

HERITAGE AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION: TOWARDS VIABLE LOCAL CREATIVE ECOSYSTEMS IN POLAND AND FRANCE

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Abstract

The overarching aim of this research was to conduct a comparative analysis of the Polish and French approaches to the interpretation and management of cultural heritage. It also explores the perceptions of the legacy associated with venues that have transitioned from their original purposes to new forms of activities aimed at heritage preservation. Key aspects of this study encompass the preservation of the memory of these sites, the strategic development of the locales, the values and goals upheld by these transformed facilities, capacity building, and the roles played by private entities in organizing cultural activities and commemorating cultural heritage within the region.

Keywords: *heritage of sanatoria, participatory governance, community transformations, local challenges, culture-led development.*

Introduction

The object of the study presented in the article focuses on cultural heritage revitalization, adopting an interdisciplinary approach that combines elements of management, art, and social participation and in particular on the significance, value, and the evolution of former French and Polish sanatoria and abbeys, transformed

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into vibrant cultural centres. This text derives from the research proceedings of the project titled “French and Polish Heritage of Former Hospitals, Sanatoriums, Abbeys, and Schools Transformed into Public or Private Arts and Culture Centers: A Comparative Analysis”. The research encompasses several in-situ case studies, the findings of which are drawn from a comparative analysis. The consortium, consisting of five partners, includes the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, the Institute of European Studies at University Paris 8, Université de Franche-Comté, the ENCC (European Network of Cultural Centres) network in Brussels, and the ACCR (*Association des Centres culturels de rencontre*) network in Paris.

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Our research question was formulated as follows, *How can the heritage sites be well transitioning to new functions and highlight successful preservation efforts, keeping historical memory and fostering local cultural education?*

Our research aims to understand and evaluate the effectiveness of participatory governance models in the revitalization of cultural heritage, focusing on the case studies of Sokołowsko in Poland and the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region in France. The study seeks to determine how the engagement of local communities and the application of participatory management methods contribute to the preservation and revitalization of cultural heritage sites, and what factors influence the success of these initiatives. It hypothesizes that participatory governance enhances the effectiveness of cultural heritage revitalization by strengthening social bonds and involving local stakeholders in the decision-making process. Furthermore, it posits that differences in institutional and historical contexts between Poland and France affect the approaches and outcomes of heritage revitalization. The study also explores the hypothesis that sustainable cultural heritage revitalization through participatory models requires financial support from diverse sources. To address these objectives, the research will undertake a comparative analysis of the management and revitalization processes in Sokołowsko and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, examining participatory, financial, and institutional aspects. Additionally, the study aims to identify key success factors and barriers in the cultural heritage revitalization process in both cases, providing insights into the strategies and practices that contribute to the long-term sustainability of such initiatives.

A case study methodology was employed, analyzing specific examples of heritage revitalization in Poland (Sokołowsko) and France (the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region), including the desk search, literature review, comparative study

analysis, critical review of the materials provided by the promoters of the subjected projects organized in France and in Poland, and this methodology included document analysis, interviews with key stakeholders, and field observations. A critical aspect of the study was examining how heritage management approaches can support local communities and contribute to sustainable cultural development. The study's data included qualitative and quantitative information derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis. These data were subsequently coded and analyzed using a thematic approach, allowing for the identification of key themes related to participatory heritage management, adaptive reuse of spaces, and local community engagement. The collected data were stored on the Jagiellonian University servers, following data protection guidelines and safeguarded against unauthorized access. Ethical considerations were paramount in conducting this research. All interviews were conducted with the participants' consent, who were informed about the purpose of the study and how the data would be used. Participant anonymity, as the research was specifically highlighting the work of prominent cultural professionals in their regions, was not maintained. Those professionals were mentioned explicitly in the acknowledgement section of the text, while the data were processed in compliance with applicable data protection regulations. The study aimed not only to analyze current practices but also to support the communities studied by providing recommendations for sustainable heritage management and promoting local culture.

