesian restaurant culture recently became intangible heritage in the Netherlands. To the relief of many, as one 'Taste of China' after the other disappeared from Dutch high streets. Is scarcity or the threat of extinction a reason for granting heritage status?

So many questions...

With so many questions buzzing around my brain, I called the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the hope that they might be able to clear things up for me. And guess what? It turned out I'd been barking up the wrong tree all along. I had been thinking too much like an architectural historian. A heritage expert selects the buildings that are given listed status, which means they are protected by law. But with intangible heritage it's the opposite: the practitioners of a tradition decide for themselves that their tradition counts as heritage. So a tradition registered with the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage doesn't have special status. A tradition that features on the Centre's website is not protected by law. In other words, there is no real basis for misusing intangible heritage status. Even though Zwarte Piet is intangible heritage, it doesn't mean that the tradition is written in stone and that people can't call for change. My newfound knowledge has given me a whole different take on those generations of campers in Wijk aan Zee. If heritage status can't give them the protection they were seeking, what can? Read my interview with Sylvia Borg from Aardenburg campsite in Wijk aan Zee and Pieter van Rooij from the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage.

See you next time,
Alma



Photographer: Jasper van Doeselaar

Blog 5

Archaeology: from licking shards to dig therapy

Lately, I've been digging around in the world of archaeology. That's still pretty much uncharted territory for me. Like many kids, I dreamed of becoming an archaeologist when I was younger. For a while anyway. I pictured myself, bronzed by the sun, spade in hand, unearthing one magnificent Roman city after another. But then came our school trip to Museum Het Valkhof in Nijmegen. I must have been thirteen at the time. A real archaeologist showed us around and explained her job. Let's just say it wasn't quite what I'd been expecting. Basically, she spent her days in a laboratory stroking, sniffing and licking pottery shards to work out how old they were. When a shard one of my classmates licked turned out to be from an ancient toilet bowl, my archaeological fantasies were well and truly over.

Now, through my work for *Erfgoedstem* (Heritage Voice), I am rediscovering archaeology through journalism and I've noticed that my heart beats a little faster whenever an exciting new discovery is made. Perhaps that's the power of archaeology: the thrill, the mystery, the romance... My boss Herbert-Jan sees it in terms of skeletons, secret passages and hidden treasure.

Community archaeology

But on my personal quest for the land of Faro, after raiding tombs and battling mummies, I stumbled upon an even more thrilling form of archaeology: community archaeology. Originally from the UK, it has blown across the North Sea and taken root on Dutch soil. The idea is that archaeologists carry out research in cooperation with local residents, strengthening the fabric of the local community in the process. Some even claim that community archaeology can be a key to solving social problems... Really?

Time to find out more. In Dutch daily NRC, I read an article by Theo Toebosch from 2015. He described a project in which traumatized war veterans helped excavate an archaeological site near Waterloo. The man behind the dig had two goals in mind: 'To increase our understanding of the Battle of Waterloo through archaeology and to help British war veterans with disabilities or post-traumatic stress disorder regain confidence in themselves by taking part.' The article makes it clear that the veterans' knowledge has paved the way for new discoveries. What the veterans

themselves get out of this 'therapeutic dig' remains a little vague. If nothing else it gets them out of the house I also made a few inquiries with archaeologist Evert van Ginkel. 'Community archaeology is a sympathetic idea. Given that archaeological research is publicly funded, archaeologists have a duty to society: they should be accountable for the work they do. Expand that idea and you could argue that they should focus on areas society wants to know about, and that they should do so by working with society.' But real life is a little more complicated, Evert reveals. 'As a member of the public, you can't just turn up and start digging. There's a lot you need to learn first. There's a good reason why people spend years studying archaeology. Lots of people enjoy excavation, but few turn it into a serious hobby. So you're talking about a small target group.' Reservations aside, Evert does see added value in community archaeology, not least because the non-expert looks at archaeology in a completely different way. 'The non-expert is fascinated by things that often seem completely unimportant to us archaeologists. And I believe that offers opportunities for community archaeology. In addition to scientific research, it encourages archaeologists to consider the emotional impact their work can have.'

More than pots and pans

Emotion... so we're back to the thrill of hidden treasure and skeletons. Or the brand-new remake of Hollywood blockbuster *Cleopatra*. Let's leave it up to the archaeologists to decide just how Western or North African *Cleopatra* was. So we can lay this age-old debate to rest once and for all.

What I've discovered by delving into the world of archaeology is that it's much more about people than I always thought. Archaeology is so much more than pots and pans in glass showcases. It's about the feelings that one shard, that stray cannonball, that piece of flint can arouse in people. This really came to life for me in my third interview, when I spoke to the people involved in a community archaeology project in the region of Midden-Brabant. Read the interview [here](#).

