COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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Reference Note

Community Regeneration and Heritage

March 2018

Background:

The Faro Convention Action Plans between 2014 and 2017 have been designed to translate the Faro Convention principles into practice. Together with the Faro Convention Network, this dynamic process has gradually evolved with each Action Plan; building on the lessons learned in relation to the diverse contexts across member states. Through a number of field based experiences, a common theme that is repeatedly being discussed is the notion of community regeneration, its impact on heritage and vice-versa.

With the emphasis on people (communities) as the **makers of heritage** who offer diverse and distinct stories, the significance given to heritage assets in any given place changes. The inhabitants of these places, who are increasingly diverse and in constant movement, redefine the significance of heritage as they continuously regenerate themselves and treat this heritage accordingly. Through these changes experienced by communities across member states, the approach to heritage in relation to the communities also evolves **from territorial to relational**[1], which calls for revisiting existing relationships through the lenses of human rights and democratic participation. The fundamental step of acknowledging the identity and dignity of all involved is imperative for this process.

Based on some of the experiences, including Marseilles, France (urban regeneration and residents' cooperative); Viscri, Romania (local economic development and the inclusion of marginalised communities); Kaunas, Lithuania, (urban regeneration and dissonant heritage); Machkhaani, Georgia, (rural development and community engagement); Fontecchio (post-disaster revitalisation), Forli (dissonant heritage), Venice (over tourism and commodification of heritage), Italy; St Millian, Spain (depopulation and abandoned heritage); Lisbon, Portugal (over tourism and gentrification); the 2018-19 Action Plan puts the spotlight on the topic of community regeneration processes; the impact of heritage on community regeneration and the effects of community regeneration on heritage.

Context:

- In the context of the Faro Convention, we speak about **heritage** in relation to people and their stories;
- We also consider heritage as a political, economic, and social resource for the progressive **transformation** of societies;
- Referring to the same heritage assets in any given place, we acknowledge that there is more than one narrative and, at times these different narratives might be quite uncomfortable;
- Revisiting mainstream perspectives about heritage, we note that they are often **territorial, possessive and time bound**. The narratives of the powerful and privileged tend to dominate the

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[1] *Rethinking Research and Policy Agendas on Cultural Heritage and European Identities - www.culturalbase.eu*

discourse and set the norms, making 'historical' arguments how the heritage came about and who are the rightful owners of this heritage (which might be selective);

- We observe that transmitting these heritage values, assets and protecting one's identity is one of the most challenging as regards the struggle for resources today;
- In times of **constant mobility** of people (by choice or by force), we increasingly find ourselves in a world where diverse cultures meet, negotiate and redefine themselves. Those who resist such change tend to become rigid, inverted and exclusive;
- With increased population movement, there is also increased **fear for the loss** of identity and values. Under these conditions, communities develop pre-conceived ideas (prejudices) about the others and build walls.

Issues at stake:

- Depopulation of rural areas, gentrification, uncontrolled commodification of heritage, migration, social exclusion, changing nature of the neighbourhoods, quality of life, dignity, identity, democratic representation and the right to practise one's culture and heritage.

Actions:

- Acknowledgement: The need to step out of the dominant narrative and recall the transnational past of Europe offers different perspectives on heritage with all the influences of the existing communities / groups and their representations. Consequently, the heritage in Europe consists of very rich multiple identities and analysis will need to examine these identities and their heritage with an open mind.
- Mutual understanding: Acknowledgment of all groups sets a platform for a genuine dialogue to understand the existing heritage assets, the relationship of the inhabitants to this heritage and their stories about these assets. This could be an attempt to step out of the territorial approach to heritage and enter in a more relational approach; a major shift in our perception and treatment of heritage with its places, people and stories.
- Interpretation: The possibility to share the narratives (having a space to tell and listen = to live, to understand by doing, to be in situation, to walk in the tracks of the others) is essential where all involved are able to voice their views and understand the positions of the others. Stepping out of a territorial approach also allows all inhabitants to express their identity and practice their heritage regardless their legal status, based on their human rights.
- Transmitting: With the consideration of human settlements as places of transformation, and the people's right and active role in remaking their culture and heritage, communities constantly regenerate themselves. This has been (in various lengths) a natural part of human evolution and settlements. Today, it has a different dynamic and speed with the technological advances. In this equation, the marginalized communities have the opportunity to find and express their voice with dignity through heritage and gradually take their place in the governance of heritage as well as the community life in general. This is the role of heritage (as a common ground) in addressing societal challenges as we understand them today.

Critical questions:

- What is the role of heritage and heritage communities in the regeneration process and what are the consequences of ignoring diverse narratives? Considering heritage as an economic, social, political and cultural source and resource, could heritage be an essential part of the image negotiation between the groups, and open a door for dialogue and the regeneration process?
- Can the network of heritage communities play a role in finding solutions and creating a sense of solidarity across the borders?
- How can the implementation of human rights, the fight against discrimination, strengthen the regeneration of these communities?
- How does a heritage community build a capacity to reclaim and redefine commons (including relationships)?
- What would be the new division of the roles and responsibilities between public institutions, political players and heritage communities?