



## Good practices of volunteering for European cultural heritage

The project “Good practices of volunteering for European cultural heritage” represents the fruitful outcome of several decades of engagement and experience of European Heritage Volunteers in the field of volunteering for heritage, which condensed in the period of 2018 and 2019 on the occasion of the European Year of Cultural Heritage. During these two years the long-time engagement arrived to a crucial opportunity to showcase its potentials, to place the efforts of many actors involved from all over Europe into an amplified position, and to highlight the importance of volunteering as a tool contributing to the rescue, conservation and awareness raising for heritage.

Drawing from European Heritage Volunteers’ solid ground of experience the project successfully accomplished its objectives of connecting a wide range of existing activities in the field of volunteering for heritage under a joint banner of coordinated action while venturing this concept for the first time into regions where it had not been widespread or even did not exist before. It harnessed the inventiveness and engagement from a diverse pool of heritage professionals, entities and stakeholders into a synergic enterprise that achieved a combined effect of uniting criterions for the success of volunteering activities dedicated to heritage. In addition, it developed, monitored and evaluated quality standards that can serve as blueprint for further activities in the field in order to make it a sustainable process that goes far beyond the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

The umbrella project “Good practices of volunteering for European cultural heritage” consisted of numerous two-week individual volunteering projects and training courses which took place during the years 2018 and 2019 at various heritage sites in need of support or urgent intervention. They brought together stakeholders engaged in a particular heritage site with young heritage professionals from all over Europe and beyond, thus jointly contributing to the rescue, conservation and revitalisation of the particular sites. The stakeholders were heritage administrations, local authorities, universities, bigger non-governmental organisations, and smaller local initiatives. The umbrella project provided a bridge between these parties and the broader European echelon, by connecting the sites and stakeholders to a wider audience as part of a network of institutional cooperation and volunteering enlistment.

The activities offered relevant practical support for the particular heritage sites – in documentation, interpretation, conservation, restoration and other fields, all guided by technical instructors specialised on each respective area, who mostly stemmed from the cross-European network of professionals linked by European Heritage Volunteers. The umbrella project offered financial support and provided a sense of acknowledgement of the local initiatives which bolstered their standing for the continuation of their efforts. At the same time, it provided the optimal frame for the connection of theory and practice, for interdisciplinary exchange and for the transmission of traditional heritage-

related knowledge and skills to the younger generation.

The implementation of heritage volunteering activities presents often challenges, with the need to address multi-layered and complex issues at very local levels. If well designed, prepared, and implemented, heritage volunteering can be an appropriate means of intervention at heritage sites creating a common ground for different local actors to work together while hosting a group of young international heritage professionals.

The particular volunteering projects served as bridges between urban and rural environments, between similar sites in different latitudes, between different generations, and between heritage activists with different cultural backgrounds. They placed a spotlight on neglected heritage sites and their value; and the contribution of young heritage professionals from all over Europe and beyond mirrored the engagement of local heritage activists to the local population and to the administrations, thus supporting their efforts not only directly, but also indirectly on a mid-term basis.

The project “Good practices of volunteering for European cultural heritage” provided an ideal melting pot for the transboundary and interdisciplinary exchange of knowledge, ideas and perspectives that enrich the heritage sites, but equally important, it significantly enriched those young professionals who joined the experience and returned home with new skills and an enhanced worldview on architectural heritage.



## Field of activities

The project “Good practices of volunteering for European cultural heritage” involved activities dealing with a wide array of architectural heritage spread across all over Europe and contained within the expanded interpretation of what constitutes European cultural heritage. Accordingly, the selection of heritage sites put a special focus on locations outside of the European Union, contributing to raise awareness

on the view of wider Europe as a joint cultural space with a rich diversity of architectural traditions.

The particular volunteering projects were very diverse and ranged from urgent interventions and revitalisation of abandoned heritage sites, over conservation measures, to documentation, research and interpretation, while addressing issues in strict accordance

with the needs of the particular sites. In the same time, they illustrated the diversity and the various categories of architectural heritage targeting sites which are also among the wider public understood as heritage, such as churches or castles, over underappreciated heritage categories, such as industrial sites or structures from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to lesser-known locations with relevance for the local narratives.

## Methodology

All particular volunteering projects lasted two weeks, and gathered twelve to sixteen young heritage professionals between 22 and 33 years, with different heritage-related professional education and from as many different countries of origin as possible.

They were led by field-specific professionals – architects, archaeologists, restorers, craftsmen with heritage related education, and others. These instructors were provided either by the local project partner, by European Heritage Volunteers, or by another project partner from the European Heritage Volunteers network. Two group coordinators, usually one originating from the country where the project took place, and one from abroad, were responsible for the communication on the site and the intercultural aspects within the group.

