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THE EUROPEAN APPROACH TO CULTURE: THE EUROPEAN HERITAGE LABEL*

Abstract: Cultural heritage is a topic with many dimensions, often complementary to each other. Even within the European Union, the topic is developed from different perspectives, partly because the European Union's involvement in the field of culture has developed gradually over the years and with different actions.

This chapter, after briefly outlining some of the different European initiatives, aims to provide an analysis of one of the measures adopted by the European Union: the European Heritage Label. This is a rather recent initiative that shows how the member States are fully aware of the potential but also of the limitations there are in managing heritage at European level; for this specific reason, in the Decision by which the European Heritage Label was adopted, there is an explicit reference to the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention, a crucial tool in this field.

Starting from a more general approach inherent to the label as a whole, the selected sites in Italy will then be analysed specifically: the Alcide De Gasperi House Museum, the Fort of Cadine, the archaeological area of Ostia Antica and finally the island of Ventotene. Through the study of these heritages, it is possible to have a tangible and practical approach to what is considered cultural heritage within the European Union and which therefore deserves to be protected and disseminated.

1. *Introduction*

Cultural heritage is a theme that has many dimensions, often complementary to each other. Even within the European Union, the topic is developed from different points of view.

The main purpose of this chapter is to analyse the Decision n. 1194/2011/UE¹ with which the European Union established the

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¹ Decision No 1194/2011/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 November 2011 establishing a European Union action for the European Heritage Label.

European Heritage Label which is one of the European Union's central heritage initiatives.

The involvement of the European Union in the field of culture has been developed over the years in a gradual way and with different actions. In the first period, the attention of the European Community was focused mainly on the creation of a common market within which, however, there was no specific discipline for such particular goods as cultural heritage. The only instrument of protection provided was article 36 EEC² (now Art. 36 TFEU) which allowed a derogation from the prohibition to impose restrictions on imports and exports between the Member Countries, for reasons related to the preservation of national artistic, historical, or archaeological heritage.

Based on this starting point, the Court of Justice of the European Union intervened³, balancing the free movement of goods and the protection of cultural assets, preventing any abuse of the cultural exception provided for by Art. 36 mentioned above.

It was only in 1992 that the Maastricht Treaty introduced, in Art. 128 EC⁴ (now Art. 167 TFEU), European competence in the cultural sphere, establishing that the EU contributes to the development of the cultures of the Member States while respecting national diversity and encouraging cooperation between the Member States.

Another way in which the European Union has intervened relates to external relations. The cooperation established for years be-

² ECC Treaty, Art. 36.

³ See, for instance, Judgment of the Court of 10 December 1968. Commission of the European Communities v Italian Republic Case 7-68; Judgment of the Court of 11 July 1985. Cinéthèque SA and others v Fédération nationale des cinémas français. Reference for a preliminary ruling: Tribunal de grande instance de Paris - France. Distribution of films in the form of video recordings - National prohibitions. Joined cases 60 and 61/84; Judgment of the Court (Fifth Chamber) of 4 May 1993. Federación de Distribuidores Cinematográficos v Estado Español and Unión de Productores de Cine y Televisión. Reference for a preliminary ruling: Tribunal Supremo - Spain. National rules intended to promote the distribution of national films. Case C-17/92.

⁴ EC Treaty, Art. 128. See R. ADAM, A. TIZZANO, *Manuale di diritto dell'Unione europea*, Giappichelli, Torino, 2020³.

tween the European Union and UNESCO⁵ is still very close. Often various UNESCO initiatives have directly or indirectly influenced European ones. It is precisely for this reason that I have decided to analyse the European Heritage Label in this chapter. In the following paragraphs, I'll briefly explain how European Union decided to manage the cultural policy in general and in particular focusing on the European Heritage Label.

2. *The European Cultural Policy*

The process of developing cultural heritage as an EU policy area has not only been EU-led progress. Some Member States and European transnational organizations have driven cultural heritage to the top of the EU policy agenda; due to the interest of individual Member States, it became easier for the Commission to foresee measures impacting cultural heritage.

