

# Citizen engagement in the protection of cultural heritage

A policy brief from the Policy Learning Platform  
on environment and resource efficiency

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## Introduction

The report of the Horizon 2020 Expert Group on Cultural Heritage makes a case for the European Union to promote the innovative use of cultural heritage in support of economic growth, social cohesion and environmental sustainability. Cultural heritage is a shared resource and forms part of the cultural identity of communities and individuals. The expert group argued for engagement of new audiences and continued development of more participative models of interpretation and governance, including through increased involvement of the private sector and civil society.

The group recognised the potential for cultural heritage to encourage participation, integration and cohesion in society. The report notes that cultural heritage has traditionally been identified, maintained and protected by culture professionals, which has resulted in a situation where local communities often have little responsibility for their own assets.

Increased participation of citizens in the protection of cultural heritage aligns well with steps towards increasing decentralisation in many policy areas, and may also help alleviate the pressures of dwindling public budgets for heritage protection. The Council conclusions on participatory governance of cultural heritage (2014/C 463/01) highlight that better involvement in institutional processes could help empower citizens and address the challenge of their increasing political disengagement. The Council conclusions also called on member states to promote long-term heritage policy models that are evidence-based and citizen-driven.



Image credit: Photo by ShonEjai from [Pexels](#)

## How to involve citizens?

The [European Capitals of Culture](#) (ECoC) initiative and connected programmes are intended to foster the participation of citizens living in the city and its surroundings, as well as those from elsewhere. Evaluation of the ECoC has highlighted that it helps cities identify previously untapped sources of talent, inspiration, ideas and energy amongst their citizens. This, in turn, enhances the ECoC cultural programme and also helps to support an ongoing legacy.

Key success factors in how to involve citizens include effective communication from the outset, including when activity may be less visible - e.g. in the programme design phase. It was also found that practical and technical support may be just as important as financial support in enabling local people or smaller organisations. There is also a need to consider the diversity of the local population and the opportunities for inclusive participation. For example, both Liverpool (2008) and Linz (2009) organised cultural events in neighbourhoods across the city, particularly in schools in the case of Liverpool.



The [Global Development Research Center](#) concluded that good heritage conservation strategies require both a better appreciation of the value of heritage assets and integration of strategies in the wider process of planning and development of the area, as well as the active participation and effective involvement of the local community in all aspects of its development and implementation. The participation of the local community supports development of a coordinated approach covering awareness raising, capacity building and means to resolve issues. Using active and practical methods, engaging with small groups with mutual concerns and providing meaningful data and information are some of the actions which foster participation.

### Regional and local approaches

A number of EU programmes, including Horizon 2020 and the joint programming initiative 'Cultural Heritage and Global Change', have adopted a people-centred approach to cultural heritage. For the partners involved in interregional cooperation, stakeholder involvement means increased awareness towards the conservation of cultural assets, but also more opportunities for sustainable heritage management that brings economic and social benefits, and alternative employment. It also facilitates the design and implementation of policies, since local actors are empowered and networks are created, enabling a critical consensus on policies and initiatives.

Good examples in the field of citizen engagement stem from the past INTERREG IVC projects:

EUROSCAPES (European Landscapes Management) project focused on the management of natural and cultural heritage landscapes in urban and peri-urban areas. As part of this project, the territorial planning department of the Municipality of Loures (Portugal) engaged local actors in the development of a landscape management strategy. Public meetings were held and attracted 430 participants, and 180 people shared their views by responding to a questionnaire. Meetings were also held with 25 local school teachers. 20 local schoolchildren interviewed their relatives about the landscapes they live in. Face-to-face contact between the local actors and the promoters was considered a success, and it was concluded that continuing and deepening this type of work was crucial for good landscape management.

See: <http://www.euroscapes-eu.org/>

The B-TEAM project worked with regional policies concerned with the redevelopment of brownfield land. The City of Oulu (Finland) oversaw the signing of a Brownfield Pledge to regenerate the maritime area. A container was placed on the shoreline to be used as a place for interaction between stakeholders and as a venue for events, exhibitions and other activities. Partners felt that it was important to raise awareness of the area as a resource amongst local people and also to create facilities for temporary use (such as the container). The initiative led to the involvement of 20 communities around the city.

See: <http://bteaminitiative.eu/>



Interreg Europe projects also focus on citizen engagement and identify good practices that focus on stakeholder mapping and engagement. Techniques for identifying the appropriate people, establishing networks and highlighting the co-benefits of sustainable management of cultural assets are some of the approaches that partners in Interreg Europe projects can share with each other.



