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EUROPEAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

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1. Introduction

European Cultural Heritage is a field that unites institutions such as museums, galleries, academies, universities, religious establishments, tourism agencies, NGOs, but also individuals who may be either curators, conservators, restorers, experts, researchers, operators, educators, or artists, craftsmen etc. who all work for linking past, present and future.

According to UNESCO, “heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration.”¹ In its turn, the European Commission describes the broad range of domains that can be contained under the rather wide umbrella of cultural heritage as “a shared source of remembrance, understanding, identity, dialogue, cohesion and creativity.”²

Facing a constant evolution and a changing understanding, the concept of cultural heritage has been adapted throughout time to the continuous modifications of societal rating systems, as it incorporates the symbolism and value society gives to its creations. If the practice of collecting valuable items started centuries ago, in Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period, the first forms of institutionalization of the process were the encyclopedic representations attempting to contain the entire world in one room.³

Coming from the past, cultural heritage reaches us, contemporary people, as a symbolic and representative evidence of past societies and their values, with the goal of perpetrating it to the future. It can be interpreted as a bridge that links the various temporal segments – past/ present/ future – and keeps time together in an undivided continuum. Hence its importance, its materiality, its meaningfulness, nationwide, but also worldwide.

When speaking of cultural heritage there are two main distinctions that represent the zero level in understanding it and its forms of existence, of manifestation. On one hand, there is the quality of tangible or intangible that needs to be approached. On the other hand, the differentiation can be done also between movable, immovable but also underwater heritage. In order to very briefly explain this distinction, it is worth pointing out that tangible heritage includes all physical artifacts reaching us from the past, from previous civilizations, which have created and assigned them symbolic value, using them as such and preserving them for the same purpose. When coming to immovable heritage, it can be understood as built heritage, such as monuments, historical sites, religious edifices etc.. While involving intangible components, such as the skills specific to the building or decorative techniques, or the religious practices performed inside them, the buildings themselves are part of the tangible heritage. Another specific type of tangible heritage is the one preserved underwater due to very specific historical contexts. Tangible heritage also includes cave painting and industrial heritage, as specified in the 2009 UNESCO Glossary.⁴

¹ [World Heritage | UNESCO](#)

² [EU Policy for cultural heritage - Culture and Creativity](#)

³ [The Concept and History of Cultural Heritage | Cultural Heritage Studies](#)

⁴ [Cultural heritage | UNESCO UIS](#)

If UNESCO is mostly preoccupied with the preservation issues related to cultural heritage, the European Union has come to promote it as a driving force for nowadays societies. This is mainly because the cultural and creative sectors determine economic growth, employment and social cohesion. Cultural heritage can act as a social catalyzer, can contribute to building or consolidating a feeling of togetherness, of community belonging, and thus enriching people's lives. As statistics point out, at the level of the European Union, there are over 300,000 people employed in the cultural heritage sector, while in related fields of activity such as hospitality, interpretation and security, there are another 7.8 million jobs.

But the driving force of cultural heritage is to be found in the educational resources it offers, at all levels, from early childhood to continuing education and advanced academic research. Magnified by the development of digital tools, the acquisition of knowledge related to cultural heritage can contribute to improving the educational level of adults, whatever their previous skills and formal qualifications.

2. Learning Objectives

The educational objectives that will be followed all through the module with focus on fostering understanding, appreciation, and preservation of shared traditions, histories, and values in order to promote peace and respect and fight nationalism and extremism

1. **Raising awareness and inspiring respect by means of cultural heritage:** Teaching individuals about diverse cultures to promote mutual respect and understanding.
2. **Creating a feeling of identity and consolidating connections:** Helping learners explore and understand their own heritage, thus building a sense of belonging and identity.
3. **Explaining the importance of preservation for cultural heritage persistence:** Encouraging activities that protect and conserve cultural artifacts, practices, and sites, explaining how easily they can be destroyed, how important it is to prevent such destruction.
4. **Promoting critical thinking:** Inspiring learners to analyze the impact of culture on history, society, and global relations.
5. **Developing creativity and encouraging free expression:** Using cultural elements as inspiration for art- and culture-inspired educational processes.
6. **Integrating cultural heritage in contemporary contexts:** Exploring ways to adapt and integrate traditions into contemporary life responsibly.

3. Theoretical Background

An essential term when considering the wide field of cultural heritage is the **collection**: a set of objects selected by professionals – museum specialists or private collectors – according to well defined criteria. Among these, the symbolic value of the respective items, their unicity, representativeness, rarity.