See you next time,

Alma



Photographer: Jasper van Doeselaar

Blog 6

Can heritage serve as a means to combat rural shrinkage?

It's a worldwide phenomenon: city living is more popular than ever and rural communities are shrinking fast. The result? Soaring house prices in urban centres and vacant properties and dwindling resources in the provinces. The Faro Convention insists that heritage should play a role in social issues. So can heritage provide a way to counter rural decline? I explored this issue with Gijsje Stephanus. As part of her Human Technology studies at Hanze University of Applied Sciences in Groningen, she has been examining the influence of heritage on the quality of life in small villages. In her view, it's the quality of a place that counts, and heritage is very much part of that equation: 'When heritage comes alive and is put to good use, it will boost the appeal of a village. And the more appealing a village is, the more people will come to live there.'

I am no stranger to the countryside. I grew up in a Frisian village that is home to a whopping 345 inhabitants. Everyone knows everyone else. At the local school, I had four classmates and every one of them had a horse. The only public amenities – the chip shop and the primary school I attended – have now disappeared. But in spite of this, the population hasn't shrunk. The birth rate may have fallen, but the village is kept alive by well-to-do retirees with a love of sailing, who move to the country to enjoy their old age. And what better destination than beautiful Friesland, where heritage is alive and well? The Frisian language, the province's eleven historic towns, sweet treats like *sûkerbôle*, the magnificent Fryske hynders, the *skûtsjesilen* regatta... a diverse cultural heritage that is the pride of Friesland and gives the province its own unique appeal. Could Gijsje be on to something?

One place where heritage is certainly used to improve the quality of life is Kloosterburen in the neighbouring province of Groningen. This village was home to a monastery in the Middle Ages. Although very little of the monastery complex remains, the intangible heritage of 'the monastic spirit' has been harnessed as a source of inspiration to keep the village attractive and liveable. This monastic ideal centres on the notion that all things should be connected. This ideal was applied to a number of local care institutions that were on the brink of collapse. Care for the elderly, children and people with a disability is now provided by a single team, so

that they can all continue to exist side by side. Meanwhile the monastery grounds have been transformed into a community garden and the old church into a yoga school. And it works: unlike other villages in the area, Kloosterburen is growing. And, as in my home village, the new residents are urbanites from the west of the country.

Vibrant heritage seems to make small villages attractive to newcomers. But at the same time it upsets the balance of village life. Both in Kloosterburen and in my own village, the influx of city folk caused tensions. New residents were seen as strangers, outsiders with foreign interests, culture and language. This presented problems for those villagers who found change scary and were very attached to the way things had been for decades. One of the houses in my village bears a Frisian motto *It hoecht net oars*, which roughly translates as 'Things are fine as they are'.

The influx of newcomers and the clash of cultures is not unique to the Dutch countryside. Architect Rem Koolhaas and NRC correspondent Caroline de Gruyter have highlighted a link between the pace of change in rural areas and the growth of populism. In the Swiss village where Koolhaas had a holiday home, the original farming population disappeared within twenty years. In their place came wealthy urbanites and apartment complexes that housed immigrants. Vineyards and farmland became office parks. De Gruyter is convinced that such developments have led to the rise of the right-wing nationalist Swiss People's Party (UDC), now the dominant political force in many of these areas. The traditional inhabitants have seen the world they knew go up in smoke. The more control they lose over their villages, the more nostalgic and conservative they become.

Happily, the balance in Kloosterburen and in my own village has now been restored. The newcomers have been accepted. Perhaps because people realized that they are not only a burden, but also a source of income and a way of keeping the countryside alive. Living heritage can attract people and resources, but the local population will have to accept that newcomers bring change as well as benefits.

See you next time,
Alma



Blog 7

Football or bobbin lace?

Photographer: Jasper van Doeseelaar ©

Six interviews done and dusted and five already published... time to look back at the story so far. Three months ago I began my quest to get to grips with the Faro Convention, slightly suspicious and not really knowing what lay in store. Fourteen telephone interviews later – all with people involved in participation or citizens' initiative projects – and not only have I grown wiser but I have also become a lot less suspicious.

No matter how many critical questions I had – and still have – each and every interview left me feeling positive. Fourteen different people and fourteen different conversations: from very reserved and polite to open-hearted and even encyclopaedic. I now know more about Auschwitz than I ever thought I would – including some horrific details I wish I could forget – and I'm still trying to get my head around how chilled out and laid back the 1970s really were. But what they all have in common was that I learned something new in every conversation. They broadened my view of what heritage actually is and at times even succeeded in answering my most pressing questions.

