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## Challenges for Creating Visibility of European Cultural Heritage A Case Study of the European Heritage Label

### Abstract

The European Heritage Label (EHL) is a recent flagship heritage action of the European Union and focuses on the European dimension of Europe's history and heritage as part of the Union's cultural policy. One of the central concerns of the EU's cultural policy is to generate a sense of belonging and identity among European citizens. While efficient promotion of the visibility of the EHL among European audiences could be expected corresponding to the political objectives, the EHL continues to struggle with broader public recognition. Based on fieldwork findings, the article discusses the visibility of the EHL action as a network of heritage sites that challenges national narratives by promoting a European dimension of heritage. The article identifies diverse shortcomings in creating public visibility, such as the missed opportunity of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 for creating useful synergies. The findings suggest that the EHL has potential to initiate public debate of what is European heritage, which may result in enhancing social cohesion in Europe. However, the label would benefit from the development of a joint strategy for improving the visibility of the EHL network at the local, national and European levels.

Keywords: European cultural heritage, visibility, European Heritage Label, European Year of Cultural Heritage

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## Introduction

The Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Values of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention) in 2005 introduced a new understanding of the purpose of cultural heritage—in terms of its meanings and uses and the values it represents for people—that promotes a broader understanding of heritage and its relationship to communities and civic society. The Faro Convention speaks of a 'common heritage of Europe' as the primary source for democratic engagement and a facilitator of unity, belonging and identity based on a principle of shared responsibility and historically rooted social values and political ideals through active participation (Faro Convention 2005). Heritage is a value-laden concept and the diversity of heritage regimes and politics allude to complex socio-political and economic interests as part of promoting a 'reified culture' in the national context (Kuutma 2013, 32). The strategic use of heritage production processes, in particular in the context of top-down approaches and their consequences for the production, preservation and memory of intangible cultural heritage, has been widely explored and critically discussed within the fields of ethnology and cultural anthropology (e.g. Bendix 2009; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006; Smith 2006).

The concept of heritage has also been central to the EU cultural and integration policies since the late 1970s (see Lähdesmäki, Kaasik-Krogerus & Mäkinen, 2019; Peckham 2003). One of the central concerns of the EU politics is to influence positively the public perception of the EU and to add value to belonging to Europe by communicating a sense of a 'shared community of values' that may strengthen cultural identity and a sense of belonging to Europe among European citizens (Lähdesmäki 2014, 409). The strategic use of heritage impacts various EU heritage initiatives, such as the European Heritage Days, the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage or the European Heritage Label (EHL), which try to communicate specific values and positions to the wider European public (see Sassatelli 2009; Lähdesmäki 2014; Niklasson 2017).

Figure 1. The European Heritage Label Plaque at Robert Schuman House, France (Photo: EUROHERIT)



The EHL is a recent EU flagship heritage initiative that developed in 2006 from an intergovernmental initiative of European member states and was transformed in 2011 into an EU heritage action with updated criteria. The label currently counts 38 awarded heritage sites and 24 participating EU member states, with the exception of Ireland, the UK, Sweden and Finland (see Table 1, List of EHL heritage sites). Recently, the EHL has become relevant in the Finnish context after the Minister of Education, Culture and Sport, Sam-

Krapina Neanderthal Site, Croatia (2015)	Dohány Street Synagogue Complex, Budapest, Hungary (2017)
The Heart of Ancient Athens, Greece (2014)	<b>Mundaneum, Mons, Belgium (2015)</b>
<b>Archaeological Park Carnuntum, Austria (2013)</b>	Peace Palace, The Hague, The Netherlands (2013)
Abbey of Cluny, France (2014)	Javorca Church and its Cultural Landscape, Tolmin, Slovenia (2017)
Olomouc Premyslid Castle and Archdiocesan Museum, Czech Republic (2015)	Residencia de Estudiantes, Madrid, Spain (2014)
Archive of the Crown of Aragon, Barcelona, Spain (2014)	World War I Eastern Front Cemetery No 123, Łużna-Pustki, Poland (2015)
Leipzig's Musical Heritage Sites, Germany (2017)	Kaunas of 1919-1940, Lithuania (2014)
<b>Great Guild Hall, Tallinn, Estonia (2013)</b>	<b>Camp Westerbork, The Netherlands (2013)</b>
<b>Sagres Promontory, Portugal (2015)</b>	Former Natzweiler concentration camp and its satellite camps, Alsace-Moselle, Haut Rhin / France - and Baden-Württemberg, Hessen, Rhineland-Palatinate / Germany (2017)
General Library of the University of Coimbra, Portugal (2014)	Franja Partisan Hospital, Slovenia (2014)
The Imperial Palace, Vienna, Austria (2015)	Sighet Memorial, Sighet, Romania (2017)
Union of Lublin, Poland (2014)	Bois du Cazier, Marcinelle, Belgium (2017)
Münster and Osnabrück – Sites of the Peace of Westphalia, Germany (2014)	<b>European District of Strasbourg, France (2015)</b>
The May 3, 1791 Constitution, Warsaw, Poland (2014)	<b>Museo Casa Alcide De Gaspari, Pieve, Tesino, Italy (2014)</b>
The Historic Ensemble of the University of Tartu, Estonia (2015)	<b>Robert Schuman's House, Scy-Chazelles, France (2014)</b>
<b>Hambach Castle, Germany (2014)</b>	<b>The Historical Gdańsk Shipyard, Poland (2014)</b>
Fort Cadine, Trento, Italy (2017)	Pan-European Picnic Memorial Park, Sopron, Hungary (2014)
Charter of Law of Abolition of the Death Penalty, Lisbon, Portugal (2014)	Village of Schengen, Schengen, Luxembourg (2017)
<b>Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest, Hungary (2015)</b>	Maastricht Treaty, Maastricht, The Netherlands (2017)

Table 1. List of EHL heritage sites (2018) in historical order and with year of designation. The researched sites are in bold.

po Terho, officially announced Finland's participation in the EHL during the closing event of the European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH) in Finland on 28 November 2018. The National Heritage Agency hosted preparatory workshops for core stakeholders in 2019 in order to access interest among heritage sites and discuss possible strategies of implementing the label.