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Heritage Management: Evolving Approaches to Temporal Interpretation

Heritage management has gained recognition as an increasingly intricate field of research. The evolution of heritage management practices over the years mirrors the

shifting relationship of society with heritage [Hall, McArthur 1998] and changing perspectives on what constitutes heritage. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Jean-Philippe Lecat, the French Minister for Culture and Communication, proposed a comprehensive approach to heritage.¹ He articulated that cultural heritage encompasses all remnants of human endeavours throughout history, positioning the human being as the central figure rather than the object, place, tradition, or language. Heritage management has also evolved in tandem with changes in the temporal interpretation of heritage.

Today, cultural heritage is regarded as a temporal phenomenon [Smolarkiewicz 2012: 71], seen through the lens of three temporal dimensions: it makes the past present and is intended to serve the future. Heritage is no longer confined to the past; it acts as a conduit for shaping the future [Herzfeld 1991]. Consequently, when discussing heritage, one is referring to the values, attitudes, stories, and histories that past generations have celebrated and left behind. These elements bear witness to the authenticity of the past, but they also address contemporary questions: What does heritage mean today? How significant is it? How does it influence the present, and how can it benefit the current generation? What lessons can it impart to them? Furthermore, there is a consideration of the long-term advantages that heritage can offer to the present generation while preserving its potential to fulfil the needs and aspirations of future generations [Kobylinski 2011: 40].

Therefore, when examining the paradigm of multivocality and heritage interpretation [Gawel 2016] or the management of heritage, it is crucial to consider the functions it performs in the present, as well as the role it will play in the future [Ashworth 2015]. This perspective assesses the extent to which heritage can serve contemporary society and how it can be harnessed and cultivated for the benefit of future generations. This tri-temporality framework remains a contemporary key to describing and managing heritage. It has evolved beyond being a mere testament to the past and has become a resource that serves the needs of both the present and the future.

By assuming responsibility for the safeguarding of heritage, individuals are essentially safeguarding memory about themselves – preserving their history, identity, values, and attitudes. In this manner, they function as conduits or intergenerational transmitters and become active participants in the process of inheritance [Ashworth 2015; 13].

UNESCO's evolving paradigms, exemplified by initiatives like the UNESCO Culture 2030 indicators², emphasize integrating environmental policies and fostering civic engagement in heritage preservation. This commitment stems from

¹ <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00628926/document> (viewed 24.01.2025.)

² <https://whc.unesco.org/en/culture2030indicators/> (viewed 24.01.2025.)

earlier discussions within UNESCO and aligns with the concept of sustainable development. The Budapest Declaration on World Heritage in 2002 marked a significant moment, introducing objectives such as credibility, conservation, capacity-building, communication, while the focus on the communities was integrated in this approach in 2007, at the moment of the 31st session of the World Heritage Committee held in New Zealand. This expansion of strategic objectives anticipated the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. The “Voices of Culture” report in 2015 focused on participatory governance in cultural heritage, offering recommendations to empower heritage in various policy domains. In 2018, the European Year of Cultural Heritage highlighted inclusivity and participation as key pillars, reflected in both policy and practice. Community-led local development is gaining traction, emphasizing a redefined civic participation that addresses social responsibility for cultural heritage within specific communities.

Considering the fact that cultural heritage is fundamentally a social construct [Gilmour 2006], it becomes evident that effective heritage management adopts a humanistic and participatory approach. This approach places individuals at the core of the process, harnessing their actions and creativity [Kostera 2015: 60; Barańska 2013]. It takes into account the needs of those referred to as recipient-stakeholders [Purchla 2005: 22], denoting any individual interested in the management and transmission of heritage, who resides in and interacts with the locale [Szmygin 2008: 268]. Such individuals are individuals for whom heritage carries intrinsic value and significance [Oevermann 2015: 10], including both current and former residents. They form part of a community that identifies specific heritage as the source and embodiment of values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions that hold profound importance for that particular community.