The sites where the projects took place were selected first and foremost on the basis of the urgency for the presence of an international volunteering activity, where there were already local stakeholders who understood such

activity as an appropriate tool to raise awareness of their efforts. The foreseen works needed to provide an interesting educational input to stimulate the participants to perceive the relevance of their work. Additionally, the tasks had to be necessary, as well as manageable both quantitatively and technically within the given setting and timeframe. The works usually covered two different topics and were led by two instructors, what allowed for an alternation in the tasks and enhanced the learning experience.

The programme of every particular volunteering project was completed by theoretical education which went much beyond the provided hands-on skills, incorporating lectures and site visits to provide background knowledge about the particular heritage site – its history, heritage value and the challenges in its conservation and revitalisation. Participants were also taught about the applied methodology, the techniques and materials used, as well as other aspects of tangible and intangible heritage of the region. To raise awareness among the local population

and to stimulate the interdisciplinary exchange among the participants, a public presentation was held in which every participant presented a heritage site from his or her country comparable to that of the project according to a theme agreed upon beforehand with the project partner. The programme rounded out with a day-long excursion to other heritage sites in the region.

The umbrella project promoted the sustainable engagement in the implementation of heritage volunteering activities by setting the place for a continuous collaboration with the respective local and regional partners. The projects were set to take place on a yearly basis, as a recurrent activity on the same site each year with an identical or slightly modified topic, or as a yearly activity collaborating with the same partner within the same region. By pursuing this aim, the particular projects have in many cases become a stable hallmark of heritage-related local community activities, widening the perspectives of local actors and connecting their engagement with the broader European dimension.

## Examples of covered topics & implemented projects



### **Traditional wood-related techniques**

Wood-related building traditions · Kauppila Farm Museum Laitila · Finland

Wood is the most readily available construction material in the Nordic regions, so most Nordic architectural heritage is built of wood, motivating over the centuries the emergence of a large variety of related techniques. Unfortunately, this traditional know-

ledge is rapidly vanishing. The project offered the opportunity to learn various wood-related techniques and provided needed support to the open-air museum by raising awareness of the site while supporting the conservation of the historic edifices.



### **Traditional stone-related techniques**

Conservation of dry-stone walls · Belvedere Palace Park Weimar · Germany

Dry-stone walling is a traditional technique applied historically all over Europe. It is a work-intensive activity; this being a reason to the loss of the related skills. Dry-stone walls are often overlooked, however when they disappear, they become an obvious

missing element. During the project which focused on conserving a dry-stone wall in decay surrounding a Baroque garden the participants learned the technique under the guidance of a master mason specialised as “Restorer in Handicraft”.



### **Conservation & Restoration**

Conservation of Roman stone elements · Palmatis Basilica · Bulgaria

The ruins of Palmatis Basilica dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century are after recent excavations which had not been followed by conservation measures exposed to climate influences and thus undergoing rapid decay, which is why urgent intervention was needed

to conserve the site’s stone elements. Under the guidance of a stone conservator, the participants learned and applied in the most endangered area, around the altar, all steps of documentation, consolidation, refilling and stone conservation.



### **Documentation**

Mapping and documentation of industrial heritage · Ivanić-Grad · Croatia

Industrial heritage is often underappreciated, but it is a formative element to the narrative of Ivanić-Grad, where industry was, as in other cities, too, an essential part of the community. In recent times, a sudden de-industrialisation process brought

this story to a halt, however the sites remain. The project focused on documentation of the industrial heritage sites and the related stories, thus contributing to their valorisation and creating a first step for future conservation measures.



### **Research**

Digitalisation of documents and research · Casa Batlló Barcelona · Spain

Casa Batlló was recently restored using numerous historic documents as a base. However, the archives of Casa Batlló contain a documentary wealth which goes beyond the site itself. The digitalisation of these archives is crucial to avoid the risk

of loss and to create a base for future structured research work. The project focused on the digitalisation of written documents, drawings and photographs, initiating the first steps of related research thus contributing to future site-related storytelling.



## Target Groups

The project “Good practices of volunteering for European cultural heritage” aimed at two target groups, who each had the opportunity to benefit from the particular volunteering activities in distinct, but interconnected ways through their joint experiences gained during the implementation of the project.

On the one hand, the beneficiaries of the particular projects were the project partners – the local and regional actors and the communities interacting with the heritage site.

The umbrella project was built upon a European network of partners that connects the expertise of heritage professionals with the engagement of civil society activists. Its purpose was to raise awareness on the value of the sites and support the local advocates for their conservation and revitalisation. Heritage sites are very different, often a heritage site does not stand isolated; it is embedded in an urban or rural structure, often linked with the surrounding natural environment, and it is a part of a community with a particular social structure and economic needs, often with other priorities than heritage-related ones. The activities therefore had to be carried out with great effort, with comparably little support and involving highly interested and enthusiastic local individuals.