A museum **object** is not any type of object, but one which is representative for a certain reality, one which loses its functionality once it becomes part of the museum context, this being true particularly for the ethnographical and archaeological fields. Krzysztof Pomian refers to such objects as *semiophores*, i.e. carriers of significance.⁵

A museum **exhibit** is that object which is included in an exhibition and thus acquires new meaning through its "reading" by the viewer, by the visitor, who assigns it value according to the information provided by the museum but also according to his/her previous knowledge, interpreting it as part of a more complex process which involves various stimuli: aesthetic pleasure, scientific interest, curiosity, pride, identification, belonging etc.

An **exhibition** is a construct, a result of a creative process initiated by a curator, bringing forward a certain topic, a certain artist, a certain selection of cultural heritage items. It can take the form of a temporary exhibition, available to the public for a limited timeframe, generally varying from one to several months, sometimes even one year, but also of main or permanent exhibition, which is the way to present to the public the most representative part of the cultural heritage items existing in the museum collections.

According to the last ICOM definition, adopted in Prague, on 24 August 2022, "a **museum** is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing."⁶ The occurrence of museums has been possible following the institutionalization of the collecting practice whose understanding varied from fashionable to some to professional to others, and which developed throughout centuries so to involve appropriate venues, including both exhibition spaces and storage spaces.

Preservation is a goal, followed by all cultural heritage professionals, aiming at the transmission hereof to future generations. It can be achieved by appropriate, deontologically implemented conservation-restoration measures.

⁵ Apud André Desvallées and François Mairesse (ed.), *Key Concepts of Museology*, Armand Colin, 2010, p. 63

⁶ [Museum Definition - International Council of Museums - International Council of Museums](#)

≡ **mediation** or **interpretation** refers to sets of measures and actions that are museum contexts in order to ensure the transmission of the exhibit/ exhibition viewers, ensuring bridges between the sender and receiver of the museum message.

”Mediation sometimes seeks to favour the sharing of experiences and social interactions between visitors, and the emergence of common reference”⁷.

4. Cultural Heritage

4.1 Intro to the topic

As we all have parents, grandparents and great-grandparents from whom we inherit much of what is valuable in our lives, a comparison with the familial universe may be useful in better understanding the word “heritage”, which is significant at society level. If the family inheritance that is nowadays quite often clearly specified in a written will, or otherwise determined by national laws, heritage is a more general term that unites both tangible and intangible aspects, all equally important for all society members.

Cultural heritage is a concept that is considered to have been first used by Leibnitz in 1690⁸. It refers to monuments, cultural goods but also intangible elements, all of public interest. Considering its intrinsic value and the appreciation at society level, it must be preserved by specialized professionals in order to ensure its transmission to future generations.

Nowadays understood as ”a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time”⁹, cultural heritage is a source of inspiration for today’s societies, a proof of everything previous communities have created, gathered and consolidated throughout the centuries. While it can most frequently be found in museums, libraries, research centers, in a structured way, according to the typologies and themes of the collections, it is at the same time a living organism which continues to evolve in contemporaneity, within the communities which have shaped it and in this latter case its forms of manifestations are rather fluid, always undergoing a process of imperceptible transformation.

More recently, it has been acknowledged a cross-disciplinary tool to achieve greater unity between people of different nations, but also within one and the same nation, as in most cases it requires tight cooperation between various official institutions. It is up to everyone to recognize the cultural

⁷ André Desvallées and François Mairesse, *op.cit.*, p. 47

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 39

⁹ *Council of Europe Treaty Series - No. 199, Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*, Faro, 27.X.2005, p. 2

ment to the own person, and to participate in the process of cherishing, preserving and her words, it is a matter of (personal) choice but also of (social) responsibility and cultural heritage links the individual to the rest of the society, irrespective of the size

4.2 Application in Adult Education

More recently cultural heritage has also been valued for its power of creating social bonds.

It is of particular meaningfulness for educators, as the higher their cultural competence, the better their skills in approaching the beneficiaries of the educational process in an equal, inclusive manner, while recognizing their diversity.

Understanding the cultural background, the cultural inheritance of all participants in the educational activities, educators can design and adapt learning methods, teaching materials and create pedagogical environments that are favorable to all, whatever their level of prior knowledge. Furthermore, cooperation between the cultural educator and family members, as well as with the students' everyday teaching staff, if this is the case, provides the framework for an inclusive and adaptative learning environment that focuses on the students.

