



A2.1 EMPATHS Baseline: current practices of participatory heritage interpretation

Desk Research

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EMPATHS - Empowering landscapes with Participatory
Approaches To Heritage interpretation Skills

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the heritage sector has taken on the challenge of participation of citizens and communities. The Faro Convention established that heritage institutions should encourage everyone to participate in heritage decision-making and management processes. In particular, they should engage communities in the interpretation of heritage. This represents a paradigm shift: from a conservationist view, where meanings and values of heritage are inherent in heritage assets and interpreted only by experts, to a people-centred paradigm which respects the diversity of meanings and values that different people assign to heritage. Heritage interpretation (henceforth, HI) should then be the result of a collaboration between heritage experts, communities, and other stakeholders¹. In line with this, IE and UNESCO have advocated for the concept of Value-Based Heritage Interpretation, a vision for a new HI practice where people participate in the very process of heritage identification and interpretation, and the interpreter becomes an Interpretive Agent, a facilitator of dialogue among the multiple values and perspectives of local stakeholders ultimately converging in an Interpretive Strategy for their whole heritage landscapes.

However, the sector lags in implementing such approaches, especially in EU countries. In particular, while participatory practices are being gradually included in front-end interpretive services (e.g. guided tours, interpretive panels, guidebooks etc.), strategic-level HI practices (e.g. Interpretation strategies and masterplans) are largely still stuck in the old paradigm; in most cases, they are expert- or institution-driven and participatory experiences are still rare. This is due to several reasons; in particular, the sector lacks a solid and established work practice for participatory HI at the strategic level, and heritage professionals – usually specialists in archaeology, history, natural sciences etc. – lack structured competences on participatory approaches.

The EMPATHS project aims to fill this gap. In particular, the project will develop the methodological framework of **a new participatory strategic-level HI practice** and create **a new training programme** to upskill heritage professionals on the necessary participatory competences. In this context, *WP2 - Setting the EMPATHS Framework* aims to develop the new methodological framework. This will be based on the research and analysis of current participatory models in use both in the heritage sector as well as in other sectors where such practices are solid and established. The specific objectives of WP2 are to:

- Study the state of the art of existing practices of community participation and stakeholder engagement related to HI at local, European and global level;
- Identify gaps, challenges as well as strengths and opportunities of current models from within the heritage sector;
- Identify opportunities to learn from and transferable models in different sectors;
- Develop the EMPATHS Compendium which defines the methodological framework of the new participatory HI practice.

¹ EU Quality Principles for EU-funded Interventions with Potential Impact on Cultural Heritage, ICOMOS 2020

In the context of WP2, the *EMPATHS Baseline* (A2.1) represents the first step: it is a **study of the state of the art**, in Europe and the world, of existing practices of community participation and stakeholder engagement related to HI with a focus on the strategic and planning processes. The aim of the research is to provide an understanding of the "status quo", a picture of how participatory approaches are currently applied in HI and closely related fields, and highlight areas for improvement.

This activity involved a) conducting desk research on existing practices and b) analysing these practices to understand gaps, challenges and opportunities. This report provides a preliminary analysis of the desk research and will be discussed with all project partners at the TPM₁ in Berlin in order to collect input and feedback; this report will then be revised for a final version.

Furthermore, based on this research, **two interview grids** will be developed:

- a) One for interviewing HI experts working with participatory approaches, to delve deeper into gaps, challenges and areas of improvement of current models;
- b) One for professionals from other sectors with established practices of participation, to learn from successful models.

The interview grids will support all partners in conducting the interviews in the second phase of WP2.

For this purpose, this report also includes a set of suggested topics and questions which can later be expanded in the fully developed interview grids.

The activity was led by The Story Behind with the contribution of project partners in the research design, collection and analysis. Both this report and the interviews will inform and support the development of the new methodological framework developed in the *EMPATHS Compendium* as a final output of WP2.

2. Methodology

2.1 Collection Criteria

We adopted purposive sampling as the selection of practices for this research adhered to clearly defined criteria tailored to its specific objectives. Given the primary focus on participatory practices in HI at a strategic level, the priority criterion was: “**Examples of participatory practices applied in HI at a strategic level on a landscape, territory, or regional scale**”. Recognising the potential scarcity of perfectly fitting examples, and prioritising an exploration of methods over content, the scope was extended beyond HI to include related practices from the broader heritage sector (e.g., management, education). Additionally, for the same reasons, we also collected “**Examples of participatory practices applied in HI planning processes at single sites**” as a secondary option.

To maintain relevance to the research objectives, we **excluded examples limited to participatory interpretation at the service or product level in single sites** (e.g. guided tours, heritage events, panels, or audio guides).

A **broad definition of HI** was adopted to encompass interpretation, presentation, mediation, and educational practices aimed at engaging people with heritage and fostering meaningful connections. This inclusive approach served two purposes: 1) To account for the diversity of existing HI definitions and practices; 2) To accommodate variations in terminology across countries, ensuring alignment with the research scope.

2.2 Tools and Procedure

To gather data on relevant practices, The Story Behind developed a dedicated form, which was subsequently approved by Interpret Europe. The form was designed to collect information across five key areas:

1. **Context:** Details about the broader framework within which each specific project or initiative was implemented, including its name, location, year, responsible organisation, and the motivations and objectives underpinning the initiative.
2. **Methodology:** An overview of the methods employed to engage stakeholders in participatory processes.
3. **People Involved:** Profiles of both facilitators and participants involved in the process.
4. **Results and Impacts:** The primary outputs as well as short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes.
5. **Strengths, Weaknesses, and Takeaways:** Lessons learned - both positive and negative - regarding the application of participatory approaches.