The EHL contributes to a unifying European narrative of belonging through the explicit claim to build upon the concept of a 'shared', but not a homogenous, 'European cultural heritage' (Niklasson 2017). It recognises cultural monuments, cultural landscapes, memorials and intangible heritage associated with a place that symbolise European integration, common European values, and the history and culture of the EU. The EHL sites are not awarded for their aesthetics or architectural quality but according to their symbolic European value that 'bring[s] to life the European narrative and the history behind it' (EHL website; see Lähdesmäki 2014). As a result, the designated heritage sites represent a broad variety of events, geographical areas and historical periods that ranges from prehistory to late 20th century and includes one transnational site, the Former Natzweiler concentration camp and its satellite camps on both sides of the Rhine. In the logics of the EU heritage politics, the EHL sites convey the notion that the EU integration is building upon a continuity of diverse historical processes and phenomena that link to core values of the EU's narrative (e.g. peace, human rights, transnational cooperation, free access to knowledge) as pillars of Europe's democracy and fundamental rights (see EC 2016, 15). The emphasis on the European dimension of heritage in the process of appropriating heritage sites helps to differentiate and position the EHL as a label with a specific mission to 'improve the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of European peoples' as key elements of their membership in the Union (see EP 2011).

The EHL operates on the assumption that conservation, transmission and public awareness of cultural heritage for future generations depends on the ability to reach a large number of citizens and get them to perceive, understand and appreciate Europe's cultural heritage as a value and quality. The decision implementing the action (EP 2011) anticipates the development of the EHL into a high-quality label, which can supplement and compete on equal terms with known cultural heritage initiatives, such as the UNESCO World Heritage List, the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the Council of Europe's European Cultural Routes.

The designation of specific heritage sites as 'European heritage' connects to concrete expectations of increasing the visibility of the EHL action for raising the profile and attractiveness of EHL sites as tourist destinations. At the same time, the visibility of the label is supposed to add credibility and value

to the quality of the EHL mission and its core objectives by increasing public awareness of the transnational European dimension of cultural heritage, which in turn is expected to emotionally affect people in the way they relate to Europe and the EU. While sustainable tourism and branding are important issues for discussing the EHL, the article addresses the question of visibility in a broader context. Visibility is understood as a key issue in the discursive meaning-making process of a common heritage and in creating a sense of communality and belonging among EU citizens (Lähdesmäki 2014). The article explores the question: How efficient is the present communication strategy for raising public visibility of the EHL action and its goal of promoting European cultural heritage as a means of establishing a political and cultural community?

The analysis is informed by critical heritage studies, which understand heritage as a social, discursive and performative construction that uses the past with the aim of influencing the future. Consequently, heritage is seen as a dynamic, political process set in the present that may be both a source and a result of social conflict (Harrison 2013; Macdonald 2013; Lähdesmäki 2014; Kisić 2017). Furthermore, the article follows Delanty's (2017) understanding of Europe as a networked space and Europe's cultural heritage as the product of entangled memories and identities.

The article first explores the idea of 'shared responsibility' for establishing the EHL and raising the brand visibility to strengthen public identification with Europe's common heritage. Next, the article examines the (in)visibility of the EHL action in relation to diverse processes of decision-making, communication and networking and hereby identifies possible shortcoming that play a role in raising awareness among Europeans. It then discusses the example of the EYCH 2018 and the missed opportunities of promoting a broader public debate of what Europe's shared cultural heritage is. While the article examines diverse processes related to the visibility of the EHL as well as the label's promotion during the EYCH 2018, it does not intend to compare how successfully each individual EHL site has been in developing a strategy that highlights the 'European dimension' of its site. The article concludes with a discussion on the shortcoming and benefits of the EHL action's visibility for challenging national narratives and mitigating societal polarisation.

## **Data and Methods**

The article seeks to explore the visibility and public reception of the EHL based on the combined analysis of fieldwork data and documents. In the framework of a broader research project (EUROHERIT) that explores EU heritage initiatives as well as EU heritage and identity politics, fieldwork was conducted at eleven EHL sites between August 2017 and March 2018. The sites include

Carnuntum Archaeological Park (Austria), Mundaneum (archive and exhibition site, Belgium), Great Guild Hall (Estonia), European District of Strasbourg (France), Robert Schuman House (France), Hambach Castle (Germany), Ferenc Liszt Academy and Museum (Hungary), Alcide De Gasperi House Museum (Italy), The Historical Gdańsk Shipyard (Poland), Sagres Promontory (Portugal) and Camp Westerbork (Netherlands). The sites differ regarding their size and available space of exhibition, number of staff, financial resources and annual visitor numbers.

The article draws on the project's rich ethnographic data that include qualitative interviews with key EU heritage officials for the EHL and members of the selection panel appointed by the EU (N = 7) as well as heritage practitioners (N = 35) and visitors (N = 272) to the selected EHL sites. As part of the project, an online survey was conducted among the EHL national coordinators of the selected countries who were asked to elaborate on the application procedures at the national level. All interviews and responses have been transcribed, and if necessary translated into English, followed by a double-review, in which two translators and one researcher checked each transcribed and translated interview.