Our research underscores that the participatory management of cultural heritage is the most effective approach. In a similar vein, Zbigniew Kobylinski [2011: 12] contends that participatory management, involving local communities in development strategy and heritage management, is imperative for sustainable development-based management. This management approach is founded on principles of cooperation and interdependence, emphasizing learning and embracing responsibility [Oblój 2010] for the preservation of places and heritage. It fosters a supportive environment for the care of the past, creating safe zones where heritage is safeguarded. Furthermore, it adopts a multi-perspectival stance, showing respect for diversity and embracing a dialogical nature that acknowledges the central values of local society and its heritage: the subjectivity and dignity.

Community participation can take on both indirect and direct forms. What is essential is that the local community exerts influence on the site or the organization responsible for its management, while concurrently, the site itself holds the potential

to impact the community. Moreover, the primary recipients of transformations within a heritage site are the members of the local community. Consequently, it becomes the prerogative of the local community to delineate the concept of heritage and actively engage in its social rejuvenation and transformation.

Participatory Governance and the Revival of Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of the Brehmer Sanatorium in Rural Poland

Participatory governance of cultural heritage has the potential to become a pressing concern, particularly in the context of rescuing and preserving heritage sites. This issue is especially relevant in rural areas of Poland, where a notable number of abandoned and demolished heritage sites are in need of revitalization. These sites are in search of dedicated artists and cultural stakeholders who can breathe new life into them. An illustrative example is the “Sokołowsko International Laboratory of Culture”,¹ situated in the mountainous and rural region of Lower Silesia, Poland, within the premises of the former Brehmer Sanatorium.

The town now known as Sokołowsko traces its history back to around 1400 when it was named Görbersdorf. In 1855, it became home to the world’s first specialized tuberculosis sanatorium, pioneering innovative treatment methods. Dr. Brehmer led efforts to expand the hydrotherapy facility, constructing key buildings like the spa and guesthouses, while architect Edwin Oppler designed them. Dr. Brehmer’s residence underwent expansion in the mid-1870s, and a new addition, the *New Kurhaus*, was built in the late 1870s. The entire sanatorium complex underwent interior renovations in 1882, modernizing facilities and preparing 303 rooms for guests. Dr. Brehmer collaborated closely with Professor Alfred Sokołowski, and in 1945, the town was officially renamed in his honor. In 2007, the former Brehmer Sanatorium changed ownership, leading to the establishment of the In Situ Contemporary Art Foundation. This foundation aimed to raise funds for the comprehensive restoration of the sanatorium complex following a fire in 2005, to revitalize it as an International Cultural Laboratory.

The foundation’s name, “In Situ”, meaning “in place” in Latin, reflects its philosophy of organizing events and exhibitions to transform spaces into art venues and hubs for social engagement. Led by founders Bożena Biskupska and Zuzanna Fogtt, the foundation combines high-quality artistic activities with a commitment to preserving heritage, including the Brehmer Sanatorium complex and the historic theater building in Sokołowsko. It also houses an extensive repository of materials related to Polish film director Krzysztof Kieślowski (who used to live in Sokołowsko for ca. 10 years), further demonstrating its dedication to preserving cultural heritage

¹ <http://www.sokolowsko.org/pl/> (viewed 24.01.2025.)

and promoting artistic endeavors. The In Situ Foundation organizes participatory activities, including the “Sanatorium of Sound” and a film festival called “Homage à Kiesłowski” film festival, attracting artists and engaging audiences while facilitating knowledge exchange among institutions and NGOs in Sokółowsko. However, sustaining these efforts requires significant financial support. While private donors, NGOs, and local stakeholders are passionate, their voluntary involvement often leads to burnout and dependence on public funding, making the management model non-self-sufficient and prone to delays.

To ensure the preservation and restoration of heritage sites, new funding streams and business models must be identified promptly to address the urgency of the situation, as underlined by both managers. One positive step forward has been the Foundation’s declaration of intent to establish a hotel with a commercial orientation within a portion of the Sanatorium, as according to Zuzanna Fogtt, this would immensely support the development of the site. Nonetheless, it is essential to acknowledge that this measure, on its own, may not be sufficient to sustain the entire project, to function as the Art-house, by the vision of Bożena Biskupska. Therefore, careful consideration of diversifying funding sources and devising innovative business models should be a central focus for the continued success of this heritage site.

