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STEERING COMMITTEE FOR CULTURE, HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPE  
(CDCPP)

COUNCIL OF EUROPE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION  
ON THE VALUE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE FOR SOCIETY

FARO MEETINGS 2016

Venice Meeting on the value of heritage for society -  
The time for Faro

22-23 September 2016

Venice, Italy

*CONCEPT NOTE*



## Background

In the context of Faro promotional activities, the Faro meetings are playing a crucial role in bringing main stakeholders together to introduce the Convention, its principles and possible actions. Building on previous actions, such as the Marseilles Forum and the four case studies from Marseilles (France), Pilsen (Czech Republic), Viscri (Romania) and Venice (Italy), the Faro meeting in Venice offers opportunities for developing strategies to demonstrate the constructive use of the Faro Convention.

In this context, the Council of Europe is bringing together the countries that are actively thinking about signing and/or ratifying the Convention with those that have already ratified and are actively implementing Faro, in order to exchange experience and views. One expected outcome of this event is that participants will subsequently communicate with their respective officials at decision-making level, in order to better explain the potential implementation of the Convention.

## A distinctive approach

Based on the Faro Action Plan motto "*Peoples, Places and Stories*", the Council of Europe's ongoing reflection on the Faro Convention draws on three main ideas, which were incorporated as hallmarks of the working methodology:

- Prioritising residents in their relationship with cultural heritage;
- Reaching out to heritage communities;
- Strengthening linkages between all the local, regional and national heritage actors, through synergetic action.

The reflection gives priority to an "*action research*" approach, particularly aimed at "sites" selected as spotlights. It offers a platform for dialogue, seeking heritage-led alternative solutions to the increasingly complex societal challenges of our times. It also seeks to include the various distinctive civic initiatives carried out at local level and to draw on these specific experiences. It allows a better consideration of contributions from the field (a "bottom-up" approach) and understanding of the government entities and institutions in order to develop common references for all member States of the Organisation.

## Heritage and democracy

The Council of Europe process has been supported and encouraged by the European Union, where the Faro Convention is increasingly referred to in EU documents. Concrete examples of civic initiatives that draw on the Faro principles, and their capacity to propose practical solutions to community participation issues, play an essential role in addressing today's complex socio-economic issues. The evolving methodology of the Faro Action encourages the process to move forward, based primarily on field experience and working with all layers of society. Increased numbers of signatory member States to the Convention will further encourage the European institutions to listen to the communities, and be aware of their active role in the development of innovative approaches to heritage and democratization processes. Through the Faro Convention, the Council of Europe continues to assume its role in launching and guiding a pan-European debate on societal challenges with particular attention to human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

## Issues at stake

### *Peoples, places and stories*

When working with heritage communities who are interested in progressive social transformation of the relationships between peoples, places and stories, with an inclusive approach and enhanced definition of heritage, three main concepts are put forward through the Faro Convention implementation; participation, common assets and narratives.

1. A desire for the **participation** of individuals and collective entities that are prepared to enter into public action for the general well-being;

If not perceived and applied organically, the concept of participation could become artificial, if it is merely instituted in the framework of public policy, official regulation, an incentive or a condition, without the basic democratic provisions being honoured. In these situations, the participatory process loses its essence and is perceived as a condition, generating reactions, including a refusal to take part by some groups or communities, disregard or superficial assimilation. This delicate process should be acknowledged by everyone, civil society and public institutions alike, and should not be taken lightly.

In these contexts, concerted application of the principles of the Faro Convention by public institutions and civil society presents new forms of participation by the heritage communities in the affairs of a local authority. It reshapes and renews the nature of relations between the political power, the public institution and the heritage communities, encouraging ownership of a public action for the common wellbeing.

2. To identify and preserve one or more of the “**common assets**” around which the community can be structured and projected into the future;

What is held in common attaches to human activity. Only a practice of pooling in liaison with the public authority can decide what is “common”, set aside certain things for common use, and collectively put forward the rules calculated to ensure governance of common assets. It is first and foremost what sustains co-existence between peoples. The prime common asset is the surety for everyone to be able to enjoy relational well-being, to lead a peaceful co-existence with the other. This definition of the common asset is fundamental to the commitment of all heritage communities. The Faro Convention encourages the direct relation between common assets and democracy, which enriches public life and participation.

Through the heritage communities, these significant places, unique practices and traditions are rediscovered or revealed and brought to public attention. It may be, in Pilsen, the collective re-appropriation of a garden formerly tended by prisoners and left uncultivated. It may be, in Marseilles, rediscovery of the Aygalades stream piped in the industrial era and restored to the population today. In Venice, it is continued reflection on accessing and using activities related to the lagoon and to water. In Viscri, it is regulation of residents’ access to the communal meadows to graze their livestock.

3. The difficulties that some communities experience in bringing out a collective contemporary “**Narrative**”, in view of the challenges of diversity, migration and various other crises;

The peoples’ narratives; tales of life, territorial tales, stories of migrations, celebrations, unique stories of human groups or emblematic places nurture elements of heritage communities. These narratives, and the way they are revealed and disseminated, make up an important part of the extraordinary wealth of our shared history in Europe. Acknowledgement that there is more than one story to any issue, and regardless of whether we agree with it or not, having the opportunity to be heard is fundamental to the ‘narratives’ question. It allows the inhabitants themselves to take possession of places and of their history. These narratives connect the recent and more distant past to what constitutes the present. They give direction and allow the cohesion of individuals, groups and institutions, offering representations that can be compared, shared and accepted. They create a platform for greater mutual understanding and dialogue for possible future actions together.