The EUROHERIT research team consists of five researchers, including the author, and brings together a broad range of backgrounds in social sciences and humanities as well as several nationalities and languages. The fieldwork was divided among the team members and each site was visited by one researcher. In addition, native-speaking research assistants were employed at a few sites. Due to the project's scale, research requires collaborative approaches in terms of conducting the fieldwork in multiple locales and co-producing knowledge at manifold levels. At the core of this collective knowledge production is a dynamic process that seeks to understand the positions of each individual researcher as well as the positional relationships within the team, which influences our knowledge production in terms of individual ethnographers and as a collective team (for more detailed information, see Turunen, Čeginskas, Kaasik-Krogerus, Lähdesmäki & Mäkinen, forthcoming and Lähdesmäki, Čeginskas, Mäkinen, Kaasik-Krogerus & Turunen forthcoming).

The article primarily draws on the interviews with the heritage practitioners, the EU policy officers and members of the selection panel as well as on the survey results to analyse the transparency, visibility and communication of and within the EHL action. Issues of research ethics play an important role in ethnographic research as the findings can have potential and far-reaching implications for the interviewees. The coded references E 1-7 indicate the policy officers and members of the selection panel at EU level, while the codes P1-37 refer to the interviewed heritage practitioners at the selected eleven



heritage sites. The coding neither follows the alphabetical order of the heritage sites nor indicates the work position of the interviewed practitioners or the alphabetical order of their names. The use of this coding system aims to ensure confidentiality and anonymity by not disclosing the position, department, gender, age, educational background or precise location of the interview partners, which could facilitate their identification by outsiders, direct colleagues or cooperation partners.

In addition, the article explores policy documents that focus on the preparation, launch and implementation phases of the EHL action, official Panel Reports and Monitoring Reports of the EHL published by the European Commission and the official website of the EHL. Furthermore, it examines websites and recent policy documents connected with the decision to implement the European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH) 2018. To assess the public visibility and reception of the label, the article also draws on interviews conducted with the visitors of the heritage sites and informal discussions with various stakeholders, such as the staff of tourist information offices, representatives of regional authorities or other actors in the local vicinity of the eleven EHL sites. The interview questions concerned the subjects' familiarity with the EHL action, its objective, logo and slogan.

In preparation of the qualitative and discursive analysis of the data, the interviews, policy documents, survey results and other available documentation and notes were read repeatedly. As a next step, the data was analysed with an emphasis on qualitative content, language use and discursive meaning making. This approach made it possible to gain contextual understanding of the procedures and at the same time provided insights in the assessment of visibility and communication structures of the EHL action by the relevant actors themselves.

### **'Shared responsibility' for establishing the EHL**

The European Commission and the member states participating in the action share responsibility for the selection and monitoring of EHL awarded sites. First, a national panel of experts pre-selects the applications and then a European panel of independent experts (European Panel) makes the final selection. Each site awarded the EHL is monitored on a regular basis by the member state on which respective territory it is located and by the European Panel to ensure that it continues to meet the criteria of the Label and respects the project and work plan submitted in its application (interview with E3). The task of the EC is to ensure coordination between the member states and the European Panel and guarantee the overall coherence and quality of the action. The European Commission allocated 650, 000 Euro for the initial

implementation of the EHL during the period from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2013 (EP 2011).

The nature of the EHL action and its proclaimed objective to raise the appreciation of shared European values and benefits among European citizens and particularly young people (EP 2011, Art. 5; EC 2017, 7–8) are such that it necessitates public visibility. The decision of the European Parliament and Council implementing the EHL action in 2011 recognised the importance of cultural tourism for contributing to the economic and sustainable development and attractiveness of regions and expressed the intention of creating the EHL as an exclusive, high-quality label in accordance with the Union's political and economic objectives (EP 2011). Diverse heritage experts at local and European levels shared this expectation and viewed the introduction of the EHL as an exclusive marker of distinction among the 'inflationary' rise of UNESCO heritage sites in the past years (interviews with E7, E3, P8, P1). As one of them argued, 'at the moment everything is UNESCO heritage. It has no value anymore' (P8).

In its most recent report (EC 2017), the European Panel suggested the extension of the label across the EU and its surrounding states and inclusion of 100 heritage sites with a distinct European dimension by 2030. This speaks of a strong interest in strengthening the label as a significant brand but it equally poses a challenge to ensure the value and quality of the EHL action through processes of economic valuation and processes of valorization (see Beeton & Benfield 2002; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006; Macdonald 2013; Hassan & Rahman 2015). However, the interrelation of heritage and commodification of cultural resources is also critically viewed at EU level, as one of the interviewees (E3) notes,

cultural heritage is also there for the people, in the first place [...]. And in fact all this commodification, using cultural heritage for something else instead of putting people at the core, is maybe not a good thing.

According to interviewees at the EU level, each EHL site acts as a 'gateway to discover the European history' (E3) or as an 'ambassador for the scheme' that facilitates 'people [to] grasp what is the scheme' (E7). One EU official (E7) speaks against the notion of separate heritage categories,

I don't see categories like 'this is European cultural heritage, this is national, this is regional'. I don't see it as something separate that would deserve to be in separate groups.



Rather, the emphasis on the 'European dimension' of heritage stresses its transnational quality and entanglements at various levels and promotes the understanding that heritage does not belong to a specific group of people where it is located but to European citizens as a whole (see Macdonald 2013). From a legal point of view, both the EU and the member states share an obligation and responsibility to preserve, protect and promote Europe's shared heritage, as the same EU official notes (E7).