Multi-level governance characterizes EU cultural policy⁶. This logic of multi-level government creates a network of connections between actors at different levels that is central to European policy⁷. The problem with this approach, as can be easily understood,

⁵ L. PALADINI, *I rapporti tra Unione europea ed UNESCO*, in *Tutela e valorizzazione del patrimonio culturale mondiale nel diritto internazionale*, edited by E. BARONCINI, Bononia University Press, Bologna, 2021, pp. 45-81; L. PALADINI, *La cooperazione tra l'UNESCO e l'UE: aspetti istituzionali e materiali*, in *DPCE online*, 2020.

⁶ See A. BENZ, *The European Union as a Loosely Coupled Multi-Level System*, in *Handbook on Multi-Level Governance*, edited by H. ENDERLEIN, S. WÄLTI, M. ZÜRN, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 2010, pp. 214-226; S. PIATTONI, *The Theory of Multi-Level Governance: Conceptual, Empirical and Normative Challenges*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009; S. PIATTONI, *Multi-Level Governance: A Historical and Conceptual Analysis*, in *Journal of European Integration*, 31, 2009, 2, pp. 163-180.

⁷ See Council conclusions on participatory governance of cultural heritage (2014/C 463/01); European Commission. *Commission Staff Working Document: European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage*. SWD (2018) 491 final, 5 December 2018, European Commission, Brussels.

is that it creates very fragmented systems also due to the lack of exclusive competence of the Union in cultural matters. It is then necessary to find the right compromise that allows this approach to develop without creating excessive imbalances between the various Countries involved.

Cultural policies are not the only way in which the European Union manages heritage. It also does so through other social and political objectives. In the EU, the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture initiates cultural policy development. Still, numerous actors, such as international organizations involved in culture and institutions based on research and information sharing, are engaged in defining its agenda⁸.

Lähdesmäki⁹ identified five central focuses among European objectives: strengthening European cohesion and integration¹⁰; increasing the visibility of the EU and its branding through heritage; educating young people to become pro-European; extending EU governance to culture and heritage; supporting the economy to culture and heritage, and support economic development with tourism, creative industries, and regional development. This focus on the social sphere in EU cultural heritage policy is in line with the Faro Convention of the Council of Europe¹¹. Also, for this reason it can be said that the Council of Europe has an important impact on the development and characterisation of EU policy discourse.

The purpose of the European Union's role is to assist and complement the actions of Member States in preserving and promoting Europe's cultural heritage. The European Commission has developed several policies and programs relevant to this goal. It also

⁸ P. DEWAY, "Power in European Union Cultural Policy", in *International Cultural Policies and Power*, edited by P. SINGH, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010, pp. 113-126.

⁹ T. LÄHDESMÄKI T., *The EU'S Explicit and Implicit Heritage Politics*, in *European Societies*, 16, 2014, 3, pp. 401-421.

¹⁰ O. CALLIGARO, *Negotiating Europe: The EU Promotion of Europeanness since the 1950s*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013.

¹¹ Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention, 2005).

supports and promotes policy collaboration between the Member States and cultural heritage stakeholders.

As mentioned in the introduction after the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty¹² a European cultural competence was pre-viewed. Hence, the various programs have become much less fragmented. In the years 2000 and 2010, the EU introduced many new initiatives to encourage a narrative of Europe's common history and cultural heritage¹³. The first program based on Art. 151 of the Maastricht Treaty was the Kaleidoscope program¹⁴, which promoted cultural cooperation through exchanges. Other programs were then adopted, such as Ariane (1997-1999)¹⁵ for support in the book sector and Raphael (1997-2000)¹⁶ for support of the European cultural heritage.

At the beginning of the 2000s, a structured program called Culture 2000¹⁷ was finally envisaged to increase cultural dialogue, the dissemination of culture, and European cultural heritage, within which the European Capitals of Culture¹⁸ measure was planned.

Already since the 1990s, the Union has engaged in closer co-operation with other international actors. An example of this is

¹² Treaty of European Union (92/C 191/01).

¹³ T. LÄHDESMÄKI, V.L.A. ČEGINSKAS, S. KAASIK-KROGERUS, K. MÄKINEN, J. TURUNEN, *Creating and Governing Cultural Heritage in the European Union: The European Heritage Label*, Routledge, London and New York, 2020.

¹⁴ Decision No 719/96/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 March 1996 establishing a programme to support artistic and cultural activities having a European dimension (Kaleidoscope).