Reflecting the collaborative nature of the project, the form was initially shared with both the piloting and training partners. Training partners were tasked with gathering data on at least 2 practices from either European or global contexts, while piloting partners focused on collecting at least 1 practice from their respective local contexts.

To further broaden contributions, Interpret Europe distributed the form within its network of heritage interpretation professionals, encouraging input from its members. However, the voluntary nature of this initiative led to variations in the level of detail provided for each collected practice, largely due to the time constraints faced by contributors. In some cases, contributors provided links or papers from which additional information could be extracted for analysis. In other instances, the analysis was supplemented by insights gained through informal discussions with contributors.

Recognising that the primary aim of this report is to stimulate reflection and ideas for subsequent phases of the project, an inclusive approach was adopted. All examples that met the selection criteria (and for which sufficient information was available) were included to provide a realistic and diverse snapshot of current participatory practices in HI and related fields operating on a strategic or planning level. This approach does not claim to comprehensively cover all existing examples but instead seeks to present a representative and nuanced overview of the field.

Target: 9 practices (2 from each training partner, 6 in total; 1 from each piloting partner, 3 in total)

Collected practices: 19

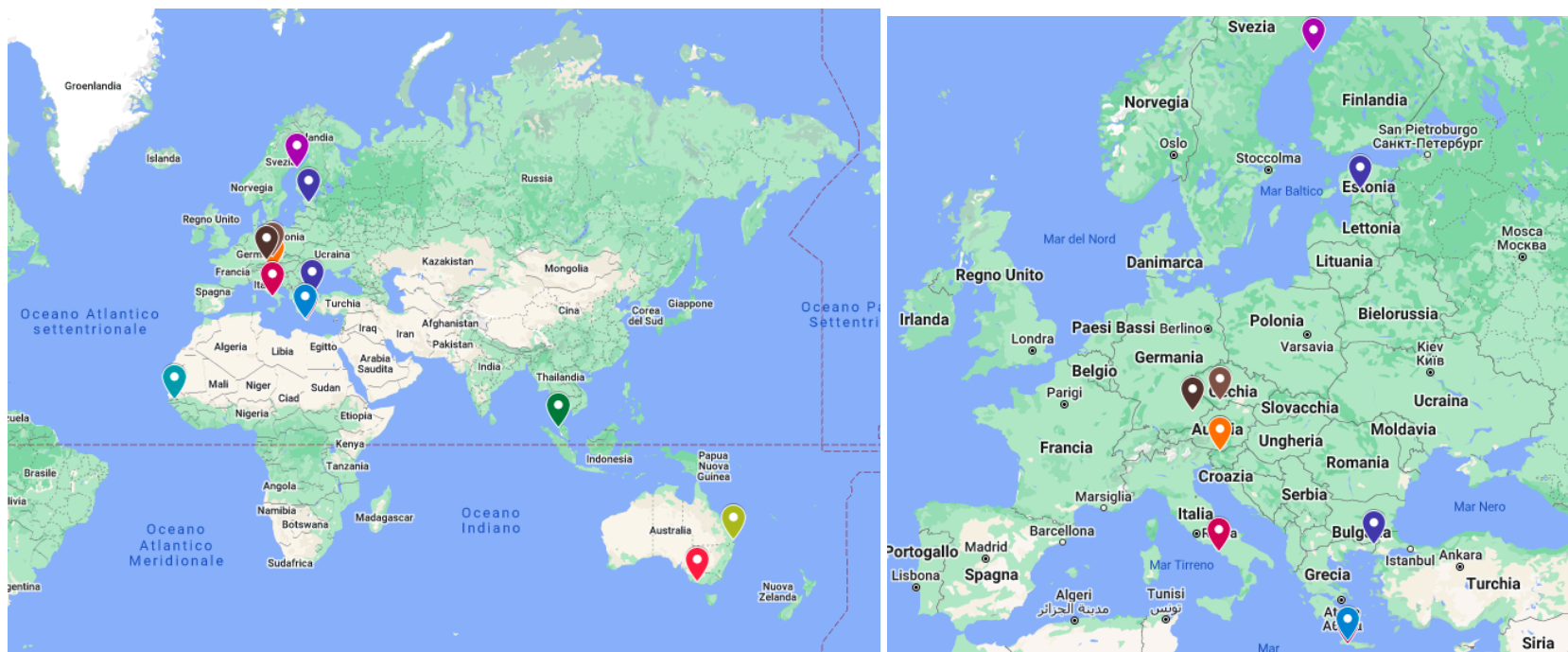
Selected practices: 14

Practices collected by training partners	10	Practices collected by piloting partners	4
IE: Landshut Interpretation and Development Strategy; The process behind a heritage interpretation plan for the world heritage site High Coast / Kvarken Archipelago; Armenoi water heritage landscape; Heritage Interpretation Plan of Netolice Renaissance Game Reserve	4	PaFleg: Il Parco delle Idee in the Campi Flegrei Archaeological Park	1
TSB: Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape Masterplan; Queens Wharf Development Heritage Interpretation Masterplan; George Town recipe book; Programme for owners of rural heritage	4	EMT: Evrinos	1
HMO: The postman's road: Connecting Gorges; HerMaP Gambia	2	CK: Karawanken trail: a participatory HI project; Geopark School Network and annual theme practice	2

3. Analysis

3.1 Overview

The majority of examples (9) are from Europe, with 2 from Africa, 2 from Australia, and 1 from Asia (see Map). This distribution is notably uneven, reflecting the predominance of European-based professional networks involved in the research. Notably, there is an absence of examples from Northern, Central, and South America. In the next phase of the project, expanding the scope to include more non-European contexts will be a priority, particularly through interviews.



