



# CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN HERITAGE

Impact in deprived  
urban areas

Council of Europe – Strategy 21

**WORKSHOP** summary



The approach to heritage demands a deep questioning when considered against the pressing problems of marginalized urban areas. Among the challenges presented by low income peripheral neighbourhoods or declining urban centres, the relation between heritage at the local level and the residents presents risks and opportunities. Top-down initiatives and heritage policies which do not take the residents into account, may generate speculation and worsen the conflicts. On the other hand, citizen involvement is arguably an opportunity for heritage policies to strengthen inclusion and social wellbeing in deprived neighbourhoods. From self-management initiatives to practices aiming to enhance spatial justice or the inclusion of resident populations in an integrated heritage approach, the role of local communities is especially critical in vulnerable areas.

These relations are studied through five different reports that are summarised in this fact-sheet. The first two approaches deal with social aspects of heritage: (1) Social Production of Heritage and (2) Heritage in Marginal Urban Spaces. The third vision (3) is about Financial and Sustainability Aspects of Heritage and draws on new financial strategies within community-led heritage management. Two further studies deal with aspects of (4) Knowledge and Heritage and (5) Heritage and Public Space.

## SOCIAL PRODUCTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE FOR THE DIGNITY OF THE SUBURBS

Prof. Dr. Carlo Cellamare, "Sapienza" University of Rome, Italy

The idea of cultural heritage is associated, in most cases, to cities with a cultural tradition and a historical stratification. It particularly addresses historical centres and urban contexts of a certain architectural "value" and of certain recognised "prestige". Despite this, the suburbs are the most vital places in the city, the contexts where the most interesting dynamics take place. Although they may be characterised by great social problems, at the same time, they are social laboratories of coexistence in diversity and places of cultural production.

A first field of work of citizen associations, for example, which takes place in the suburbs of Rome, has been to recover and enhance the historical-cultural heritage widespread in the territory (Roman and medieval period), even with the support of archaeologists and other scholars. A second case of field of work is the reconstruction and enhancement of the mem-

ory of the social struggles over the past years, of the citizens' continuous efforts to claim adequate public service delivery and public investment into the redevelopment of the neighbourhoods (e.g. the school, health care, public transport, etc.) and of the achievements that have made the district as it is today. A third example of field of work is the expression of the tensions and experiences of a neighbourhood through artistic languages, like *street poetry*, graffiti, rap music, *street art*, and so on. The most interesting experiences, recognised of value by the inhabitants, are self-produced ones or those experienced by the artists with the participation of the inhabitants.

In order to recognise and enhance this cultural heritage, the involvement of the inhabitants is necessary. Already today, especially through their associations, they are the protagonists of the enhancement of heritage. We need to think





# HERITAGE AND MARGINAL URBAN SPACES

Prof. Dr. Ali Madanipour, Newcastle University, UK

The interface of deprived populations and historic cultural heritage may pose challenges but also opportunities for the management of heritage. Marginal urban spaces are where low-income populations, with increasingly diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, are concentrated. These areas, particularly in the historic urban core but also on the urban periphery, may be rich in cultural heritage, such as historic buildings, ancient roads and monuments, as well as the intangible heritage of memories and practices. The local populations who may have found themselves in these areas, or those who have lived here for a long time, may not have the financial capacity or cultural inclination to engage with this heritage. Neglect, dwindling public budgets, lack of private investment, cultural mismatch between the population and the heritage, and the threat of gentrification may all pose serious challenges to the management of heritage in these areas. At the same time, the interface between marginality and heritage may offer new opportunities for both sides. If the area is treated as a living cultural landscape, in which the local population is seen as an integral part of the heritage, the processes of improvement can benefit both the historic fabric and the local community. The links between people and places grow through the experience of living in an area. If this link is recognised and strengthened, through participation and support, the local capacity for engagement in the local heritage would be developed and encouraged. This is the direction in which an initiative such as the Heritage Action Zones, by Historic England, can play a positive role. Through participation of the local population and financial and technical support from Historic England, declining areas such as central Rochdale may be rejuvenated in an inclusive manner. The threat of gentrification only arises if investment is made in the place and not in the people, but if the two are both taken into account as part of a cultural landscape, the outcome would be an inclusive programme of heritage management that would also help overcome the marginality of these urban spaces.

about “policies for self-organisation” to support their actions and ongoing processes, to avoid that such processes become estranged and dropped from above. In some cases, we need to prevent the risk of an expropriation of the creative, planning and organisational capacities of the inhabitants. An example of how to counterbalance these shortcomings has been the organisation of the *Roman Summer Project* in Tor Bella Monaca, organised by “Sapienza University of Rome”.

The recognition of heritage must be closely connected with the memory of the neighbourhoods and with the needs and experiences of the inhabitants. The “heritage” socially produced and recognised is the sign of the dignity of the suburbs.

# HERITAGE, FINANCIAL ASPECTS

Dr. Daniela Patti and Dr. Levente Polyák,  
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Deprived urban areas, sometimes inhabited by marginalised social groups, often suffer from under-investment by public administrations and private financial organisations. Consequently, with no significant purchasing power and established community-led development structures in place, heritage assets in these areas are commonly exposed to top-down public development funds or commercially-minded private investment, that often fail to take into account the needs and capacities of local communities. Heritage regeneration in deprived areas without the involvement of “heritage communities” risks to create renovated structures with no real programming, users and economic sustainability; or to produce engines of gentrification with controversial impacts on the surrounding areas.