¹⁵ Decision No 2085/97/EC establishing a support programme, including translation, in the field of books and reading (Ariane Programme).

¹⁶ Decision No 2228/97/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 October 1997 establishing a Community action programme in the field of cultural heritage (the Raphael programme).

¹⁷ Launched in 2000, the Culture 2000 programme ran until 2006, with a budget of € 236.4 million dedicated to promoting a common cultural area, characterised by its cultural diversity and shared cultural heritage.

¹⁸ See more at <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture>.

the European Heritage Awards launched in 2002 by the European Commission and administered by Europa Nostra¹⁹.

As early as 2006, the European Union has been working to introduce what is now the European Heritage Label, which will be analysed in the next paragraph. Among all these measures, the European Heritage Label is an essential step toward coordinated cultural actions by the Commission.

Since 2007 a global approach has been given to the programs, through the Culture 2007-2013 program²⁰ which was intended to support the transnational mobility of artistic heritage and operators in the sector.

An important project developed by the EU in 2008 and still active today is the creation of the European digital library: Europeana²¹. Europeana Collections provides access to more than 50 million digitized items, including books, music, and works of art. Europeana aims to be a common access point to Europe's cultural heritage by creating a space where all expressions of Europe's cultural and scientific heritage can be integrated. This project demonstrates how the European Union must set its priorities according to the needs of the moment. It has to show a strong ability to adapt to the challenges in front of it.

The European Commission declared, in its 2014 Communication Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe²², that heritage preservation is a shared responsibility. For this reason, especially in recent years, the EU has sought to develop policies that also include local communities.

¹⁹ Europa Nostra is today recognised as the most representative heritage organisation in Europe with members from over 40 countries. The awards identify and promote best practices in conserving and enhancing cultural heritage.

²⁰ For more information visit <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/resources/creative-europe-previous-programmes/culture-programme-2007-2013>.

²¹ Council conclusions of 20 November 2008 on the European digital library EUROPEANA (2008/C 319/07).

²² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee of the Regions *Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe* /* COM/2014/0477 final */.

In 2019, the European Commission's Informal Expert Group on Cultural Heritage was established to maintain the outstanding multi-stakeholder cooperation and policy dialogue achieved during the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage²³. The objective of the expert group is to promote public policies that ensure the long-term value and sustainability of Europe's cultural heritage based on an integrated approach.

It is essential to remember that all the initiatives now mentioned, which show some of the many interventions of the EU in this field, must be conciliated with the lack of exclusive competence in cultural matters. The EU can only intervene in support of the Member States. On the contrary, an area where there is a competence that allows for a more incisive intervention is the economic one. For this reason, it has often been necessary to balance the importance of economic issues with the relevance of cultural heritage.

When we deal with the cultural sphere, it is now natural to also refer to various social aspects mentioned earlier. In fact, many of them have long been introduced into the dynamics of cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage is seen as a social process and as such must be open to change and is the result of social conflicts. In fact, when we talk about heritage, we are referring by nature to something that can be different even because of the various actors involved who can give different readings to the same asset.

In its policies, the EU has therefore sought to inculcate an idea based on common values and narratives of its past that can help build European identity. In doing so, it has tried to keep as much as possible in a position of continuity with the European Economic Community which, even if from a different perspective, had taken an interest in cultural issues.

²³ The slogan of the program was 'Our heritage: where the past meets the future'.

Increasingly, in its policies, the EU has been appealing to what can be called a ‘feeling of belonging’²⁴, aware that heritage is capable of affecting people’s consciences and emotional spheres.

It can therefore be seen that, although in the early days of community development, issues related to these topics were mostly considered linked to economic aspects, today the perspective has changed.

It is crucial nowadays to be able to create and strengthen the bond between citizens and the Union itself. It is believed that this is also possible through cultural issues by being close to the citizens, their needs, and their heritage that represents a part of their history. Heritage is perceived as something open to change and struggle²⁵.

In discourses referring to the cultural sphere, the community of individuals is often referred to in various policies and discourses. In particular, the 2005 Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society²⁶ introduced the concept of a ‘heritage community’ according to which every individual should be encouraged to participate in the process of identifying, protecting, and preserving heritage. It is individuals who add value to heritage and this aspect certainly cannot be ignored.