Geographical distribution of the 14 collected current practices, in the world and in Europe.

The following table provides a concise overview of the 14 practices examined²:

Name	Country and type of heritage	Field	Scope	Main output
A. Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape Masterplan	AUSTRALIA UNESCO Cultural Landscape	Heritage Interpretation	Landscape	Interpretation masterplan
B. Queens Wharf Development Heritage Interpretation Strategy	AUSTRALIA Cultural landscape in an urban environment	Heritage Interpretation	Landscape	Interpretation masterplan
C. Karawanken trail: a participatory HI project	AUSTRIA and SLOVENIA Karavanke UNESCO Global Geopark	Heritage Interpretation	Landscape	Itinerary planning and creation
D. Interpretation routes of the natural and cultural heritage of Evros	GREECE Natural and cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible heritage, of Evros region	Heritage Interpretation	Landscape	Itinerary planning and creation
E. The postman's road: Connecting Gorges	GREECE Cultural and natural landscape	Heritage Interpretation	Landscape	Itinerary planning and creation
F. Landshut Interpretation and Development Strategy	GERMANY Cultural sites in a landscape	Heritage Interpretation	Landscape	Interpretation masterplan
G. George Town recipe book	MALAYSIA UNESCO World Heritage Site in an urban environment	Heritage Interpretation	Landscape	Interpretation masterplan
H. The process behind a heritage interpretation plan for the world heritage site High Coast / Kvarken Archipelago	SWEDEN UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site	Heritage Interpretation	Landscape	Interpretation plan
I. Armenoi water heritage landscape	GREECE	Heritage	Landscape	Itinerary planning and

² “Field” denotes whether the practice was focused specifically on HI or other heritage-related domains. “Scope” classifies the level at which the practice was developed: “Landscape” refers to practices implemented in a group of sites in a regional or sub-regional territory or within an urban context; “National” designates activities run in multiple institutions at a national level. “Main output” refers to the primary product produced through participatory approaches.

	Cultural and natural landscape	Interpretation		creation
J. Heritage Interpretation Plan of Netolice Renaissance Game Reserve	CZECH REPUBLIC Historical landscape	Heritage Interpretation	Landscape	Interpretation masterplan
K. Il Parco delle Idee in the Campi Flegrei Archaeological Park	ITALY Archaeological Park with multiple sites in a sub-regional context	Management	Landscape	A new strategy for the Park management
L. Geopark School Network and annual theme practice	AUSTRIA and SLOVENIA Karavanke UNESCO Global Geopark	Education	Landscape	Education project
M. HerMaP Gambia	GAMBIA Tangible cultural heritage, particularly in museums	Education	National	Training course
N. Programme for owners of rural heritage	ESTONIA Cultural heritage	Education	National	Capacity building project

- We selected 12 cases operating on a landscape level (12); 2 cases were national programmes which do not strictly operate on a landscape but still offer interesting inputs for a reflection on participatory approaches to HI.
- Only **6 cases produced a strategic document for the interpretation of the landscape** (in bold in the table). Interestingly, 3 of them are from non-European countries.

3.2 Context

The following table summarises the main reasons provided for why participatory approaches were used:

Initial reasons for using participatory approaches	Practices involved
Raise awareness / Engage the local community	11: A; B; C; D; E; G; I; K; L; M; N
Save heritage at risk / revitalising neglected heritage	7: A; B; E; G; J; K; N
Encourage sustainable accessibility	7: A; C; D; G; H; K; L

Develop an interpretation plan/master plan	6: A; B; F; G; H; J
Foster social /community inclusion	3: A; B; G
Build capacity for heritage professionals	1: M

Trends

- Obviously, the most common reason for using participatory approaches is to **increase awareness and engagement of communities** (11/14).
- **In 6 cases, participatory approaches have been adopted specifically to develop an interpretation plan/masterplan.**
- The need to **revitalise neglected areas/preserve heritage at risk** and **encourage sustainable access** are both recurring motivations (7/14). This highlights the crucial role of community participation in addressing issues of neglected, endangerment and sustainability of heritage, where it is fundamental that communities recognise / share the values of cultural and natural heritage.
- In 3 cases, participatory approaches (and the related Interpretation Masterplans) were used as a tool for **promoting social inclusion** and representation of previously excluded or underrepresented minorities. All these cases come from non-European contexts.