Image credit: Photo by Al ghazali on [Unsplash](#)

The role of digitalisation is increasing in protection of natural and cultural assets, including in the process of stakeholder engagement. To raise awareness and stimulate dialogue with stakeholders, the Vest-Agder County Council (Norway), lead partner of the Interreg Europe [HERICOAST](#) project, plans to communicate the history of cultural heritage (historical harbours) through digitisation. The museums and the university of Agder will be the key actors engaged in this effort. In addition, the Council intends to actively involve the municipalities with historical harbours at the coast of Agder in improving planning for the cultural heritage. As part of HERICOAST project the county councils have taken the initiative to establish a regional reference group consisting of four municipalities in the region with potentially the most valuable historical harbours. At the same time several municipalities are currently working on their local heritage plans.<sup>1</sup>

Efficient engagement of stakeholders requires proper structures and mechanisms for information sharing. “One of the principal aims of local authority reform in Ireland over last number of years has been to establish structures that allow stakeholders to contribute towards policy making”, states Róisín O’Grady Heritage Officer in Tipperary County Council, partner in [SWARE](#) project, which works with sustainable heritage management of waterway regions<sup>2</sup>.

#### *Examples of stakeholder engagement structures in Ireland:*

- Strategic Policy Committees focus on local government policies and programmes
- Local Community Development Committees co-ordinate and implement a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development
- Public Participation Networks (PPN) enable the public to take an active formal role in the policy making.

PPN is a network of groups from the community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental, sectors. The aim of the network is to broaden representation and participation in local government, to act as a hub for sharing information between sectors and to build the capacity of the sectors through networks and training. Currently there are over 980 groups in the Tipperary PPN. The groups feed into council policy through linkage groups and PPN representatives.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/tx\\_tevprojects/library/Revidert%20territorial%20analysis%20Vest-Agder%2024.03.2017.pdf](https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/tx_tevprojects/library/Revidert%20territorial%20analysis%20Vest-Agder%2024.03.2017.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/tx\\_tevprojects/library/SWARE\\_Launching\\_OGrady.pdf](https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/tx_tevprojects/library/SWARE_Launching_OGrady.pdf)



## Concluding comments

Citizen participation in the protection of cultural heritage helps to increase awareness about the value of cultural heritage as a shared resource. It empowers communities and fosters community cohesion. Increasingly, EU funded programmes encourage a people-centred approach, and citizen participation is also supported by Interreg Europe.

Reaching out to a wide range of stakeholders is essential for building a sound basis for sustainable planning and action for cultural heritage. There are good practices that demonstrate the value of this and provide examples of how to do it, but the first step is recognition and prioritisation of the need for this method of working. Policymakers need to frame the information in a convincing manner, such that it can convince political decision makers to support action for sustainable heritage planning and management.

The Policy Learning Platform is the second principal activity besides the projects funded by the Interreg Europe programme. Our aim is to make the projects knowledge accessible and usable by other regions and to offer networking, knowledge sharing and policy learning opportunities to any interested region even without being partner in a project. We create a hub of information and services to facilitate continuous learning mainly among local and regional public authorities in Europe. You can learn from the experiences and solutions of your peers and benefit from the policy know-how of our experts. As our platform community grows, so will the pool of good practices and expertise in our four topics: research and innovation, competitiveness of SMEs, low-carbon economy, and the environment and resource efficiency, which covers also cultural heritage. Join us today to exchange with the other policy makers in your field and access expert services, tools and information on how to improve the effectiveness of your regional development policies and programmes.

### *Sources of further information:*

- Ecorys. Ex-post Evaluation of the 2011 European Capitals of Culture (2012)
- Getting Cultural Heritage to Work for Europe – Report of the Horizon 2020 Expert Group on Cultural Heritage (2015): [https://ec.europa.eu/culture/news/2015/0427-heritage-2020\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/culture/news/2015/0427-heritage-2020_en)
- Interreg Europe. Discover projects: <http://www.interregeurope.eu/discover-projects/>
- INTERREG IVC. Approved projects database: <http://www.interreg4c.eu/projects/index.html>
- Srinvas, Hari. Heritage and Conservation Strategies: Understanding the Justifications and Implications. GDRG Research Output E-100 <http://www.gdrc.org/heritage/heritage-strategies.html>
- Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe. European Commission, COM (2014) 477 final

*Image credit: Photo by Maria Jose Oyarzun on [Unsplash](#)*

#CulturalHeritage #CitizenEngagement #cooperation #PolicyLearning  
#InterregEurope



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