The EC and the EHL heritage sites officially share responsibility for enhancing the label's visibility among European audiences (EP 2011, Art. 17; EC 2011). The Commission is in charge of the communication strategy for promoting visibility of the EHL at the EU level and for coordinating the network activities between the EHL heritage sites. For instance, it is responsible for communicating relevant information concerning the EHL, maintaining an official website of the EHL action and supporting the sites' communication activities by creating specific brandings principles (EP 2011; EC 2011; EHL website). The EHL sites in the meantime are explicitly expected to promote actively the label's public visibility and raise their profile in particular among young people by using new digital technologies. They are also responsible for implementing educative projects and activities as well as by searching for synergies with other EHL sites and European initiatives, for instance through networking (EC 2011; see also interviews with E7, E3). The application procedure for the label and the subsequent monitoring of the awarded EHL sites pays specific attention to their operational capacity to carry out activities related to the site's management, protection, quality, public access, promotional capacity and multilingual communication of its European significance to a broad public (EC 2011; EC 2016).

Various studies show that brand awareness, familiarity and positive associations with a label are of strategic importance in the context of global competition and sustainability and may increase the willingness of the tourist to visit a specific site (King & Halpenny 2014; Poria, Reichel & Cohen 2011; Dewar, du Cros & Li 2012). The status of a label can have benefits in promoting and positioning the awarded heritage sites and play a role in signalling a certain level of quality of the designation among tourists (see Patuelli, Mussoni & Candela 2013; Hassan & Rahman 2015; Caust & Vecco 2017). This suggests an interrelation between different aspects such as tourist perception and reality, objects and their representation, national identity and cultural and social cohesion and economic development and sustainability (Landorf 2009; King & Halpenny 2014; Barthel-Bouchier 2016).

While the official EHL documents emphasise the importance of developing a 'coherent and comprehensive communication strategy highlighting the

European significance of the site' (EP 2011; EC 2011), it only vaguely mentions how to increase awareness of European cultural heritage among European citizens in practice. For instance, the Impact Assessment Working Document (COM 2010, 27) argues that the 'most direct effects of the Label will be on the sites themselves and then on individual citizens'. It explains further that the 'primary effects should be on raising the European dimension and the profile of the sites, and on increasing access, especially for young people', which only then will result in seeing 'benefits for individuals in terms of increased interest in and understanding of European heritage, and Europe's cultural diversity' (COM 2010, 27). As a result, the development of a strategy for increasing visibility and awareness of a 'European heritage' is primarily delegated to the responsibility of the EHL sites – although the promotion of such a 'common' European heritage represents one of the EU's core policy objectives for strengthening the legitimacy and acceptance of the EU as a political and cultural community.

### **The (in-)visibility of the EHL**

The increasing number of EHL-awarded sites over the last years speaks of a growing interest in the label among Europe's heritage sites and the participating EU member states. In numerous interviews conducted with experts both at the European level and at EHL sites, most interviewees showed a comprehension for the fact that the EHL was not yet widely known. They pleaded for time to develop greater familiarity of the cultural initiative and awareness of the EHL among European audiences. The following subsections briefly explore the current EHL communication strategy in relation to its objectives of generating and increasing broader public visibility.

### **Transparency**

In comparison with other heritage actions and initiatives, the EHL selection and application processes lack transparency. For instance, in the case of the European Capital of Culture, the European Commission annually designates candidate cities based on their bid books, and the cities commonly publish them as booklets that are available online or in local cultural offices and libraries (Lähdesmäki 2014). Similarly, the UNESCO World Heritage List or the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity ensures public online access to their nomination forms. Acquiring open access to the application and selection processes of the EHL sites is not only a problem for academic researchers—as it became obvious during the fieldwork. It also poses a difficulty for the heritage professionals and managers who would like to refer to previous application material when planning and

preparing their own applications (interviews P23; P6; P31). The EHL reports show that the panel is aware of this problem and has made diverse suggestions for improving the application process by pointing out various lacks in the applications of the candidate sites, such as poor quality or inadequate applications (EC 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017). On the other hand, while the EHL professionals generally welcomed the recent improvements to facilitate the application process, some practitioners spoke against making the applications transparent during ongoing application processes, as the heritage sites were competitors for the EHL award and needed to show their specific eligibility for the label (interviews P21; P25). Transparency matters as a form of visibility management, which results from efforts to make people, objects and processes knowable and governable (see Flyverbom 2016). This implies a shift from viewing transparency solely in terms of disclosing information about structures and processes to considering the wider social processes and dynamics at work that can promote confidence in the quality of the EHL action and its core subjects.

### **Practical operation at EHL sites**

It became obvious that the interviewed professionals at local EHL sites are motivated and committed to the EHL objectives. However, the tasks of promoting visibility and awareness of the label's designation at large to a broader audience by networking and planning joint activities come on top of their everyday operational activities of managing the respective sites and strengthening their general competitiveness as sustainable tourist destinations at the local and regional levels. The fieldwork revealed that a lack of human resources, time and financial resources are crucial factors that affect the sites' communication with the audience and impede their efforts to promote joint EHL events (P15; P31). For instance, one practitioner pointed out that the challenge was not 'to translate the text' in different languages but having 'time and money' (P15). The lack of staff and funding is a problem particularly in audience engagement at smaller EHL sites, such as the European District, the Robert Schuman House, the Alcide de Gaspari House Museum, or Ferenc Liszt Academy and Museum, which often struggle to offer guided tours in multiple languages and provide multilingual print material.