Recognizing difference leads to **fostering inclusivity** in the own educational background of the cultural organization, and this reflects in both staff's attitude and in the design of the teaching materials. One of the great advantages of cultural education is that it allows a huge variety of topics and possibilities of adapting the topics to the real needs and expectations of the target audience.

At the same time, cultural organizations, while **promoting diversity and raising awareness of cultural differences**, also contribute to social responsibility and consolidate the social responsibility of the community within which they are active.¹⁰

Apart from inclusivity, cultural heritage also impacts the field of adult education in terms of sustainability. Raising awareness about the importance of using local resources, instead of having them travelling long distances, and understanding that this also consolidates economic health of the communities are material in transforming societies into sustainable ones, viable in the long term. A first phase in this process is the construction of **sustainable cultural thinking**, so that social groups can understand their territories, with limits and values as well. Sometimes this may require adjusting some practices, sometimes it means recognizing the worthiness of daily things and processes which need to be preserved and not thrown away.¹¹

¹⁰ Chima Abimbola Eden, Onyebuchi Nneamaka Chisom, Idowu Sulaimon Adeniyi, "Cultural Competence in Education: Strategies for Fostering Inclusivity and Diversity Awareness", in *International Journal of Applied Research in Social Sciences*, Volume 6, Issue 3, March 2024, pp. 384 and foll. DOI: 10.51594/ijarss.v6i3.895

¹¹ Karla Nunnes Penna, "Cultural heritage as an educational base for the traditional pillars of sustainable development", conference paper available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330881714_Cultural_heritage_as_an_educational_base_for_the_additional_pillars_of_sustainable_development



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4.3 Case Studies and Examples

Resources for Accessible Cultural Tours (REACT) is an Erasmus+ project, taking place during 2023-2025, whose aim is to improve the cultural experience for all visitors, with a focus on inclusion and accessibility. The project partners focus on the needs of diverse audiences, including persons with various disabilities, be them visible or invisible, and tackle also the advantages brought by digital innovation for those working in the field and, most importantly, for the end-users. Reaching broader audiences and fostering sustainable, inclusive cultural practices are objectives that can be turned into reality by developing accessible and inclusive content, both on-site and online. The first step is to start considering the diversity of the audiences already in the design phase.¹²

Folk Art & Culture. Offering Educational Opportunities to Young People (Folk Art&Culture) is another Erasmus+ project, implemented during 2023-2024, that brought forward the advantages of empowering especially adults who belong to the group of NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) by facilitating their contact with folk culture and providing them with suitable sources of information. Persons belonging to the NEETs usually show an increased risk of marginalization and cultural organization can work positively towards reducing and even eliminating it through the creation of educational material and experiences, suitable for the mobilization of this group. In this framework, the project partnership worked for the creation of an innovative museum educational program for adults who belong to the group of NEETs and the transition of the status of museums from places of visit to spaces of support and engagement for the local and European society. The project also made use of technology as a means of promotion and highlighting the Europe's cultural wealth, and provided the end-users with a 7 module-MOOC on the importance of cultural heritage and its appropriate understanding and capitalization, as well as four educational virtual tours, enabling 360 degree-visualizations of the cultural heritage resources available on the project partner premises.¹³

Connecting Through Cultural Heritage (CONNECTAGE) was a project aimed at empowering adult educators and improving their skills in teaching cultural heritage to their adult learners, who acquire abilities to cherish the cultural heritage as well as knowledge and skills to practice various handicrafts and artistic activities. This was also the place to share life experience and improve communication skills, including through digital technology.¹⁴

¹² To find out more about the project and its objectives, click [REACT | Resources for Accessible Cultural Tours](#)

¹³ To find out more about the project and its achievements, please visit <https://www.folkart-culture.eu/>

¹⁴ More information on this project can be found on the EPALE page [Digitalisation and Adult Learning in Antalya Olgunlasma Institution...](#)

iNTANGIBLE: Digitizing Intangible Cultural Heritage Amidst the Digital Shift

(iNTANGIBLE) was an Erasmus+ project (2021-2023) aimed at bringing forward the necessity of online cultural content availability, which became very clear during the Covid-19 pandemics, with a focus on intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The project included a desk research phase on existing ICH digitization models and practices, followed by the creation of a training curriculum and handbook for professionals, as well as a digital platform with five modules and a digital map.¹⁵