The European Union is also an important actor at the international level. For this reason, it is appropriate to underline that in the field of external relations an important collaboration has been established with UNESCO. Even if no act has been adopted, encom-

²⁴ A. JAKUBOWSKI, *Cultural Heritage in the European Union. A Critical Inquiry into Law and Policy*, in *Studies in Intercultural Human Rights*, edited by A. JAKUBOWSKI, K. HAUSLER, F. FIORENTINI, Leida, 2019.

²⁵ See R. HARRISON, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, Routledge, New York, 2013; B. GRAHAM, P. HOWARD, ‘Heritage and identity’, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, edited by B. GRAHAM, P. HOWARDS, Aldershot and Burlington, Ashgate, 2008, pp. 1-15; T. LÄHDESMÄKI, S. THOMAS, Y. ZHU, *Introduction: heritage and scale*, in *Politics of Scale. New Directions in Critical Heritage Studies*, edited by T. LÄHDESMÄKI, S. THOMAS, Y. ZHU, Berghahn’s Books, New York, 2019, pp. 1-18; L. SMITH, *Uses of Heritage*, Routledge, London, 2006.

²⁶ Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CETS No. 199)

passing the modalities of the collaboration, this dates to the sixties when initially there was an exchange of letters, followed by an exchange of notes, and then the *Dispositions applicables à la coopération entre la Commission des communautés européennes et l'UNESCO* were defined²⁷.

The link between the two institutions was reinforced with the accession of the EEC to the 1976 Protocol to the UNESCO Agreement for the importation of objects of an educational, scientific, or cultural nature of 1950²⁸. From the very beginning of the collaboration, the EU has encouraged its member countries to pursue the goals set by UNESCO. An example of this is the fact that the Commission's Recommendation of 20 December 1974²⁹ to the Member States on the Protection of Architectural and Natural Heritage recognizes the central role of the 1972 UNESCO Convention.

A significant expression of this cooperation is the European accession to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions of 2005³⁰.

Although the EU cannot technically be a UNESCO member, it has the status of an advanced observer thanks to which it can take an active part in the work of this organization as was the case for the 2005 Convention. In 2012 the Memorandum of Understanding concerning the establishment of a partnership between the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Secretariat and its subsidiary bodies and the European Union was adopted to renew the willingness to collaborate³¹. Only a year after the

²⁷ See UNESCO. Executive Board, 147th session, 1995, available on <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000101482>, see also L. PALADINI, *op cit*.

²⁸ Council Decision of 8 May 1979 on the conclusion of the Protocol to the Agreement on the importation of educational, scientific, and cultural materials, Official Journal of the European Communities, L 134, 31 May 1979.

²⁹ Commission Recommendation of 20 December 1974 to Member States concerning the protection of the architectural and natural heritage (75/65/EEC).

³⁰ Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (Paris, 20 October 2005).

³¹ Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the Establishment of a Partnership between the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organi-

Memorandum was signed, the two organisations jointly issued a press release³² renewing their intention to cooperate and emphasising the importance of their joint action.

3. *The Decision n. 1194/2011/EU Establishing a European Union Action for the European Heritage Label*

As mentioned earlier, the European Union needed to answer to several crises that have marked it. An attempt to respond has also been made with various social policies. These policies are closely linked to the economy and the development of the individual market.

An early reference to these policies dates back to the 1960s. In particular, the European Social Charter³³ guarantees fundamental social and economic rights and common standards of justice in a complementary manner to the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights³⁴.

These aspects have been included from time to time in the cultural policy, which not only aims to promote the sector but also to enhance certain goals related to European integration.

In the new European Agenda for Culture³⁵, the Commission has identified the social dimension as one of three strategic objectives with which to harness the power of culture and cultural diversity to amplify social cohesion and well-being.

zation Secretariat and its Subsidiary Bodies and the European Union (Paris, 8 October 2012).

³² The detailed content of the press release can be found at <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-european-union-working-together-change>.

³³ Council of Europe, European Social Charter, 18.X.1961, ETS (European Treaty Series), 35.

³⁴ ECHR, Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950.

³⁵ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A New European Agenda for Culture*, Brussels, 22.5.2018, COM (2018) 267 final, European Commission, Brussels.