The EU policy rhetoric understands multilingualism as a substantial cornerstone of the EU's cultural policy that highlights cultural diversity as a core value of the union and aims to foster unity by respecting the Union's manifold diversity (Nic Craith 2012; Delanty & Rumford 2005, 51; Lähdesmäki 2014; European Charter, Art. 22; Treaty on European Union, Art. 3). The fieldwork highlights similarities in establishing criteria but differences in how each

heritage site handles the question of which languages to include in their exhibitions and on their websites. The EHL heritage sites commonly consider providing information in multiple languages *in situ* and online as an asset in global competition and of strategic interest for increasing the attractiveness of cultural tourism, and the European Panel regularly monitors and comments on their operational capacity to provide the largest possible access in multiple languages (EC 2013-2017; EP 2011). Some heritage sites manage better with the challenges of multilingualism in their operational practice and for instance include Braille on their signposts for the visually impaired, offer guided tours in plain language or make information available on their websites in a broad selection of European and non-European languages. However, multilingualism can remain an issue and some visitors voiced the feeling of being left out of the exhibition, as one Italian visitor of Camp Westerbork, who pointed out that the interactive activities were 'mainly for Dutch speakers' and 'very few things in English' (VS3/31).

Most sites face the same difficulty of being limited by both the actual space for designing a multilingual exhibition and a desire not to overload the exhibitions with too much text in different languages. Several EHL practitioners therefore expressed an increased interest in employing digital means at their sites, such as multilingual touch screens, tablets and other interactive tools, as in their experience visitors were often no longer interested in using audio guides during the visit (e.g. interviews P15; P23; P33). One practitioner argued that it was important to 'have something more interactive and dynamic. Because the visitors of today want to have more information in less time' (P33). The practices of the House of European History and the Parliamentarium, both Brussels, could serve as an ideal example for the EHL action by providing visitors with an audio-video device set in one of the 24 official EU languages, but the EHL sites lack financial resources for developing and implementing multilingual and digitalised audience engagement.

### **Promotional tools**

While the Commission and the EHL heritage sites share the responsibility of promoting the visibility of the label among European audiences, the fieldwork data indicate unclear brand management of the label and a lack of a coherent strategy at the national and European levels. In her analysis of EU cultural initiatives, Lähdesmäki argued that the ideological core of EU politics is to mingle the top-down and bottom-up dynamics between the EU and local agents to produce self-creating and self-maintaining communality, coherency and cultural integration in the EU (Lähdesmäki 2014). The same logic applies to the EHL action and provides the EHL sites with an active role, based on the

belief that if the heritage sites continue advertising their sites and events, public familiarity with the label at large will automatically increase. However, this automation of creating visibility to promote European cultural heritage only through the EHL sites can be questioned. The EHL sites are very diverse and represent different aspects of Europe's past, which makes it difficult to initiate projects for presenting a 'European' cultural heritage and for finding a common ground of engaging in current political and social debates, as some interviewed heritage practitioners pointed out (interviews P24; P8; P31; P33).

As part of its communication strategy, the European Commission is responsible for creating a specific logo for the EHL action, providing a toolkit of promotional material in multiple languages for the EHL sites, and maintaining an official website (EP 2011; EC 2011). Many visited heritage sites prominently display the EHL logo and plaque in the language of the country at the entrance and often provide free promotional material provided by the EC, such as postcards of the EHL action. The fieldwork shows that the heritage sites often refer to the EHL award as a means of advertising their respective sites at predominantly local and regional levels to increase their attraction as an interesting tourist destination. However, site managers could not establish a correlation between the number of visitors and the designation of the label to their sites, questioning the impact of the label on visitor behaviour (P8; P19; P30; P23; P1). In addition, fieldwork confirms a very poor public awareness of the EHL and familiarity with its logo. With a few exceptions, visitors were not aware of the label or had noticed the plaque. While the logo design (see Figure 1) enabled visitors to establish a connection between the EHL and the EU based on the display of the EU flag, the majority of visitors did not recognise the EHL logo and confused the label with other, more familiar cultural initiatives, such as the UNESCO Heritage List.

The EHL action at large does not benefit of the sites' promotional activities and the overall coverage and knowledge of the EHL and its designated sites in national, regional and local media is still low in the member states (see for similar previous findings: Kaiser 2014, 37). For instance, the Creative Europe Desks in the EU member states as well as regional authorities and local tourist information centres in the immediate surroundings of the EHL sites very often lack basic knowledge about the label and are unable to provide information about it and the designation of the sites. The EHL site managers are aware of the fact but many argue that it would require a different approach to increase awareness of the EHL in terms of brand equity and familiarity, and they cannot do more than provide promotional material on their respective sites.

In this context, the EHL website of the European Commission is not helpful as a source of information to the average EU citizen or particularly attrac-

tive to the designated principal group of young people. Although it serves as a central platform and provides brief information about the label and the respective EHL sites, it is neither frequently updated nor providing an interactive map with an overview of the geographical location of the sites as a means of visualising the EHL action, not in terms of isolated sites but connected to a larger network. Many EHL sites commented on the fact that they have no influence on the content of the official EHL website (e.g. P33; P22; P34; P19). This is an important issue for some sites in particular that lack the possibility of having a personally created website where they could update information and use it to interact with visitors and thereby spread information about their site and its specific 'European' value. As one practitioner of one of the sites is questioned explained, 'we can just give some quite basic information, [...] we cannot explain as we want, and it's a handicap for us' (P33).

### **Networking**

The Commission encourages the different actors participating in the EHL to develop cooperation and projects promoting the sites' European significance through the network and as a means of improving the visibility of the label (EP 2011). One EU official (E7) was optimistic about the cooperation between EHL sites in form of bilateral projects by spotting the 'brother and sister' among the EHL sites, for instance based on being 'both archive centres, or because they are working on the same topics'. Diverse interviewed practitioners also pointed out that they find means to interact and form new relationships and possibilities of cooperation between the EHL sites but this does not solve the general question of creating public visibility of the label.