The update to the story about Sokółowsko comes in one year after the completion of the study, in September 2024, when the disastrous flood have devastated a newly renovated building of the “Kino Zdrowie” cinema, and affected the main sanatorium building.¹ Therefore, as those new challenges have been facing the promoters and owners of the site, they have decided to run a fundraising campaign to rescue and recover the damages. The business model including e. g. the hotel discussed previously in the text, would also support the financial stability of this very demanding heritage site.

Cases in France: Creative Ecosystem in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region

The comparative research field, the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region in France, provides an insightful illustration of both similarities and distinctions with regions that share urban, rural, and mountainous characteristics, such as Lower Silesia in Poland. Furthermore, the construction of sanatoria in remote mountainous areas in both regions, facilitated by the presence of fresh and therapeutic air, adds another layer of commonality. In both cases, the overarching concept of art as a unifying force within society holds true.

The first case study, *Le Bon Attrait*, a two-story house built in 1949 in Hauteville-Lompnes, was acquired by artist Raphaël Charpentier’s family in 2022. Initially

¹ <https://www.instagram.com/fundacjainsitu> (viewed 24.01.2025.)

serving as accommodations for hospital staff and tuberculosis patients in long-term remission, it currently functions as both a residence and a small art gallery on the second floor, with plans for a future Bed & Breakfast facility. Raphael and his family embrace principles of slow and sustainable living while promoting community engagement through the arts. Their aim is to foster participatory governance of cultural heritage, encouraging discussions and activities that draw people away from mainstream entertainment platforms toward meaningful interactions centered on local heritage and volunteering. In discussing the societal gaps, sensitivities, and fundamental competencies, Raphael underscored the deficiency in comprehensive education, particularly in the domains of arts, culture, and values. He emphasized that only through a well-rounded education can we actively counteract the encroaching tide of ignorance.

Within this local ecosystem, which encompasses Hauteville, *La Montagne Magique* art space, and the *Centre d'Art Contemporain de Lacoux*, a striking synergy emerges. Artists and curators within this network exhibit a deep mutual understanding and offer steadfast support to one another. The magnetic allure of the locale, as elucidated by Raphael, prompted his establishment of *Le Bon Attrait* as an Art Villa, fully aware that he would be surrounded by a community of creative, open-minded individuals, creating a harmonious coexistence with the rhythms of local life. Raphael is committed to further refining the business model of *La Montagne Magique*, with the aim of increasing visibility and sales opportunities for the artists working there.

A short drive up the hills in Hauteville, located approximately one hundred kilometers from Lyon, reveals the presence of the final building nestled amidst a lush forest – *La Montagne Magique*, a private cultural project in the process of development. This edifice, formerly utilized as both a sanatorium and a nursery school, is situated within the renowned mountain resort of Hauteville-Lompnes. Positioned on the elevated Plateau d'Hauteville within the Bugey massif, its nomenclature is borrowed from the famous novel by Thomas Mann. *La Montagne Magique* has become an integral part of the local historical landscape, operating as a cultural hub that synergistically fosters the convergence of contemporary art, creative expression, and craftsmanship. The property was acquired by a consortium of professionals in April 2019 for the establishment of their artistic workshops. This collective comprises four contemporary artists, a craft brewer, a metal enameller, a textile designer, and a comic book author-illustrator.

The formal inauguration of these spaces took place during the European Heritage Days on September 17, 2022, attracting over 600 visitors¹ and marking a significant

¹ <https://montagnemagique.fr/> (viewed 24.01.2025.)

milestone in the project's development. Through various studios and initiatives, including exhibitions and residencies, the venue revitalizes local heritage through cultural means. This model, exemplified by *La Montagne Magique*, offers valuable insights for international knowledge exchange, as detailed to us by cultural advisor, Nicolas Bertrand, who supported the organization of the onsite research in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region in France. Similarly, the *Centre d'Art Contemporain de Lacoux* (CACL), founded in 1971, thrives in the Plateau d'Hauteville despite its small population. Director Sophie Pouille emphasizes CACL's engagement with territorial issues and the natural environment, leveraging its unique setting to foster artistic expression.