Cultural sites and institutions have the opportunity to create and represent a more equitable society through the inclusion of different groups in their exhibitions, trying to address a diverse audience and making all these people part of their activities including decision-making. There are many recent EU documents and acts in which there are explicit references to pluralism, accessibility, and participatory interaction and this highlights how heritage can without any problem strengthen the European social dimension³⁶. From this perspective, the European Heritage Label is a key measure with which to implement these objectives. This initiative seeks to increase European citizens', especially young people's, understanding of Europe's history, its creation, and their common but diverse cultural heritage. This also fully reflects the EU motto: «Unity in Diversity».

As mentioned earlier, the initial idea of this label dates to 2006 when the French Minister of Culture, with the support of his Spanish and Hungarian colleagues, initiated this new measure in the form of an intergovernmental scheme. Despite some criticism due to the most practical aspects, the potential of the idea was recognized. In 2008, the Council adopted conclusions to turn the idea into an official EU action. The decision on the initiative was finally taken in 2011.

As explicitly stated on the official website of the European Commission, the European Heritage Label was introduced with the aim of reviving the European narrative and the history behind it³⁷. Therefore, sites are selected according to their symbolic value for European history or integration.

³⁶ See Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage*, Official Journal of the European Union C 463, 23.12.2014; EP [European Parliament], *Towards an Integrated Approach to Cultural Heritage for Europe*, 2015, Report (2014/2149(INI)), Committee on Culture and Education, *Rapporteur: M. Diaconu*, 24.6.2015.

³⁷ See V.L.A. ČEGINSKAS, S. KAASIK-KROGERUS, T. LÄHDESMÄKI, K. MÄKINEN, *Constructing social Europe through European cultural heritage*, *European Societies*, 23, 2021, 4, p. 2.



Official logo of the European Heritage Label³⁸

The label since its introduction wants to be developed as a high-quality award. This brings it partly closer to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Council of Europe's European Cultural Routes. Moreover, the Decision with which it was introduced in Art. 5 clearly states that «The Commission and the Member States shall ensure the added value and complementarity of the action with regard to other initiatives in the field of cultural heritage such as the UNESCO World Heritage List, the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the Council of Europe's European Cultural Routes».

Despite this, however, the visibility of these sites and their reputation among tourists is very poor³⁹. Many times, the label is not known or is confused with UNESCO initiatives because they are more famous and widespread⁴⁰.

One of the main objectives – explicitly stated in the recitals of the Decision – is to increase the sense of belonging of the citizens of the Member States. With regard to the European Heritage Label,

³⁸ BelinDear, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

³⁹ T. LÄHDESMÄKI, V.L.A. ČEGINSKAS, S. KAASIK-KROGERUS, K. MÄKINEN, J. TURUNEN, *Creating and Governing Cultural Heritage in the European Union: The European Heritage Label*, Routledge, London and New York, 2020.

⁴⁰ V.L.A. ČEGINSKAS, *Challenges for creating visibility of European cultural heritage. A case study of the European Heritage Label*, in *Ethnologia Fennica*, 46, 2019, pp. 109-134.

the concept of community was used in the 2017 panel report⁴¹. Immediately after the summary in fact it is clearly stated that:

«The EHL sites reveal heritage communities of people, who are proud to interpret their past within the wider framework of European culture and history. They courageously present their site by raising questions. The stories of the EHL sites allow the European peoples to develop emotional attachment to cultural heritage in Europe. This then becomes shared heritage and enables the understanding of a multilayered European identity. These communities are outstanding examples of cultural resiliency and solidarity»⁴².

The increasingly widespread policy of appealing to a sense of belonging to the Union and European identity seeks to influence citizens emotionally and affectively. According to Banús⁴³, it can be said that European discourses often have a 'poetic dimension'. This kind of poetic dimension manifests itself in the emphasis on numerous ideals and principles that are considered to be the basis of the Union itself.

The importance of these values is such that the application form to compete for the European Heritage Label requires an indication of the contribution of the site to the development or promotion of the values of Art. 2 TEU. This is why site narratives often insist on these aspects in their applications.

The 2019 selection report also makes extensive reference to the European relevance for obtaining the label, and in doing so, there are a number of concepts that are widely referred to⁴⁴.

One of them is the concept of peace, by which one wants to teach citizens what in the Union's past was contrary to peace and

⁴¹ European Commission, *European Heritage Label: 2017 Panel Report*, European Commission, Brussels, 2017.