3.3 Methodologies

To map the participatory methods adopted in the selected practices, we rely on the descriptions provided by the contributors and related available materials. As a result, the level of detail available for each practice varies. While more in-depth investigation into these methodologies is planned for subsequent phases of the project, it is still possible at this stage to draw some broad yet useful preliminary observations:

Methodologies applied for participation	Practices involved
Workshops	11: A; B; C; E; F; G; H; I; L; M; N
Meetings	6: A; B; D; F; I; J;
Oral history collection	5: A; B; E; G; N
Site visits	5: A; E; J; L; N
Interviews	3: B; C; G;

Feedback (participants are asked to provide feedback and comments on the outputs)	3: A; C; H
Living labs	3: C; G; D;
Educational activities with school students	2: J; L;
Educational day(s)	2: H; L;
Focus groups	2: C; K
Approval (participants are asked for approval of the outputs)	2: A; B
Open call (to recruit participants)	2: D; K

Trends

- **Workshops are the most commonly employed method** (11/14), followed by meetings (6/14). However, most cases provided only general descriptions, leaving us with limited information about how workshops and meetings were structured or the specific formats and tasks they involved.
- Oral history collection (5/14) and Interviews (3/14) were mainly used in projects focused on intangible heritage. These methods proved instrumental in capturing personal experiences, memories, and cultural knowledge, which are essential for enriching and authenticating narratives tied to intangible heritage.
- Four cases emphasised the **importance of follow-up actions** after collaborative working sessions. In three cases (A, C, H), participants were asked to provide **feedback** on the outputs and/or test their effectiveness. In two cases (A, B), participants were not only required to provide feedback but also to **validate and approve** the outputs. This demonstrates that participants in these practices **had the authority to actively contribute to the decision-making process**. Feedback requests and approval mechanisms appear to be effective strategies for **fostering long-term participant engagement**, as they empower individuals and make them accountable for the final outcomes. Conversely, in other cases, the absence of follow-up actions was cited as a factor leading to weaker or more superficial engagement.
- In 2 cases, participants were recruited through an open call, while in other cases, recruitment was conducted by direct invitation. The method for **participant recruitment is a critical step** in developing participatory approaches, as it can influence the composition of the group and, consequently, impact the outcomes of the process.

Zoom in

- Interestingly, in Case A (where the planners adopted a participatory approach to develop the interpretation masterplan for the cultural landscape of an Australian Aboriginal community, emphasising inclusion and the re-appropriation of cultural heritage), workshops and meetings involved **a selected group of representatives nominated by the local community**.
- In Case I, the contributor highlighted the need to "**learn from anthropology**" when running participatory activities, underscoring the value of adopting interdisciplinary approaches.

3.4 People involved

The following table outlines the profiles of individuals involved in the participatory activities, either as facilitators or participants:

Facilitators profiles	Practices involved
Heritage interpreters	9: A; B; C; E; F; G; H; I; J
Heritage professionals with participatory competences	7: A; B; D; E; G; K; M
Heritage professionals with no specific participatory competences	6: C; D; E; K; L; N
Professional facilitators	4: A, B; G; K;
Members of the community	2: A; C;
Participants profiles	Practices involved
Local inhabitants /community (with no expertise in heritage field)	14: A; B; C; D; E; F; G; H; I; J; K; L; M; N
Heritage professionals	6: C; E; F; J; K; M
School students / young people	5: C; E; J; L; M
Guides	5: A; C; F; G; K;

Hospitality & Recreation professionals	4: F; G; H; K
Decision makers (mayors, local administrators etcc..)	4: A; B; H; M
Volunteers / Amateurs	3: F; J; K;
Visitors	2: C; E

On facilitators

In most cases, participatory activities were conducted by **teams of professionals**, often from **diverse disciplinary backgrounds**.

- Heritage interpreters were frequently involved as facilitators (9/14);
- Other heritage professionals also commonly acted as facilitators; however, in half of these cases, they lacked specific expertise in participatory methods.
- Professional facilitators were engaged in only 4 out of 14 cases.
- Community members were rarely involved in facilitation, appearing in just 2 out of 14 cases.
- This mapping indicates that, while a variety of approaches exist, participatory activities were generally **led by professionals with some level of expertise in participatory methods** and, presumably, relevant training.

On participants

- In 100% of the cases, individuals from the **local community** were involved as participants.
- Certain categories, such as heritage professionals, guides, school students/young people, and hospitality and recreational professionals, were recurrently included, as they are typically **key stakeholders** in heritage projects.
- In 4 out of 14 cases, **decision-makers** were involved. Their inclusion can be highly effective in **ensuring the long-term impact** of initiatives and **guaranteeing that the outcomes of participatory processes are integrated into decision-making**.
- It is also noteworthy that **visitors** were explicitly mentioned as part of the process in only 2 out of 14 cases. This suggests that visitors are generally seen as **"receivers" of the outputs** rather than active participants in the process. However, this lack of visitor involvement could also stem from logistical or strategic reasons that were not apparent in the data.

It was also valuable to map the **types of entities involved in managing the initiatives**: the bodies that commissioned the initiatives employing participatory approaches, and those responsible for their implementation:

Who commissioned the initiative?	Who implemented the initiative?	
	Public bodies	Private actors
Public bodies	3: C; L; N	8: A; B; D; F; G; H; J; K
Private actors		3: E; I; M

Trends

- The involvement of public bodies in most of the practices is not surprising, given that all the initiatives in question were developed in public-owned cultural or natural sites. However, only in 3 cases was the initiative both commissioned and implemented by public institutions.
- In the majority of cases, the initiative was commissioned by a public body, but the implementation required the involvement of private contractors. It would be useful to explore whether this reliance on external parties stemmed from a lack of expertise or insufficient human resources within the public institutions.