Looking for ways to maintain their physical assets and services, many European municipalities have developed new policies of the commons, temporary use and real estate development. These policies created new opportunities for more substantial citizen involvement in the preservation and management of heritage spaces. New public funding programmes aiming at disadvantaged neighbourhoods have developed instruments for communities to give social value to heritage assets also in areas less interesting for mainstream heritage policies and private investment capital. Outside the public realm, the emergence of ethical financial organisations and digital platforms made it possible for communities to access ownership of their heritage assets with new legal forms to exclude speculation.

Supported by these processes, the proliferation of citizen-led urban regeneration projects in the past decade has produced new skills and methods that enable communities to take the responsibility of renovating and managing heritage buildings. It is time that administrations at the EU, national, regional and the city level recognise the role of citizen initiatives and communities in heritage preservation and management – and help them through the revision of

regulatory frameworks and the establishment of specially targeted investment funds for community-led heritage regeneration processes.

## KNOWLEDGE AND HERITAGE

Juan Arana. Universidad CEU San Pablo, Spain

Rethinking heritage learning in the urban margins:

How can we approach heritage in the places that are farther away from historical and cultural urban centres? In peripheral neighbourhoods, there is a local heritage that is related to the meaning residents give to assets, rather than their historical or artistic significance. Diverse communities live together in the areas with lowest income rates in a city like Madrid and each of them associates its own meanings





and memories to the place they live in. Precariousness and inter-community tensions can project a negative perception of the neighbourhood, associated to insecurity. Initiatives that deal with local heritage as a driver for social inclusion can help to enhance alternative visions through strategies based on horizontal, open and collaborative processes.

**Collective construction of knowledge:** Promoting the knowledge of the different and shared identities to foster social inclusion and place attachment, requires an approach to the community through its cultural values, its memories and stories embedded in the urban space. Bottom-up production of knowledge can be promoted by adaptive cultural institutions able to become local, work horizontally with heritage communities and engage with social situations. The institution becomes a social and cultural facilitator.

Creative programmes where institutions and local communities work together can promote participation through open processes of creation. Projects like *Imagina Madrid* make use of cultural mediation actions and ephemeral interventions in selected public spaces of deprived neighbourhoods. The different experiences often include interviews and storytelling, collectively creating knowledge about the place and the shared identity of the communities. These projects aim to foster identity and place attachment through horizontal learning. Other initiatives as *Este es mi Barrio* work with children of marginalised neighbourhoods and local artists, reclaiming a sense of belonging through a common ground of street culture. The knowledge of cultural and symbolic her-

itage in the marginalised urban environment must be understood as a dynamic process rather than a static asset, a call for action rather than a neutral statement.

## HERITAGE AND PUBLIC SPACE

Prof. Dr. Sabine Knierbein, Vienna University of Technology, Austria

Public space is an arena for democratic, inclusive and emancipatory praxis and agency. Heritage is hence approached with an emphasis on spatial practices of heritage-making. Heritage-making is a contested process of past-based meaning production in the present. The section on Heritage and Public Space features three key challenges, delineates three core opportunities and exemplifies these debates with the support of three empirical case studies that link practices of heritage-making with public space agency. The challenges focus on three key aspects of peace, inclusion and innovation, whereas the opportunities section highlights difference, equity and emancipation as key ingredients of a democratic approach to heritage-making and public space. Considering heritage as a social, cultural and political process of heritage-making through public space agency includes both tangible and intangible dimensions of heritage and focuses on heritage as both a (material, social) product and a (materialising, relational) production process. Controversies that arise in processes of heritage-mak-



ing in public space can foster an exchange between institutionalised perspectives of cultural policy and 'the political' as expressed in heritage-oriented social movements in the city that develop own claims on fair, just and inclusive cultural policy. In that sense, public space can be an important realm for learning processes and for developing an approach that treats different forms of knowledge on heritage as equally important. Such an approach transfers key findings from public space research (relational thinking, focus on present opportunities, emphasis on inhabitants' emancipatory power) to the approach of heritage-making. Striving for peace, inclusion, and innovation by fostering difference, equity and emancipation through a democratic approach to public space will help to ensure that practices of heritage-making ensure human rights, fundamental freedoms, respect of the other, equal dignity of all persons and quality of life for all inhabitants.





## CONCLUSION

The challenges that urban communities face particularly in vulnerable neighbourhoods are multiple and context-specific. The studied experiences and discourses hint to ways in which the consideration and the involvement of local communities in heritage practices and policies can open opportunities and help to circumvent or overcome potential risks, such as gentrification. The introduced approaches to heritage call for transformative strategies in different aspects: (1) There is a potential for social value generation through a range of citizen engagement strategies, from self-management to horizontal work with heritage communities. (2) There are new ways to promote and foster citizen initiatives in more sustainable ways. These ways can be implemented both through public intervention and with stakeholders' collaboration. From the public sector, it is necessary that programmes promote an inclusive management of heritage that focuses on enhancing resident's capacities in processes of heritage-making, not only facilitating investment into place, but also offering funds to promote processes of social production of heritage to the people.

The definition for cultural heritage includes "all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time" (Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, 2005). This interaction cannot be neutral, nor isolated from the social context. Heritage-making needs to be assured as a common ground for a democratic approach to heritage in deprived areas, and an arena from which to claim difference, equity and emancipation.



**Strategy 21** redefines the place and role of cultural heritage in Europe providing guidelines to promote good governance and participation in heritage identification and management. It encourages innovative approaches to improving the environment and quality of life of European citizens.

The logo for Strategy 21, featuring the text "ST21" in white on a purple background, with a stylized graphic of three overlapping shapes in blue, red, and green to the right.

\*\*\* This Strategy 21 Workshop summary has been prepared and collected by group lead expert, **Mr Carlo Cellamare** for the Council of Europe. The views expressed in this document are those of its author and not necessarily those of the Council of Europe.



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