One of those questions – and I am certainly not alone in asking it – concerns what the added value of heritage is for society as a whole. The Faro Convention insists that heritage can be a means to achieve wider goals, such as social cohesion. Here in the Netherlands, the Cultural Heritage Agency's website gives the example of 'people who would otherwise struggle to find employment joining forces in the upkeep of a fort. Or the celebration of St Martin's Day in Utrecht that promotes social cohesion by bringing different groups into contact with each other.' All well and good, but wouldn't those jobless people benefit just as much from doing a spot of gardening together? Or those diverse groups in Utrecht from teaming up to play football?

What's so special about heritage? What makes it different from other activities? Why resort to heritage rather than something else to strengthen the connection between people? A few phone calls helped clarify things for me. [The community archaeology project CARE](#), in which archaeologists carry out excavations together with village residents, certainly had a positive social impact. The locals had a pleasant and informative afternoon and discussed

their finds together. But can community archaeology really achieve a social goal? I asked the psychologist involved in the project. 'My study is still ongoing so that's not something I can talk about', she replied. Disappointed, I hung up.

But in my [interview](#) about the Groningen village of Kloosterburen, I got to hear more. 'Hello, is this Gijsje Stephanus? Am I right in thinking that you carried out research into the effect of heritage on the quality of life in small villages?' Gijsje explained that it's the uniqueness of heritage that can make it a special way to strengthen social cohesion. Football is much the same wherever it is played, but the history of a neighbourhood, a village church or a regional tradition differs from place to place. People take pride in and feel responsible for their own unique heritage and that is what connects them.

That made a lot of sense to me. 'But what about in neighbourhoods with a large migrant population, where contact with neighbours and a sense of home can't be taken for granted?', I asked Vanja Treffers over the phone. Vanja organizes art workshops and heritage outings for the residents of Transvaal, one of the most diverse neighbourhoods in The Hague. Talking to her helped me see that it's personal stories and interaction that enable local residents to get to know and accept each other better. And engaging with heritage and art inspires those personal stories. Associations with a particular building or statue, the life story triggered by an old photograph, the message you want to convey with your self-made work of art... These stories and discussions are more personal and run deeper than the small talk that takes place at Transvaal's weekly Rummikub afternoon.

Based on what I've heard, can I safely conclude that heritage connects? In my interviews I heard about the strong bond between heritage and pride, of the link with a feeling of responsibility, with personal and in-depth conversations... all things that can strengthen social cohesion. With a slight sense of relief, I pick up the phone again. 'Can you put me through? I'd like to cancel our football match. Let's make some bobbin lace together instead.'

See you next time,
Alma

A woman with long, wavy brown hair is sitting on a balcony railing, looking out over a residential building complex. She is wearing a purple top. The background shows a multi-story apartment building with balconies and windows. The lighting is soft, suggesting dusk or dawn.

Blog 8

*What can the queen
learn from urban
planning?*

I'll start the new year with a confession: me and 'participation' have a difficult history. It all began in 2013, when the King announced that the Netherlands was a participation society. Two years later, I went to university to study urban planning. Still reeling from a long summer of partying, the first text I studied was all about the participation ladder. Basically, the ladder is a hierarchical account of various types of social participation. I naively thought they had started the year with the most boring text in our degree programme to get it out of the way. Little did I know that the participation ladder would be the mainstay of my entire undergraduate programme.

After battling my way through my Bachelor's, I was ready to finally focus on what moves me most: beautiful cities and glorious architecture, the older the better. But again I was mistaken. While it has long been a widely discussed topic among planners, participation is now finding its feet in the world of heritage. But if even heritage can move with the times, so can I. The queen in her ivory tower – as I was known among the planning students – is getting to grips with participation at last.

Since September, I have been exploring the Faro Convention, which is all about participation and the citizens' initiative. The heritage sector is already embracing these developments, sometimes without even realizing it. But even so, many questions remain. I couldn't help but notice this during my [interview](#) with three city officials. Can participation ever be 100% successful? They wanted to know. Is it a bad thing if not everyone participates? As a local authority or city executive, how can you stimulate citizens' initiatives? Is it problematic to do this using a top-down approach?

What can we learn from urban planning?

For answers, I called a Master's student in Heritage Studies. Like me, she had done a Bachelor's degree in Urban Planning, except she had paid attention during the lectures, as I found out during our conversation. The questions currently facing the heritage sector, she explained, have long been answered in the world of planning. Our colleagues in spatial planning began experimenting with neighbourhood participation in the 1990s and the pros and cons are well known. People are happy with their neighbourhood for

longer and feel more invested in their surroundings now that the decisions are no longer taken by ivory-tower planners who assume they know what's good for everyone else. But participation can be a costly and time-consuming process, and occasionally tensions can run high. Not everyone is happy about being confronted with the other person's opinion. So we still need the planner to step back, look at the issues independently and weigh up the various interests at stake.