Another example and case study analyzed is the Ambronay Cultural Centre (ACC)¹, situated in Ambronay and a member of the ACCR network since 2004, resides within the historic confines of the former Ambronay Abbey, founded in the early 9th century by Barnard, a former military officer under Charlemagne, the Abbey of Ambronay was attached to the Rule of St Benedict.

Following reforms in the 17th century, the abbey transitioned to the jurisdiction of the Congregation of the Benedictines of Saint-Maur, embracing stricter monastic practices. Post-French Revolution, the abbey underwent various transformations, serving as a parish church and assuming roles such as barns, barracks, and social housing.

Originating from the 1980 Festival of Early Music, the ACC has evolved into the *Ambronay Centre Culturel de Rencontre*. It facilitates interactions between artists, the public, and partners, promoting creativity, innovation, and knowledge transfer locally and internationally. Initiatives like the "European Emerging Ensembles" project support young artists' professional integration and public engagement with culture. The Festival's audience comprises mostly regional attendees, with strong participation from neighboring communities. The ACC maintains ties with local schools, particularly during the Annual Festival, despite the suboptimal timing. The upcoming 50th anniversary of the Festival in 2028 promises a special edition crafted in collaboration with audiences and the local community.

The visionary leadership of Isabelle Battioni, the current Director of ACC, who previously headed the ACCR network in Paris, aligns the institution with the core values of the network. ACC aims to be a model of community-engaged cultural entity, where both programming and heritage hold equal significance. While emphasizing the community involvement over isolated activities, the ACC collaborates with satellite initiatives through participatory practices, incorporating NGOs, inhabitants and especially local leaders, who may organize smaller festivals to

¹ <https://www.accr-europe.org/en/network/Members/ambronay-ccr/> (viewed 24.01.2025.)

promote cultural activities of the ACC and exchange audience feedback. Dynamic territorial mapping ensures continual updates, fostering a collaborative environment. With a locally rooted team of 19 professionals, ACC's shift to a community-centric approach underscores its commitment to supporting regional economy through promotion of local products.

In conclusion, the ACC represents an intriguing model of community development through the lens of heritage, where society finds a strong reference point. Looking ahead, the ACC may consider the possibility of introducing programs designed to engage with young professionals. The provision of a co-working space within the venue is a prospective venture. Additionally, given that art residencies are conducted periodically, there is potential to make more regular use of the available rooms by establishing a Bed & Breakfast facility, further enhancing the institution's offerings and resource utilization.

Connections between the cases from Poland and France – comparative analysis

The relationship between the Polish example of Sokołowsko and the French case studies in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, such as *La Montagne Magique* and the Ambronnay Cultural Centre, reveals both commonalities and differences in approaches to heritage revitalization. Both cases underscore the importance of culture as a driving force in the revitalization of heritage sites. In Sokołowsko, the In Situ Foundation has successfully transformed the former Brehmer Sanatorium into a vibrant cultural hub, paralleling the transformation of “La Montagne Magique” from a former sanatorium into an artistic space and the integration of cultural activities within the historic Ambronnay Abbey. A significant aspect of the Polish and French examples is the emphasis on community engagement and participatory governance. In Sokołowsko, the involvement of local and international participants in festivals and art events fosters a strong connection between the community and the revitalized site. Similarly, in the French cases, cultural events and educational initiatives are crucial in fostering local community involvement, thereby promoting a sense of ownership and participation in heritage preservation.

However, these projects also face challenges related to sustainability, particularly in securing long-term funding. Both Sokołowsko and the French sites rely on private donors, NGOs, and local stakeholders to support their initiatives, highlighting the necessity of diversifying and innovating funding strategies to ensure the continued success of these heritage projects. Despite these commonalities, there are notable differences between the Polish and French examples. The French cases, particularly the Ambronnay Cultural Centre, benefit from more substantial institutional support

and are often integrated into larger networks, such as the *Association des Centres Culturels de Rencontre* (ACCR). This level of support contrasts with the more localized and grassroots-driven efforts seen in Sokołowsko, where the revitalization is led by a smaller group of dedicated stakeholders.

