

*Courtesy translation (original language: French)*

**CDCPP contribution to the New Democratic Pact  
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**THEMATIC SESSION: The role of culture and cultural heritage in democracy and democratic participation**

**Speaker:** Prosper Wanner, Lead Expert, Faro Convention Network

**Subject:** The Faro Action Plans as a means of providing ongoing support from the Council of Europe to local initiatives aimed at strengthening democracy and participation through cultural heritage.

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*In order to balance the use of the two official languages of the Council of Europe, this speech is in French.*

My presentation focuses on ‘the contribution of cultural heritage to building a peaceful and democratic society’, as stated in Article 1 of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society – the Faro Convention – which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year.

**What is the contribution of cultural heritage to building a more democratic society?**

The concept note for this session notes that decentralisation of cultural decision-making allows local authorities and communities to exercise greater control over cultural governance and heritage planning. But it also calls on Member States to restore confidence in democracy by making it tangible in people's daily lives through participation, accountability and equal access to rights.

**How can this decentralisation be made tangible in people's daily lives in terms of heritage?**

I will share the experience of heritage community initiatives that share a strong desire for democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

These initiatives are often located in contexts on the margins of power, sometimes marked by a strong sense of abandonment: the outlying districts of Naples, Marseille, Kaunas in Lithuania, Novi Sad in Serbia, or the villages of Viscri in Romania, Trate in Slovenia, Fontecchio in Italy and the Castellon region in Spain. But also in hyper-touristic cities such as Venice and Cordoba, where residents feel dispossessed of their heritage and their future.

All these initiatives are members of the European Network of the Faro Convention, which, alongside the Council of Europe, has been working since 2013 to interpret and apply the Convention within the framework of the Faro plans.

## **What do they have in common?**

Firstly, they are long-term projects and have benefited from the presence of key figures from institutions who have acted as facilitators and translators between heritage communities and institutions: a mayor, a priest, a curator, an urban planner, an academic.

Secondly, they took the Faro Convention as a framework for local cooperation between heritage communities and heritage institutions. Although they were often already applying some of its principles even before they knew about it, they lacked a framework to legitimise and structure cooperation in a context of mutual mistrust.

On the one hand, the public administration did not trust civil society's ability to contribute to the processes for which it was responsible. It essentially sought to use participation to improve understanding and acceptance of the choices it had already made. Civil society, for its part, no longer recognised the public administration and its elected representatives as reliable partners.

A striking observation is that the Faro Convention is ultimately more appreciated and defended by civil society and local institutions than by the national authorities that ratify it. It is championed by heritage communities, symbolically signed by local elected representatives, applied by local civil servants, adopted statutorily by cooperatives, included in university curricula and integrated into calls for municipal projects.

These initiatives come together within national networks to exchange practices and promote the Convention. The first national network was created in Italy in 2019, followed by the French-speaking network in Faro in 2022, with Spain, Serbia and Romania also planning to set up networks soon. These networks organise annual meetings, develop research and training programmes, pool their communication resources and organise peer visits.

## **The context: a crisis of confidence**

However, this 'bottom-up' engagement is taking place in contexts where there is a clear democratic crisis, where people have less and less confidence in their elected representatives and institutions, and where, conversely, institutions and elected representatives have little confidence in civil society. The challenge is to find a way out of this mutual lack of trust.

## **The paradigm shift**

This new space for cooperation is made possible by the paradigm shift proposed by the Faro Convention in terms of heritage: it considers heritage as a shared resource and responsibility and places people at the heart of heritage processes – from the designation of what constitutes heritage, how it is interpreted and promoted, to participation in the ethical debates that this raises.

The adoption of this convention, often in a symbolic manner at the local level, reflects a desire for democracy and a willingness on both sides to cooperate and share responsibility for heritage. The Faro Convention brings civil society back to the centre of heritage policies and proposes an approach that could be described as “super-integrated”.

## **From participation to cooperation**

The challenge is to move from an approach where people were, at best, invited to ‘participate’ in public heritage action, to one of ‘cooperation’ in public action. In the latter case, responsibility for implementing the process and its ethics is shared, in accordance with the Faro Convention. Public action is effectively modified by each new person who decides to join in.

The Faro Convention provides a possible framework for attempting to overcome this ‘breakdown of trust’. Adherence to its principles by local elected representatives and heritage communities establishes a framework for deliberation and cooperation in which shared responsibility for heritage can be tested.

Article 4 of the Convention commits public authorities to ‘encourage everyone to participate in the process of identifying, studying, interpreting, protecting, conserving and presenting cultural heritage, and in public reflection and debate on the opportunities and challenges that cultural heritage represents’. It calls for cooperation in public action to be prioritised rather than limiting oneself to established participatory processes.

## **New forms of cooperation**

In these very diverse contexts, the joint application of the principles of the Faro Convention by public institutions and civil society makes it possible to imagine and experiment with new forms of cooperation between heritage communities and local authorities.

It redefines and updates the nature of relations between political authorities, public institutions and heritage communities. These innovations are documented in the Faro action plans: the residents' cooperative, the heritage commission and the social contract.

In a context of mistrust towards elected representatives and public institutions – in Europe in general and particularly in the areas where the Faro Convention is applied – the Faro processes paradoxically affirm their commitment to and desire for democracy, and repoliticise heritage.

## **The French example**

In France, several cities have taken the initiative to adhere to these principles: Rouen, Nantes, Marseille and, most recently, Villeurbanne. The cooperation initiatives often concern narratives described as dissonant – poor housing, industrial pollution, HIV – which are sources of tension with local institutions.

The Faro Convention provides a framework for cooperation in which responsibility for narrating these conflicting heritages, as well as the ethical issues this raises, is shared.

In Marseille, following the collapse of two buildings in 2018, which highlighted the city's endemic poor housing conditions, the history museum and municipal archives joined forces with heritage communities to create a peaceful environment in which to recount this traumatic event. This involves heritage communities contributing to the enrichment of the museum's collections and municipal archives, with the opening of a popular archive collection.

## **Current limitations and prospects**

Although several of these initiatives have become exemplary in their own countries and across Europe – and have been recognised with awards such as the Europa Nostra prize – they struggle to enshrine their innovations in common law and remain dependent on the sensitivity of a curator, local elected representative or institution. This is where the Council of Europe and the ratification of the Faro Convention come into their own.

The aim is to encourage states that have not yet ratified the Faro Convention, such as France, to do so, and those that have ratified it to go well beyond this political and administrative act.

While the Reykjavík Declaration rightly calls for ensuring that everyone can play their part in democratic processes, the question is also one of inviting member states to make room for initiatives by heritage communities in order to enshrine the innovations they successfully implement in common law and public policy.

The Faro Convention is clear on this point. Article 11, on the organisation of public responsibilities in the field of cultural heritage, calls on member states to develop legal, financial and professional frameworks that enable combined action by public authorities, experts, owners, investors, businesses, non-governmental organisations and civil society.

**It is a question of going beyond the ratification of the Faro Convention so that local heritage communities and institutions can fully contribute to building a more democratic society based on what they have been successfully experimenting with for more than twenty years in some cases.**