Tensions can also run high in the world of heritage. Both in the case of demolishing or redeveloping tangible heritage, and in the case of preserving or changing traditions in intangible heritage. The heritage expert is still needed to step in and act as a referee.

But what about the questions asked by those city officials I interviewed? What did our Master's student have to say about them? In a word: no, no and no! No, participation projects do not have to be 100% successful. No, not everyone wants or needs to participate. And a top-down approach is by no means a bad thing, even when it comes to citizens' initiatives. The planners have made their peace with issues like these.

In practice

What the student told me, I recognized in my [interview](#) with participants in the neighbourhood initiative for De Pas in Winterswijk. De Pas is what the Dutch like to call a 'cauliflower district': a linked collection of home zones, popular in the 1970s. In this case, a cauliflower that is well past its 'best before' date. Taking stories from the neighbourhood as a source of inspiration, the district's public spaces will now be given a much-needed upgrade and the original concept brought into step with life in 2021. This citizens' initiative is receiving encouragement from above, through small-scale activities organized by the municipality. Participation is seen as being of great importance to the success of the plans. But it turns out that some local residents have no desire to participate; in their view it is the municipality's job to solve the problems. This has led the De Pas project to conclude: participation needs to be achieved in small steps and local residents need time to appreciate the added value.

Just like the queen of top-down thinking, Alma.



Blog 9

Back to basics

Photographer: Jasper van Doeselaar

I can conclude my quest for Faro with a sense of contentment. Back in September, I was worried that the Convention had radical changes in store for us, and that the role of the heritage professional would soon be reduced to organizing neighbourhood barbecues. But my fears have turned out to be unfounded. We are already in the midst of those changes, and my experience so far has been a positive one.

Over the past few months, I have been struck by how the heritage sector is already working towards what the Faro Convention prescribes. True, it was my assignment to find out more about the projects that are actually doing this. But once I started paying attention to Faro-related issues – from participation and inclusion to stories and ownership – I suddenly found signs of these developments everywhere. News items about the ‘stories’ behind the heritage. Archaeologists talking about community archaeology. Museums and new heritage specializations with a focus on diversity and inclusion. And just the other day, I joined a large-scale online heritage event dedicated to Faro topics.

Faro is all around us

Initially, I saw a convention as a major turning point in history, the beginning of a new era. But this image doesn't seem to apply to Faro. While most of us are still trying to work out what the implementation will entail, we are all thinking and talking about many of the issues the convention addresses. We can find elements of Faro all around us.

At the same time, I am struck by how few people – even among those I interviewed – are familiar with the convention. But on second thought, perhaps that's not so strange. Faro was established as a European Convention in 2005 by heritage experts and the Council of Europe. This seems to have put a considerable distance between the convention itself and the citizens. Even I had to work hard to bridge that gap. One of Faro's central ideas is the citizens' initiative, but the convention was not born of the citizens themselves. Until now, it has mainly been a convention for and by professionals. A fine guide that enables civil servants to give direction to their policies.

Looking for Faro

Sustainability

But while the convention might seem like a remote entity, plenty of the ideas already blossoming in the minds of our citizens are very much in the spirit of Faro. Among them are ideas that reflect another strong social movement: the shift towards sustainability. For my final [interview](#) I spoke with 27-year-old Pascal Gelling. His project *Conserve the Future* explores how traditional ways of conserving food can be incorporated into the sustainability movement.

In recent years Pascal has observed a growing interest, especially among young people, in both tangible and intangible heritage. He thinks this is because many young people are attracted by sustainability. They are no longer fixated on all things luxurious and modern, but feel more of a desire to get back to basics. They wear second-hand clothes, buy local food, want to work with their hands and live by the motto ‘slow cooking, slow living’... a mindset that's only a few steps away from how things were done in the old days. Let heritage be your inspiration and go back to basics, that's what I say.

The right direction

Sustainability is not the only topic that seems to be hotter and hipper. Other core Faro concepts, such as diversity and openness, also come far more naturally to the younger generation. Hierarchical groups hold little appeal for us. Young people today are more outward looking: with us it's all about getting as many *likes* as possible.

All told, we are moving in the right direction. But it will take time to reach our destination: Faro. Some people are more receptive to change than others – that's just the way it is. And it's worth remembering that heritage has traditionally been the thing we cling to in turbulent times. That tendency can put the brakes on change. But it can also prevent us from becoming so radical that we go overboard. Heritage professionals don't need to resort to neighbourhood barbecues just yet.

Hope to see you again soon!

Alma

Publishing details

Looking for Faro

A personal voyage of discovery into the meaning of a European treaty

Faro Programme

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Photographs: Jasper van Doeselaar

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