Additionally, the historical context and cultural significance of these sites differ. Sokołowsko's heritage is closely tied to its pioneering role in tuberculosis treatment and its subsequent transformation into a cultural center, while the French sites often possess a broader historical context, such as the medieval origins of the Ambronay Abbey, which adds another layer of cultural significance. The approaches to adaptive reuse also vary between the sites. In Sokołowsko, the focus is on creating an international cultural laboratory, whereas the future sustainable financial model is foreseen to be based on the boutique hotel in the premises of the sanatorium. The same considerations are present in the French examples, which often integrate commercial activities, such as establishing a Bed & Breakfast or hosting broader public events, which helps generate revenue and contribute to the sites' sustainability. The relationship between the Polish and French examples of heritage revitalization illustrates that, while there are shared principles, such as the central role of culture and the importance of community engagement, the specific historical, cultural, and institutional contexts significantly shape the approaches and outcomes. By comparing these cases, valuable insights can be gained into how different regions can learn from each other's experiences to enhance the sustainability and impact of their heritage projects.

Summary

This study has explored the critical role of participatory governance in the revitalization of cultural heritage sites, focusing on the case studies of Sokołowsko in Poland and the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region in France. Through a detailed examination of these sites, the research highlights how cultural heritage can catalyze local development, social cohesion, and sustainable cultural practices and as referred to the temporal interpretation of the heritage, all of the presented cases, while deeply rooted in the heritage of the past, are conduit for shaping the future. The findings indicate that successful heritage revitalization requires a multifaceted approach that integrates cultural, social, and economic strategies. The study underscores the importance of involving local communities in the preservation and management of heritage sites. It reveals that when communities are actively engaged, they develop a stronger sense of ownership, which is crucial for the sustainability of these projects. The research also identifies the challenges faced by heritage sites, including financial constraints, limited institutional support, and the need for specialized training and

cooperation among stakeholders. The authors of the text have been elaborating the following recommendations: 1) to ensure the long-term success of heritage revitalization projects, it is essential to foster greater community involvement. This can be achieved through participatory governance models that empower local residents to take an active role in decision-making processes; 2) given the financial challenges often associated with heritage preservation, it is recommended to explore diverse funding streams. This could include public-private partnerships, crowdfunding, and the development of revenue-generating activities such as cultural tourism and creative industries; 3) heritage sites should be adapted for contemporary uses that respect their historical significance while making them relevant to today's communities. This could involve transforming these sites into cultural hubs, educational centers, or community spaces; 4) to address the gap in specialized knowledge and skills, it is crucial to provide training and resources for local stakeholders. This will enhance their ability to manage heritage sites effectively and sustainably; 5) establishing networks among similar heritage sites, both regionally and internationally, can facilitate knowledge exchange, foster synergies, and contribute to revitalization efforts. Collaboration with NGOs, cultural institutions, and other stakeholders should be encouraged to share the best practices and innovative approaches; 6) it is important to raise awareness among local policymakers about the value of cultural heritage in regional development. Incentives should be provided to encourage the integration of heritage preservation into broader development strategies.

Heritage revitalization is not merely about preserving the past; it is about building a sustainable future where culture plays a central role in community life. By adopting participatory governance models, diversifying funding sources, and promoting adaptive reuse, heritage sites can become vibrant centers of cultural and social activity. The insights gained from this study offer valuable guidance for policymakers, practitioners, and communities engaged in the challenging yet rewarding task of heritage preservation and revitalization. Addressing contemporary challenges like climate change and societal transformations now requires participatory processes, innovative heritage preservation approaches, and scholarly research to engage audiences. International partnerships enhance this effort, fostering knowledge exchange and improving cultural activities' quality. Overall, community-led development and heritage preservation are vital in addressing present challenges and shaping future societal progress.

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