The EC organises an annual conference for EHL site managers and national coordinators and additionally an award ceremony for newly awarded sites in an attempt to ensure communication between the different actors participating in the label. The fieldwork revealed that the European Panel and site professionals show a genuine affection and concern for the development of the EHL. One Panel member described the EHL as a 'baby' (E3)—but in the words of a site manager: it is not enough to give birth to a baby; it needs guidance and support in taking its first steps until it can run on its own (P22). While the managers and professionals of the EHL sites stress the benefits of personal and direct exchanges at the annual conferences as part of the EHL network, many EHL sites stated that the 'European dimension' was a prerequisite and an inherent part of their narratives already before applying for the EHL (P21; P26; P32; P4; P18). What is needed instead is greater awareness of the label logo and designation as such, as outlined before. The annual face-to-face meetings of the heritage professionals at the EHL sites has resulted

in projects and activities of cooperation between individual sites, but only as part of their everyday operational and practical tasks and not in terms of promoting the EHL network at large (P31; P15; P17).

The interviewed heritage professionals and managers stressed the problem of time investment and the assignment of staff to organise and coordinate specific EHL activities, and some site practitioners argued that there is currently no efficient EHL network for promoting the visibility of the label as a complex of various sites (P8; P33; P31; P23; P15). As one practitioner noted,

we would like to cooperate, but as it is, [...], [we have] difficulties to find time and money to do projects together [...] if I had people, maybe a little bit of money, [...] I could organise a meeting like three times a year. But I cannot just do it on top of my job. (P15)

The EHL sites prepared a joint application seeking support from the European Commission for developing their network, establishing a coordinating office for common EHL activities and promoting the European Heritage Label during the EYCH. However, this application was rejected in 2017, which had a strongly discouraging effect on many site practitioners and managers (P15; P31; P8; P23; P22). As one of them (P8) explained:

It's frustrating, because on the one hand you have to fulfil guidelines and you have regulations and criteria and the monitoring process and quality and co-operation, and then if you try to implement the project that exactly focuses on this, on these criteria, it's not granted.

The fieldwork findings show that neither national nor European levels provide precise guidance or assistance in how to develop the networking structures of the EHL sites (E1-7; survey; P23; P15; P31; P8). The EHL sites are left alone in charge of developing and managing the EHL network, which shows that there is no long-term, coherent understanding of how the EHL should be further implemented and how the network as well as the communication strategy within the action and towards the broader public should be advanced. One practitioner (P8) refers to the EHL as a 'nice vision' but cautions that,

every vision is, in the everyday work, very difficult to implement because [...] every site has its own challenges for everyday work. [...] So, if you want to bring a vision to life, you need money at the end of the day.



While the Panel acknowledges the problem of funding for development of the network (EC 2013–2017), it does not thematise the other practical issues that contribute to the inefficiency of current promotion and coordination of the label.

### **Role of the national coordinator**

In its reports, the European Panel emphasises that the input and network of EHL national coordinators are crucial for the success of the EHL action (EC 2013, EC 2015). However, the fieldwork suggests there is confusion about the role and tasks of the national coordinator at the site level, which affects the public visibility of the EHL action. Cooperation among EHL national coordinators seems to be limited to an annual meeting, and the roles and practices of the national coordinator and contact points differ between the member states participating in the EHL (survey). The visited EHL sites referred to efforts to develop and maintain good contacts to local and regional stakeholders in tourism, education, culture, environmental planning and civil society as part of the communication strategy during the interviews. However, close interaction between the sites and the national coordination offices seems to depend strongly on the ability, personality and interest of the respective national coordinators, as some practitioners noted. For example, a few sites have regular exchanges with their national coordinators and receive assistance, while other sites feel left alone in issues of funding, cooperation and branding. As a result, the EHL sites have unequal access to support on the national level.

On several occasions site practitioners spoke of limited coordination with the national coordination points to share the responsibility of raising more attention for the EHL from national and European decision makers and the audience alike or to communicate to the public about the sites and the label, for example in conjuncture with major events (P31; P23; P20; P15; P24; P21). For instance, the EHL sites prepared the earlier mentioned joint application for common EHL activities and projects without receiving any substantial guidance from the national coordinators during this process. As one practitioner (P8) critically remarked,

at the moment, the communication, the co-operation with the national authority is, yeah, limited to the monitoring process. The co-operation with the European Commission is limited to the annual networking conference. But besides that, it's difficult.

This was partly confirmed by the national coordinators participating in the survey, who stressed the benefits of participating in the EHL to increase the

label's familiarity and its audience appeal by developing better funding opportunities and networking. However, at the same time they spoke of 'sporadic' contacts with the EHL sites and limited cooperation with other national coordinators (survey). Nevertheless, the European Panel's suggestion of extending the label to include 100 sites by 2030 (EC 2017) requires an effective communication and promotion strategy that includes both EU and national institutions and the EHL sites themselves.

### **Missed opportunities of promoting a public debate: the case of the EYCH 2018**

During fieldwork, several EHL professionals and a member of the European Panel referred to the EYCH 2018 as an opportunity to increase visibility of the EHL as a network that explicitly promotes a European dimension of cultural heritage among European citizens and the local, national and international media. The EHL and EYCH share similar objectives and approaches and offer the possibility to complement one another for the promotion of European cultural heritage.