Zoom in

- Regarding the delegation of participatory process implementation by public institutions to private consultants, Case H explicitly stated that "it is important for the team managing a site or park to be supported by external professionals in order to develop **a more independent and clear perspective on needs**".

3.5 Outputs and immediate results

This section summarises the outputs and immediate results of the practices based on the available data provided by contributors:

Output / Result of the participatory approach	Practices involved
Development of interpretation services	11: A; B; C; D; E; F; G; I; L; N
Heritage revival / rescue	9: A; B; D; G; I; J; K; N
Interpretation Plan or Masterplan	6: A; B; F; G; H; J

Heritage mapping / recognition	6: A; B, C; G; J; N
Capacity building in heritage interpretation	5: D; G; L; M; N
Interpretation strategy (for cross-border trail)	1: C

Trends

- In 10 out of 14 cases, participatory approaches contributed to the **development of services** for heritage interpretation and to enhancing visitor experience. However, only **a minority of these initiatives (4/14) developed these services based on a strategic-level heritage interpretation document**. This suggests that participatory approaches are often perceived and implemented at a "service-production" level rather than within a broader, more strategic framework.
- In many cases (9/14), participatory approaches led to the **revitalisation or rescue of heritage**, highlighting the importance of empowering local communities in regeneration projects.
- In 6 cases, participatory approaches resulted in the creation of an **interpretation masterplan or plan**, reinforcing the value of collaborative input in shaping the vision for heritage interpretation.
- Additionally, in 6 cases, participatory methods contributed to **mapping heritage**, demonstrating how community participation can expand the definitions of "heritage" and support the identification of previously overlooked aspects of cultural or natural significance.
- In 5 cases, these initiatives also fostered the **development of skills among both heritage professionals and non-professionals in heritage interpretation**, illustrating the potential of participatory approaches to build capacity and increase involvement in the field.

3.6 Described impacts

Regarding the impacts of the collected practices, we lack data for an objective analysis. Below, we summarise the reported impacts as described by the contributors:

Main impacts of the participatory practices (as described by contributors)	Practices involved
Management upgrade	11: A; B; D; F; G; H; I; K; M; N
Increase in community engagement	9: C; D; E; G; I; J; K; L; N

Community empowerment / re-appropriation of spaces	9: A; B; D; E; F; G; I; K; N
Re-qualification and revitalization of spaces	5: B; I; J; K; N
Positive impact on sustainable practices (tourism; attitude of people towards heritage etc)	5: A; C; E; K; L
Increase of visitors' engagement	3: A; C; I
Reconnection between cultural and natural heritage	1: E

Trends

- Firstly, participatory approaches contributed to an **upgrade in management practices** in 11 out of 14 cases.
- Additionally, these approaches are reported to have brought **significant benefits to communities**, not only by increasing engagement (9/14) but also by improving their conditions through empowerment and the re-appropriation of spaces.
- Participatory approaches also had a positive impact on the **revitalisation of spaces** (5/14) and in **promoting sustainable practices and attitudes** (5/14). This suggests that community participation in HI fosters greater awareness, stewardship, and more sustainable behaviours.
- Surprisingly, only 3 cases reported an impact on visitor engagement, despite 11 out of 14 practices developing services primarily targeted at visitors. This discrepancy may be attributed to insufficient data or a lack of clarity in measuring the specific impact on visitor engagement.

Zoom in

- Case E identified as an impact that participatory approaches contributed to “**reconnecting cultural and natural heritage**”. This is likely a relevant impact in many of the other analysed cases, even if not explicitly stated. The same can be said for the reconnection of tangible and intangible heritage.

3.7 Level of participation

In order to compare the level of participation in our cases, we adopted the Arnstein Ladder of Participation³, a framework that categorises different levels of citizen involvement in decision-making processes. The ladder is widely used in participatory planning and community development contexts and it consists of eight rungs, divided into three main categories: **Nonparticipation**, **Tokenism**, and **Citizen Power**.

Important note: The categorisation of case studies in this report using Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation framework is intended as an analytical tool to map the levels of citizen involvement. It is important to note that terms such as "Tokenism" or "Placation" reflect the naming conventions established in the original literature (Arnstein, 1969) and are not intended to carry a negative judgement or critique of the case studies themselves. Instead, they denote a specific level of participation as defined by the framework, focusing on the nature of citizen engagement rather than the overall value or success of the initiatives. This report recognises the efforts and achievements of all case studies in advancing participatory practices and acknowledges the diverse contexts, goals, and constraints within which they operate.

A. Nonparticipation: These levels are considered deceptive, as they aim to placate or control rather than genuinely involve the public.

1. **Manipulation:** The lowest rung, where participation is superficial, often used to "educate" or "engineer" consent from participants without real influence.
2. **Therapy:** Participation is framed as addressing the personal or psychological needs of the participants, rather than tackling actual systemic issues.

B. Tokenism: Tokenism represents a step forward but lacks meaningful power-sharing.

3. **Informing:** Citizens are provided with information about decisions, but there is no mechanism for feedback or influence.
4. **Consultation:** Citizens are asked for their opinions (e.g., through surveys or public meetings), but decision-makers are under no obligation to act on this input.
5. **Placation:** Citizens may be given limited roles (e.g., serving on advisory committees), but decision-making power remains with authorities.