Through the European Heritage Volunteers concept, the umbrella project was able to create trend-setting experiences that provided a different outlook to local heritage in the context of its history, present use and potential future development. It

addressed key stakeholders, and the local community received the direct benefits. It provided a valuable momentum for the development of local up-to-date initiatives that could benefit future generations. In many cases it planted the seed for a new motivation to community involvement and local empowerment. In general, the result was an increased awareness of the importance of heritage sites, as well as inspiring the establishment of a framework for local participation.

On the other hand, the project also aimed at the participants as a target group, effectively addressing a gap in opportunities for young heritage professionals and enthusiasts who wish to contribute to the conservation of cultural heritage.

The participation in the volunteering projects offered a unique chance for many students of heritage-related fields and young heritage professionals to gain their first practical experience. They were provided with a fascinating opportunity to acquire new skills and knowledge in topics they enjoyed learning about; to see their objects of study come to life in places they had before only gained theoretical knowledge about.

The volunteering projects were for the participants a revealing window into the real world of heritage conservation and site management. At the same time, they provided an exceptional way to gain a different perspective of these sites which is otherwise not available to the regular visitor. They were able to receive an immersive experience into a particular site

and its stories behind closed doors. These experiences allowed them to forge connections with the communities interacting with the heritage sites, while understanding from an insider’s perspective the value of these sites.

Interdisciplinary collaboration was at the core of the project’s objectives and aims, given that different levels of involvement on the side of partners, stakeholders, instructors and participants provided the means to ensure the success for its implementation. They all joined to work and apply their different professional and cultural perspectives to ensure the implementation of the particular volunteering activities. As a result, the diversity of perspectives and professional backgrounds which coincided on each volunteering project provided a fertile space for learning and exchange.

In addition to sharing a common interest on a project topic, and exchanging ideas about it, there was also a strong human component that played an important role in defining the experiences for the participants. As it was often the case, to complete the objectives set out for the particular volunteering projects, the groups had to rely on each other to maximise their capabilities and work as a team. This led eventually to the forging of lasting friendships that have often transcended to the professional field, thus organically developing into a network of professionals that is now spread across borders and different specialisations. This last result has been one of the proudest accomplishments of the project.



## Dissemination

The project “Good practices of volunteering for European cultural heritage” implemented in total 62 volunteering projects and training courses in 23 countries all over Europe which saw the participation of almost 800 participants from 52 countries worldwide.

The umbrella project brought together the cooperation of 28 institutions, organisations and initiatives. Furthermore, the implementation of the particular projects had the assistance of additional 66 partners on local and regional levels, in many cases joining for the first time this kind of initiative while linking to a broader network.

The implementation of the umbrella project was accompanied by various preparation, monitoring and evaluation meetings, workshops and seminars that included the participation of actors and heritage practitioners from almost 30 different nationalities.

The exchange of good practices developed, implemented and evaluated during the project, as well as the resulting synergies created, were further concretised by two conferences. These events allowed presenting the gained experiences towards heritage practitioners beyond the Euro-

pean Heritage Volunteers network. The first conference took place in 2018 in Leipzig/Germany, within the framework of “denkmal”, Europe’s leading trade fair for conservation, restoration and old buildings renovation. The second one was held in 2019 in Kraków/Poland in cooperation with the Polish National Heritage Institute. Both conferences served as a forum that welcomed heritage professionals, heritage administrations, non-governmental organisations and other civil society initiatives of the heritage sector to exchange with members of the European Heritage Volunteers network, having as an outcome the commitment to undertake further steps to initiate, develop and strengthen heritage-related volunteering initiatives in regions and at heritage sites where they are so far rare or even do not exist.

Relevant examples for the impact stemming from this process are Albania and Kosovo – countries where civil society engagement for heritage is not widely spread yet. In Albania the heritage volunteering projects initiated in 2018 and 2019 have led to continuity in what are now yearly projects in 2020 and 2021, engaging with various categories of endangered heritage sites and to the qualitative elevation of heritage volunteering

projects into heritage training courses additionally providing more extensive theoretical knowledge. In Kosovo the European Heritage Volunteers network plays now an important role in the development of heritage volunteering activities aiming to raise awareness for cultural heritage through a close collaboration with the Kosovo Council for Cultural Heritage.

The results of the project “Good practices of volunteering for European cultural heritage” were additionally disseminated in an exhibition illustrating its concept as well as showcasing eighteen selected projects in thirteen countries, which has been presented in 2019 and 2020 in fourteen different venues in six countries. This exhibition will continue to be installed on more locations as soon as the situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic will allow.

Furthermore, an extensive summary of the activities and outcomes to the project was assembled in a 176-page long publication – accessible following [this link](#) – containing articles about the applied methodology, examples of projects and experiences of project partners, local activists, technical instructors and participants with a total of 45 contributions of 48 authors from 23 different countries.