In their decision, the European Parliament and Council promote the EYCH as a platform for strengthening 'European' values and supporting the development of a sense of cohesion and belonging to 'a common European space' among (young) European citizens (EP 2017). The EYCH aims to encourage the appreciation of 'Europe's rich cultural heritage' as a shared resource through intercultural dialogue and cooperation, educational activities and greater public-awareness programmes for raising awareness of Europe's shared history and values. Stakeholders in the sectors of public governance, cultural heritage, civil society and private actors share responsibility for raising awareness of the value of cultural heritage and facilitating engagement with European citizens across Europe (EP 2017). Similarly to the EHL, the responsibility for organising participation in the EYCH lies with the member states and their appointed national coordinators (EP 2017, Art. 4), and regular meetings of EYCH national coordinators at the European level and with various national, regional and local administrations and organisations are expected to result in the creation of synergies between various initiatives. The decision of the European Parliament and Council on the EYCH attributes particular significance to the role of the EHL initiative for its 'strong European dimension' and explicitly states that 'complementarities' with the EYCH should be sought (EP 2017, 11). Consequently, the European Panel Report from December 2017 expected the EHL sites to play an important role in the framework of the EYCH (EC 2017, 6).

However, an explicit mention of the EHL is missing among the 32 high-profile partners from various cultural initiatives, organisations and stakeholders that cooperate closely with the EU to promote the European Year, such as UNESCO, NEMO, Europa Nostra, ICOM Europe or the European Cultural Tourism Network (EYCH website). Likewise, the European Commission failed to introduce the EHL to the discussions that took place at the European Summit on Cultural Heritage in Berlin (18–24 June 2018). Under the motto ‘Sharing heritage – sharing values’ and supported by the EU’s Creative Europe programme that also maintains the EHL, a wide range of representatives of public and private institutions and organisations gathered to discuss a European Cultural Heritage Agenda (ECHS 2018). Although EHL heritage sites play a role in the promotion of the European dimension of the sites and providing access to them, fieldwork among the EHL sites revealed no events during the EYCH that involved raising awareness of the EHL sites as a network. Asked about the lack of their visibility as a coherent EHL network, the site practitioners commonly referred to the rejected application for developing the EHL network and promoting the European Heritage Label during the EYCH.

Studies in the field of political communication show that political campaign strategies use advertising as an influential medium for raising the personal profile of political candidates and conveying information about their issue positions in the public. The more the candidate becomes recognisable in the public, the higher is the probability that her/his visibility may help to transport the credibility of the political message and thus affect the actions of the voters (see Denton 2017). Similarly, the efficiency of the EU’s cultural and integration policies depend on the visibility of the European dimension of heritage that helps to visualise heritage not as something abstract but in terms of something concrete with which people can identify. Therefore, the failed coordination between the two initiatives is a missed opportunity to raise visibility of the European dimension of cultural heritage as part of the collective memory of European citizens and for strengthening their sense of belonging to Europe.

The EU narratives are examples of mediating specific ideological positions, moral codes as well as social and societal values to the European public. The rhetoric of ‘European identity building’ or the ‘promotion of integration and community cohesion through shared values and history’, as argued for instance in the EU’s recent ‘New European Agenda for Culture’ (COM 2018), reduces cultural processes to mere tools for managing and achieving social, economic and political goals. However, heritage has an explicit social and political context and heritage sites are not only about what to see or what to relate to but

about who to see and who to relate to (Jafari et al. 2013, 1746; Cerquetti & Ferrara 2018, 3). Several heritage sites help to establish important connections between local and transnational levels of heritage as well as between the past and present. They actively promote debates of current socio-political issues and concerns between different actors, as for instance the Historical Gdańsk Shipyard (Poland), which is conceptualised as an agora. As visitor interviews across different nationalities, age groups and social and educational backgrounds revealed, visitors established a connection between the past and recent contextualisation of solidarity and participated in contemporary value discourses at this heritage site. Other EHL sites aim to facilitate a respectful coexistence of different opinions and the integration of various groups in society through specific projects. For instance, the Hambach Castle (Germany) cooperates in a local community project that familiarises young refugees with issues of freedom, democracy and civic solidarity in the context of German history. At the same time, the heritage site aims to communicate comprehension for historical and contemporary reasons for migration and flight through various cultural activities to a broader public. Such projects show that heritage is not only a key to the understanding of the past but also to a peaceful cohabitation of different groups in contemporary society.

Delanty (2017) points out that cultural heritage can contribute to fostering a sense of intercultural dialogue and possibly a sense of solidarity within and across European societies by offering shared points of references to European citizens (and non-EU residents alike). He argues for developing a new vision of a shared 'European cultural heritage' in terms of a larger framework that carries many contrasting interpretations of national, transnational, universalistic and cosmopolitan traditions, ideas and narratives that can complement each other and form a common social project. This would enable different groups that are themselves highly pluralised to insert themselves into this framework and to achieve a degree of solidarity with each other (Delanty 2017, 213).

The EYCH with a budget of 8 million Euro designated to the promotion of activities during the year and its presence in social networks and media could have provided a bigger platform for initiating public debate on what constitutes Europe's common cultural heritage. For instance, by June 2018, the EYCH had engaged over one million people, over 2,580 events had been organised and over 3,500 projects had received the EYCH label (EC 2018), which is a far greater public than what the EHL action lacking financial means and human resources could possibly manage to reach. In this respect, a better coordination between the EHL network with its heritage experiences and the EYCH as a broader platform to engage with the European public would have

been useful for encouraging reflection on European history and its legacy in the contemporary world. Together they could have also introduced a public debate on what constitutes Europe's shared heritage and who belongs to Europe in terms of a specific cultural and political community.

### **Conclusion**

The EHL promotes a new approach with the emphasis on the European dimension of cultural heritage. Its objectives correlate with the political aims of the EU heritage and integration policies to generate a sense of belonging and identity among European citizens that may result in strengthening the legitimation of the EU as a political and cultural community. As the promotion of European heritage is part of the political objectives of the EU integration policy, it could be expected that the visibility of the EHL action across Europe would be efficiently promoted. However, the article reveals contradictions between the stated objective of visibility and the observed lack of it among a broader European public.