C. Citizen Power: These levels signify genuine empowerment, where citizens are actively shaping outcomes.

³ S. Arnstein (1969), *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*.

6. **Partnership:** Power is redistributed through negotiation, and citizens have a degree of influence in decision-making, working collaboratively with authorities.
7. **Delegated Power:** Citizens gain significant influence, with clear authority over specific aspects of the decision-making process.
8. **Citizen Control:** The highest rung, where citizens have full control over policies, decisions, and management.

Arnstein's ladder underscores that not all forms of participation are equal. It highlights the importance of distinguishing between symbolic involvement and authentic empowerment. While the model is a valuable tool for critically assessing participatory processes, it has been critiqued for its linearity and lack of nuance in addressing complex power dynamics. Nonetheless, it remains foundational in understanding participation in planning processes.

We mapped the practices onto Arnstein Ladder based on the available data on participants' levels of involvement and power relationships between authorities and participants in decision-making:

Category	Rung	Practices involved
Tokenism	3 Informing	2 practices: L. Geopark School Network and annual theme practice M. HerMaP Gambia
	4 Consultation	2 practices: E. The postman's road: Connecting Gorges J. Heritage Interpretation Plan of Netolice Renaissance Game Reserve
	5 Placation	5 practices: C. Karawanken trail: a participatory HI project F. Landshut Interpretation and Development Strategy H. The process behind a heritage interpretation plan for the world heritage site High Coast / Kvarken Archipelago N. Program for owners of rural heritage I. Armenoi water heritage landscape

Citizen Power	6 Partnership	2 practices: D. Interpretation routes of the natural and cultural heritage of Evros K. Il Parco delle Idee in the Campi Flegrei Archaeological Park
	7 Delegated power	3 practices: A. Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape Masterplan B. Queens Wharf Development Heritage Interpretation Strategy C. George Town recipe book

Trends

- Overall, the cases ranged from level 3 (Informing) to level 7 (Delegating). None ranked in the lowest Non-participation level or the highest Citizen Control level, but instead were distributed across the **intermediate levels**.
- The majority of cases fell within the **Tokenism** category, with the highest concentration at level 5 (Placation). In these cases, people were informed, asked for opinions, and given roles, yet meaningful power-sharing remained absent. This suggests that while people's voices are increasingly recognised, they are still rarely involved in final decision-making processes.
- Two cases ranked at the **Partnership** level: in both Cases D and K, participants worked collaboratively with heritage authorities and were able to influence decisions. At this level, power is shared, but not fully transferred to citizens, who remain active partners in the process.
- Three cases were classified at the **Delegated Power** level. In two of these cases (A and B), communities did not only participate in workshops to contribute to the interpretation of their landscapes, but were also required to validate and approve all project outputs, including the Interpretation Masterplan, designs, and prototypes of interpretive services, throughout various stages of the project. In the third case (C), local inhabitants also received as a follow-up a "recipe book" with guidelines to assist business owners and community groups in developing their own interpretations for George Town, aligning with broader planning recommendations. The intention was for interpretation to be consistent across the city, while still allowing local groups the flexibility to express their unique stories in meaningful ways.

Although in these three cases participants operated within a framework set by authorities, they had significant power in key decision-making steps at both the strategic and implementation stages.

Zoom in

- The three highest-level cases are from non-European contexts and are part of **large-scale management projects that benefit from substantial financial resources**. This undoubtedly influenced the scale, complexity, and duration of the activities that could be implemented, such as delivering multiple drafts of outputs, engaging in long-term collaboration with the community, and allowing time for community approval.

- Cases A and B are both based in Australia, a country with a **long-standing tradition of negotiating heritage values with local communities**. In particular, when dealing with **First Nations' heritage**, this practice appears to be well-established, likely even mandated by the public bodies commissioning the initiatives.
- Case K underlined how **sometimes people's suggestions are simply not applicable** - something to keep in mind.

3.8 SWOT analysis

Here we analyse “strengths” and “weaknesses” as reported by the contributors. Based on these, we identified opportunities and threats.

STRENGTHS: what made the practice successful?	WEAKNESSES: what didn't work?
<p>Community and Stakeholder Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcoming and collaborative environment (H, K, C, L, E, F, I) - Capacity to build a narrative approved and shared by the local community (A, B) - Capacity to identify community needs (D) - Focus on collective contribution (K) - Capacity to merge experts' and inhabitants' knowledge (B, N) - Work on a strategic and extensive level (N) - Involvement and engagement of key actors (L) - Involvement of high-level decision-makers (L) <p>Empowerment and Capacity Building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empowering local guides (A, C) - Building the capacity of citizens so that they can be the agents of the desired transformation (G, N) - Reputation of the institution/person responsible for the initiative (D, J) - Raising awareness on sustainable tourism (A, C) 	<p>High Costs and Funding Limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resources are too limited for follow-ups (E, M) - Project is difficult to replicate due to funding (A) <p>Community Engagement and Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenge in maintaining consistent community engagement (I, M) - It is sometimes harder to generate the expected level of engagement and participation, particularly in areas not typically frequented by tourists (C) - When activities are spread over too long a time frame, the risk is disengagement (D) - Geographical and logistic challenges for mobility over long distances (E, L) <p>Content and Thematic Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It can be a challenge to formulate and create a main theme (using the method of thematic interpretation) that is interesting and relevant enough for visitors (H) - Sometimes participants' ideas are not really applicable (K)

