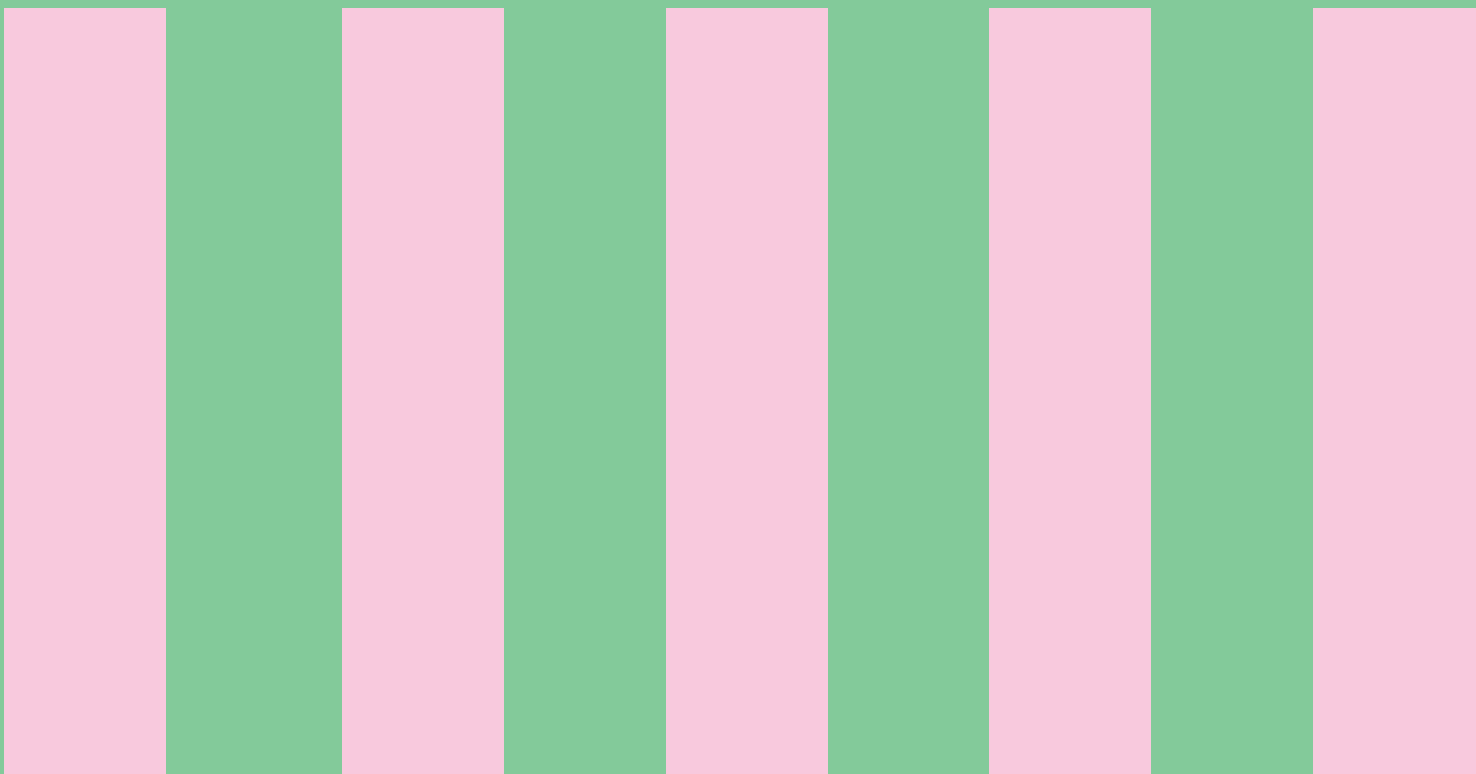


Rooted participation

Heritage Contact Zone in
support of new heritage policies



Heritage has become an increasingly visible – and political – keyword in cultural policies across the world, and in particular in the EU, where the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 (EYCH) enabled rich exchanges between experts, institutions and stakeholder groups. The Year has provided a sound understanding of the points of convergence and divergence between actors in the cultural heritage field. Its legacy should build upon these insights that support the Council of the European Union's definition of Cultural Heritage “in all its diversity and forms – tangible and intangible, immovable and movable, digital and a value in its own right [...]”. This is the task of the first Commission's expert group in the field of culture, The Expert Group on Cultural Heritage, established in Oct 2019.

As one of the 25 projects funded through the EYCH special call, the Heritage Contact Zone project has implemented activities across Europe and produced outcomes that lead its partners to the following policy reflections and call for action:

In many countries and regions, the heritage sector is deeply tied to the tourism industry, an often vital source of income for local economies. The contested relation between heritage, urban development, regeneration, preservation and tourism should be carefully re-examined with the aim to ensure the sustainability of the host communities, their cultural practices and environment. Lack of community involvement in the management of tourism, as well as in urban and heritage regeneration, especially in rural areas, can lead to the loss of cultural diversity,

displacement of communities, gentrification and erosion of local authenticity.

The Council of Europe's 2005 Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (more commonly known as the Faro Convention) has helped to frame many of the more positive – and socially progressive – aspects of cultural heritage policies that have emerged in the last decade. Its emphasis that we choose to belong to heritage communities– rather than being born into them because of ethnicity, language, class, etc. – is applaudable. The 2018-2019 Faro Convention Action Plan further defines these heritage communities as: “self-organised, self-managed groups of individuals who are interested in progressive social transformation of relationships between peoples, places and stories, with an inclusive approach based on an enhanced definition of heritage” (COE 2018: 23). This pushes heritage away from being appropriated for identity politics and rather to help build more inclusive and open civil societies.

Therefore we would welcome the stronger recognition of a value of cultural heritage that goes beyond the dimension of tangible assets: that is, heritage as a place for public engagement, reflection and re-invention of communities' contested stories and histories. Communities, citizens' engagement, co-construction and participation are critical elements that must be at the core of any heritage intervention. Informed participation of communities helps foster ownership and ensures adequate responses to local realities and needs. Promoting diversity in

interventions, particularly intercultural encounters, contributes to the well-being of citizens as a whole.

“We need to strengthen participatory methodologies, intercultural mediation and new evaluation frameworks to measure social impact and engagement.”

Policy-makers and those who implement cultural policies need to pay greater attention to soft-infrastructure and participation, rather than traditional approaches prioritizing hard infrastructure.

Now is the time to place community involvement to co-design and manage such processes at the core of the new Creative Europe programme, Horizon Europe, the Rights and Values programme, the European Regional Development and Cohesion Fund,

the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the LIFE – Programme for the Environment and Climate Action, particularly in view of the mainstreaming of climate action in the proposed post-2020 MFF.

Outlook

Working on heritage and memory, especially contested memory, requires unique approaches for each situation. The case studies we have worked on have allowed for some general conclusions, methodological and policy reflections. We have focussed on some specific communities and thematic areas and realise that we have not addressed other urgent and timely challenges. Our approach and thinking had as a main reference intersectionality, which allows for unique intersections of various axes like gender, race, religion, and class to be addressed without generalising. From there we have identified a range of areas, like cultural and heritage rights and gender issues, that the consortium of partners and stakeholders wishes to address in the following project phase. Please get in touch if you are interested to join our activities.

About the Heritage Contact Zone project

Heritage Contact Zone (HCZ) investigates the potential of heritage spaces for creative processes and dialogue. HCZ focuses especially on contested, neglected or marginalised heritage with exhibitions, workshops and a toolkit. It discusses challenging innovative and inclusive heritage representation, using heritage as a space for dialogue and making conflict constructive. This final conference brings together the outcomes of the project.