The label is a very recent EU heritage action, which in part accounts for its struggles with broader public recognition. The analysis of fieldwork data revealed that the EHL award has no significant effect on increasing the numbers of visitors to the designated EHL sites or raising the level of public visibility related to the designation of the EHL network of heritage sites for promoting Europe's shared heritage. A first step would be the development of a joint and inclusive communication strategy that results in better cooperation between different public, private and civil society actors and the media at the local, regional, national and European levels. A long-term vision of the EHL action needs to include the development of new practical communication tools and more transparency in the internal application and selection processes to facilitate the dissemination of best practices and increase the visibility of the EHL action. Moreover, a European-wide promotion of the EHL network would require a more active role of EHL national coordinators in the cooperation with regional and national authorities, which could help supporting the visibility of the EHL action at the national and European levels. In this respect, the idea of the EHL sites to establish a central coordination office for joint activities and promotion of the EHL network across Europe is an interesting suggestion worth supporting.

However, the failed coordination between the EHL and the EYCH during the European Year in 2018 is an example for the structural difficulties in finding and creating a coherent strategy for raising awareness of a shared cultural heritage at the European and national levels. It shows that heritage and culture are still closely associated with the objective to promote and sustain the

national realm. The difficulties in promoting the idea of a transnational European heritage reveal its political contentious nature, particularly at national levels. It remains thus challenging to implement policies aimed at producing shared values and a notion of historical entanglements within a community such as the EU, which defines itself primarily in terms of an economic and political community of nations and cultures in public.

The EC and participating member states missed the opportunity of creating synergies between the two initiatives despite their complementary organisational approaches and common objectives. The EHL could not profit of the broader platform provided by the EYCH 2018 to increase its visibility and the significance of its designation for an understanding of a shared heritage among a broader public in Europe. Similarly, the EYCH could not benefit of the strong European dimension of the EHL for supporting the development of a sense of cohesion and belonging to 'a common European space' among European citizens based on the mediation of shared values and historical processes. The failed deepening of the cooperation between the EHL and the EYCH 2018 exemplifies the lack of political vision and knowledge in which ways to contextualise, mediate and promote the European dimension of heritage to a broader audience at the national and European levels. The contradiction between the high expectations and a lack of guidance for the development of the EHL network has unsettled the local actors of the EHL action. It has also raised questions about the efficiency of the present communication strategy developed by the European Commission to expand to a transnational, European level.

Nevertheless, the EHL network of heritage sites has great potential. The network offers new approaches to heritage that communicate across European societies the understanding that cultural heritage is more than consensual memory of a specific historical event or cultural practice but rather a source of new perspectives for the future. The variety of the EHL heritage sites is an asset for facilitating the understanding that Europe's shared heritage includes diverse local, regional, national and transnational perspectives. The EHL network has the capacity to emphasise shared cultural meanings and heritage between different groups, places and practices that enable people to understand the extent of past entanglements and cross-fertilisations that relate to topical issues, such as mobility, migration, or the development of diverse identities (see Delanty 2017). The sites' narratives support insights in the interrelation of historical and contemporary processes that combine various, partly competing interpretations of heritage to a larger framework, based on shared values, political principles and history for shaping people's experiences of social, economic and political structures and relationships

(Harrison 2013; Appadurai 1995). This approach helps understanding the interplay between various historical processes and political developments as a process where sites, objects and values 'become' heritage and acquire shared meanings in an interactive process within a specific social context (Lähdesmäki 2014; Cerquetti & Ferrara 2018).

Similarly, the emphasis on the European dimension of heritage leaves room for interpretation and contribute to a broad conception of heritage, which allow expressing 'memories, feelings, interests and attachments to heritage in a dialogical way' (Kisić 2018, 137). Thus, the EHL network of heritage sites provides an opportunity to initiate public debate of what is Europe's shared heritage, based on the understanding that European heritage may also include non-European perspectives and result in the commitment to a shared world rather than in an original culture of its own (see. Delanty 2017). Such a transnational understanding of Europe's heritage offers the possibility to raise attention to the different voices and views of the past and present times and can connect with other debates such as (post)colonialism or social inequality. The projects of the EHL heritage sites strengthen a participatory approach to heritage, which stresses the social agency and engagement of various groups in civic society and work against top-down political instrumentalisation of heritage.

The EHL network offers a new quality of heritage experience that adds to the understanding of Europe as a cultural and value-based community. However, the EHL action would benefit from the development of a joint strategy for improving the visibility of the EHL network at the local, national and European levels to resolve fears that a European cultural heritage is about homogenising Europe's manifold national and minority cultures. In the present form, there is a risk of understanding the idea of a 'European' heritage predominantly as a way to legitimate the goals set by the EU, rather than an opportunity to open new space for debate and action. In times of constant toxic populist and nationalist campaigns undermining fundamental ideas of democracy, solidarity, equality, freedom and respect for human rights, it is topical to invite Europeans and non-European residents alike to participate in (re)producing and understanding heritage based on sharing universal principles and values. Therefore, both the EU *and* the member states share a great responsibility of supporting the transnational and intercultural perspective of Europe's heritage and past.

A shared European heritage can function as a reminder that peaceful cohabitation of different population groups in Europe is possible and this may result in establishing a political *and* cultural community in Europe. There is a need to focus attention on Europe's common past based on historical en-



tanglements to be able to deal adequately with the many problems European societies currently face in a time of increasing social, political and economic insecurities. While a sense of belonging to Europe or a European identification is not necessarily an answer for many people, an emphasis on a shared (cross-) cultural heritage can bridge differences in Europe's complex societies.

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