Process and Methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Follow-up and testing (H) - Structured meetings (I) - Cross-border cooperation (L) - Innovative use of a historical narrative to connect people to heritage (E) - Interactive site visits (L) - Inclusive open call (K) - A holistic approach integrating geological, natural, and cultural heritage into a well-integrated interpretive experience (C) 	
OPPORTUNITIES: what could be done?	THREATS: what to watch out for?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop structured methodologies for participant selection to ensure the inclusion of motivated individuals, extending beyond those already engaged in heritage activities. - Engage respected key actors to influence broader community participation, particularly among individuals who may not typically take part in such initiatives. - Establish a clear strategy for managing conflicts and disappointment, prioritizing collective goals over individual needs to maintain a harmonious and productive environment. - Incorporate follow-up activities into the project plan, ensuring resources are allocated - Consider participants' practical needs when designing activities, such as accessibility to meeting locations and the time commitment required, to foster greater inclusivity and participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited inclusivity in participation poses a risk, as initiatives may primarily attract individuals with a pre-existing interest in heritage, excluding broader community involvement. - Managing disappointment during consultations is a delicate issue, particularly when participants' ideas cannot be implemented, which may undermine trust and engagement. - Challenges in replicability of Citizen Power practices arise, as these approaches may not easily adapt to different cultural, social, or economic contexts. - Low levels of community cohesion present a barrier to effective engagement, especially in contexts where a strong sense of community is absent.

4. Takeaways and recommendations

This section combines contributors' observations and researchers' conclusions based on the previous analysis of the 14 collected practices.

Expertise

- **Build a Skilled Team:** The team of professionals should include individuals with specific training in participatory methodologies. Interdisciplinary teams, incorporating expertise from fields like anthropology and social sciences, are highly recommended. Structured activities designed by professionals familiar with diverse methodologies foster trust and enhance engagement.
- **Encourage External Expertise:** Multidisciplinary teams that include experts from outside the site management team provide an independent and objective perspective, ensuring a clearer identification of needs and priorities.

Participant Selection and Engagement

- **Define Recruitment Method and Selection Criteria:** Clear selection criteria are essential to ensure genuine group engagement. "open calls" can encourage commitment but may primarily attract individuals already interested in heritage or with strong community ties. This is not inherently problematic but should be carefully considered based on project goals.
- **Consider Targeted Involvement:** Depending on the project's objectives, specific groups (e.g., school students, elderly citizens) may need to be targeted. This requires a thorough understanding of the social context.
- **Re-evaluate the Role of Visitors:** Visitors, often seen as passive recipients, can also play an active role in the participatory process. Include visitors as active participants, particularly in tourism-driven heritage contexts, to enrich the process and foster sustainable behaviour.
- **Leverage Community Leaders and Institutional Reputation:** Engaging respected community members or leveraging the reputation of the leading institution can enhance group participation and commitment.
- **Respect Participants' Time:** Recognise and value the time and effort participants contribute. Efficient time management is crucial to avoid making participants feel their time is wasted.

Methodology

- **Consider Group Size and Composition:** Effective participation doesn't always require large groups. Working with a small, well-selected group of key actors or community representatives can be equally successful. These representatives can gather and relay feedback from the wider community.
- **Ensure Diverse Representation:** If working directly with community representatives, ensure they are capable of capturing varied perspectives. Alternatively, form a group with diverse participants (in terms of age, roles, and backgrounds) to ensure all viewpoints are included.
- **Develop a Clear Theme:** When creating an interpretation plan, work iteratively with participants to refine a preliminary theme. A well-defined theme provides focus and direction throughout the process.

- **Engage Decision-Makers:** For projects at the landscape level, involving high-level decision-makers is essential to ensure the adoption of outcomes and the alignment of participatory processes with management strategies. Investigate the barriers to decision-makers' involvement and develop strategies to better integrate participatory processes into institutional and policy frameworks.
- **Integrate Multiple Dimensions of Heritage:** Participatory approaches are particularly effective in bridging natural, cultural, and intangible heritage. Use these synergies to enhance the depth and impact of interpretation.
- **Link Participatory HI Strategies to Management:** When participatory HI strategies are acknowledged as foundational to management plans, they help ensure that decisions and operations are guided by community input. This approach amplifies the impact of HI strategies and makes management more aligned with the values and priorities identified through participatory processes.
- **Empower Participants as Interpreters:** With the right tools, such as "recipe books," local residents can actively interpret and advocate for their living spaces. This strategy is particularly valuable in areas facing overtourism, promoting sustainable and authentic interactions with heritage.
- **Balance Expert and Community Input:** Participatory approaches should not exclude experts. Instead, strive to integrate scientific and local knowledge. As experts often oversee final outcomes, it is critical to implement mechanisms that ensure participant satisfaction and a sense of ownership.
- **Strengthen Methodology and Learn from Institutionalised Practices:** Develop a robust framework of methods and techniques specifically designed for participatory activities focused on exploring values, meanings, and narratives. Additionally, explore how Australia's approach to First Nations' heritage can inform participatory practices for HI strategies in different cultural and political contexts.

Outcomes and follow-ups

- **Incorporate Participant Feedback:** Collecting feedback on project outcomes before final implementation fosters long-term engagement, builds trust, and instills a sense of responsibility toward heritage among participants.
- **Seek Approval for Final Outputs:** If possible, allow participants to review and approve final results. This promotes higher participation levels, a stronger sense of ownership, and greater accountability in heritage management.