5. Teaching and Learning Methods

5.1 Methodology approach

Andragogy or the art of teaching adults, as developed by Malcolm Knowles¹⁶ in 1968, focuses around five main principles and related teaching methods:

1. Self-directed learning – it is very important that the learning process answers the knowledge needs of the beneficiary of the educational process. This process comes along with at least three requirements: flexibility, self-paced learning and customization
2. Relevant and goal-oriented learning – unlike formal education, which for the most, takes place at a rather early age, when the curriculum is established in the majority of the cases at national level and where the teaching staff are those in charge of delivering to pupils the content created for them by educational research bodies, in the case of adult education the design of the content is created so to answer specific needs of the adult learners, whose goals are much more clearer to them than they are to children enrolled in the formal education system, where the goal setting and achievement monitoring are rather the tasks of the teachers. Moreover, the acquisition of job-specific skills and the delivery of the content in a very clear way are very important for the adult learners.
3. Experiential learning is a key method in adult education, as it allows learners, some of who may be persons who have not had access to formal education for various reasons, to feel empowered. In this case one may think of on-the-job training, cases studies but also simulations and role plays.
4. Readiness of learning refers to adults' orientation towards acquiring knowledge they need in their activities. For this purpose, tailoring activities to suit their particular interests is of highest importance, as is the clear pointing out of the connections between the educational activities and what the adult learners know from their prior experiences.
5. Problem-solving oriented learning may include finding inspiration in real life situations, using role plays and simulation to learn how to tackle related difficulties, collaborative

¹⁵ More information on the project can be found at <https://intangible-project.eu/>

¹⁶ Cf. Imed Bouchrika, "Adult Learning Theory for 2025: Methods and Techniques of Teaching Adults", available at [Adult Learning Theory for 2025: Methods and Techniques of Teaching Adults | Research.com](https://www.research.com)

Another method that is to be taken into consideration when teaching cultural heritage to adult learners is the one of transformative learning. Developed by American sociologist Jack Mezirow in 1991, this method allows learners to develop their critical thinking, while becoming more inclusive and more reflective. This emotional change takes place when the learners face “disorienting dilemmas”, that is situations which don’t fit in their usual prior understanding of the world.¹⁸

The above methods, which refer to adult education in general, can of course be applied to the teaching of cultural heritage topics that may be of interest for the adult learners. The key is to find the right theme, that is suggestive and attractive enough for the target group.

5.2 Suggested activities

For the cultural organization initiating the adult education program:

1. Ensure an appropriate communication campaign:
 - a. Consider the target audience, their particular needs, the communication channels they use
 - b. Design the targeted slogan to announce your activity
2. Ensure traceability of all implemented operations:
 - a. Registration
 - b. Attendance list
3. Design and implement the cultural heritage education program for adult learners
 - a. Identify a topic of interest for the target audience
 - b. Assign the task to the adequate staff
 - c. Implement the program
 - d. Assess the program: self-evaluation by the adult educator and evaluation by the adult learners.

Example of practical activities:

Workshop: What is heritage to me?

Target audience: 15 participants

Duration: 1 hour – 1 hour and a half

Type of work: open discussion (15-20 minutes), museum visit (15-20 minutes), practical work (30 – 50 minutes)

¹⁷ Paul Symonds, “5 Key Principles of Malcolm Knowles Adult Learning Theory of Andragogy & Using It in the Workplace”, available at [5 Key Principles of Knowles Adult Learning Theory Andragogy](#)

¹⁸ Cf. Bouchrika, *loc.cit.*

6. References and further reading materials.

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<https://intangible-project.eu/>

[Museum Definition - International Council of Museums - International Council of Museums](#)

[REACT | Resources for Accessible Cultural Tours](#)

[The Concept and History of Cultural Heritage | Cultural Heritage Studies](#)

[World Heritage | UNESCO](#)

7. Conclusion

Cultural heritage is a huge pool of resources for a variety of educational objectives, that can be adapted to the specific needs of the target audience. In many cases, the end-users of the cultural-educational activities do not necessary engage in it for the formal recognition of the action, but rather for the empowerment the access to cultural knowledge gives.

Understanding culture is not always easy and straight forward, and coming to recognize it for what it is for the self and for the society is a huge step in one's personal growth, in the development of the chances of access to a better career and also in the engagement in actions related to more sustainable future for the entire communities.



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Overcoming Nationalism and Euroscepticism Through Culture