Appendix. Questions in need of answers: preparing the interview grids

This analysis serves as the foundation for developing two interview grids to gather further insights from both heritage and non-heritage professionals. The following questions outline key topics for further exploration. These questions will be presented during the Berlin meeting for partner feedback and input to finalise the interview grids.

What should we ask?

A. Methods

1. What specialised methodologies and techniques are commonly employed to facilitate participatory activities with communities in the heritage sector? Are there heritage-specific approaches beyond examples like "time machines" formats?
2. (*For previous contributors*) How were previously applied methods, such as workshops or meetings, practically implemented and structured?
3. What criteria can guide the selection of the most appropriate methods for participatory activities in varying contexts?
4. Beyond interpretation guidelines and "recipe books," what other tools or methodologies can empower citizens in participatory processes?
5. How can contributions from experts and communities be balanced to foster meaningful collaboration and minimise the risk of disappointment?
6. What methodologies are applied to work on heritage meanings and values? How to encourage participants/communities to share these values? And how to deal with "negative" values expressed by involved communities?^{4*}

B. Facilitators:

1. What are the educational and professional backgrounds of facilitators involved in participatory processes, both from heritage and non-heritage sectors?
2. What specific skills are required of facilitators in these contexts, and how are these skills cultivated?
3. When working in multidisciplinary teams, what expertise should be included, and what methodologies are facilitators trained to employ?
4. Under what circumstances is it advisable to engage professional facilitators?
5. In what scenarios should external experts be contracted instead of relying solely on internal staff within heritage institutions?
6. What is the facilitator(s)' vision of what "participatory" really means? Which level of participation does the facilitator see as really possible and advisable?^{5*}

^{4*} These questions were added to the report after the TPM1 in Berlin upon partners' feedback

⁵ These questions were added to the report after the TPM1 in Berlin upon partners' feedback

C. Participants

1. What methods are used to select participants for participatory activities? While open calls are a common approach, what alternative methods exist, and how do they influence the quality of engagement (positively or negatively)?
2. Should individuals with little or no interest in heritage or community life be engaged in these activities? If so, what strategies can facilitate their meaningful involvement?
3. How can visitors to heritage sites be effectively engaged in participatory processes?
4. What strategies can be employed to identify and manage conflicts among stakeholders during participatory activities?
5. How can the size of a working group be optimised to ensure diversity and representation without compromising manageability? Is it preferable to involve a large, diverse group or a smaller, more focused set of participants?

D. Interpretation Strategies:

1. How do professionals differentiate between the terms "Interpretation Strategy," "Plan," and "Master Plan"? Are these distinctions clearly defined, or are they used interchangeably?
2. How is a participatory Interpretation Master Plan designed? What makes it different from a 'traditional' one?
3. How can data derived from participatory activities be analysed and incorporated in the framework of an Interpretation Master Plan?
4. What are the distinct phases typically included in the development of a participatory Interpretation Master Plan (e.g. strategy, design, implementation)?
5. What do professionals mean by "Heritage Interpretation"?^{6*}

E. Outcomes and follow-ups

1. What strategies can effectively engage high-level decision-makers in participatory interpretation processes? Are there general approaches that transcend contextual differences?
2. What tools or methods can be employed to sustain participant engagement over the long term? Beyond seeking feedback or approval, are there other strategies that enhance continuity and commitment?
3. How to monitor and evaluate the impact of the participatory approach?^{7*}

Whom should we ask?

● Professionals from the heritage sectors experienced in participatory approaches:

1. Interpretation Planners;

⁶ These questions were added to the report after the TPM1 in Berlin upon partners' feedback

⁷ *These questions were added to the report after the TPM1 in Berlin upon partners' feedback

2. Professional(s) working on intangible heritage (by definition, who works with intangible heritage deals with communities and participatory approaches);
 3. Professionals with experience in working with “difficult/contested” heritage;
 4. Site managers
- **Professionals from other sectors with established practices of participation:**
 5. Urban planners;
 6. Social scientists;
 7. Professional facilitators;
 8. Professionals with experience in public art projects;
 9. Experts in community branding
-

A note on research limitations

The data collection process for this research was inherently limited by its reliance on contributions from partners and their respective professional networks. This approach, combining **purposive sampling** and elements of **convenience sampling**, introduced constraints that affected the comprehensiveness and representativeness of the findings. Firstly, there were notable **geographical discrepancies** in the collected examples, which do not accurately reflect the global distribution of participatory approaches in HI strategies and planning. Such discrepancies are a common limitation of convenience sampling, which depends on accessible networks rather than a systematic or randomised selection process. Secondly, the **level of detail** provided for each practice varied significantly, depending on contributors’ availability and capacity to share information. This variability is typical in purposive sampling, as the method prioritises relevance and diversity of cases over uniformity or completeness.

Despite these challenges, an inclusive approach was adopted to ensure a diverse range of practices were documented. This decision prioritised the breadth of examples over the depth of individual case studies, aligning with the strengths of purposive sampling in highlighting diverse perspectives. The research does not claim to be exhaustive, however it provides a valuable and informative snapshot of current participatory practices. This overview serves as a robust starting point for reflection, further research and development of more targeted strategies in the next phases of the project.