⁴² *Ivi*, p. 7.

⁴³ E. BANÚS, *Keynote speech in the 13th International Conference European Culture*, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, October, 2015.

⁴⁴ K. MÄKINEN, *Interconceptualising Europe and peace: identity building under the European Heritage Label*, in *Dissonant Heritages and Memories in Contemporary Europe*, edited by T. LÄHDESMÄKI, L. PASSERINI, S. KAASIK-KROGERUS, I. VAN HUIS, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2019, pp. 51-78.

how it was overcome. A fact that should not be underestimated is that it confirms that often, if not every time, when a site refers to this value it gets recognition.

Another concept recalled is that of diversity understood as multilingualism, diversity of religions, culture, and ethnicity. Bringing all these nuances together, we want to emphasise how the EU implements policies that are fully inclusive of all forms of manifestation of culture, with no preference of any kind.

Again, essential in the development of the Union has been mobility. It is only through it that exchanges have taken place both culturally through the migration of people and economically through the movement of goods of various kinds. Therefore, this concept can also be considered one of the pillars within the EU.

Through the pursuit of all these links with the past, an attempt is made to create, as far as possible, continuity with the past and to instil confidence in the new generations so that the Union can continue to develop in all its facets.

The insistence on this topic also results from the fact that the EU, unlike the individual member states, has no real symbols that characterise it and on which the citizen can reflect himself. It can be said that there is a kind of symbolic deficit⁴⁵. The institutions, aware of this identity crisis of the Union, have tried to intervene with various actions that could remedy it.

Heritage not only provides a sense of belonging on a 'geographical' level but also allows for a sense of common identity, of belonging⁴⁶.

In addition to what has been said so far, it is also intended to promote the economic development of the areas in which the sites obtaining this recognition are located.

⁴⁵ See L. PASSERINI, *Figures d'Europe: Images and Myths of Europe*, Peter Lang, Brussels, 2013; C. PEARSON, *EUtopia? The European Union and the Parliamentarism in Brussels*, in *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, 17, 2013, 5, pp. 636-653; P. PERCHOC, *Brussels: What European Urban Narrative?*, in *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 25, 2017, 3, pp. 367-379.

⁴⁶ For a more in-depth analysis of this concept see L. SMITH, *op.cit.*

European funding has long been less developed in cultural matters. Even today, for example, the European Heritage Label itself does not provide for any direct funding for the actors and sites involved. The winners of the label have to finance themselves, and this often happens thanks to authorities or actors engaged at national or local level and not at European level.

The European Commission has recently launched a call for funding for EHL sites⁴⁷, with a budget of € 500.000, to develop a continuous and successful collaboration between the various sites. More specifically, its objective is to identify a coordinator who can manage the several activities related to the sites. Unfortunately, not all sites can really participate in this call. Many of them in fact even if they participated would not have the strength and the ability to manage this sum and to do what the call requires. This intervention, therefore, highlighted the clear difference that can characterize the various sites while being all part of a single network.

Also tourism is closely linked to the economic factor. It has always been attempted to bring as many tourists as possible to this brand so as to entice them to visit the sites and more generally the Countries in which they are located. In doing so, emphasis has been placed on the added value that such recognition can bring.

However, it cannot be said, at least at this stage, that there is a real winning marketing campaign. Indeed, initiatives are often left to individual sites. The European Commission has planned small measures including: the development of a logo, the creation of a website dedicated to this measure, the creation of small promotional videos and little else.

The financial aspect also influences the interactions between the various sites. Every year the Commission organises a meeting for site representatives and the various national coordinators, and it is precisely on this occasion that the most financially successful sites

⁴⁷ European Commission, *Call for Proposals – EAC/ S39/ 2018: Design and Management of Networking and Capacity Building Activities for European Heritage Label Sites*, European Commission, Brussels, 2018.

have a sort of leadership and take precedence over others in these meetings. Although this is fully in line with what is happening in other initiatives, the question arises whether, precisely because of the greater appreciation of the diversity that characterizes the EU, it would not be better to identify a mechanism by which each site can rotate to play the role of coordinator of the work of the annual meeting.

For the moment, the European States that have joined the initiative are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Hungary.

According to the provisions of Art. 2 of the Decision, the sites eligible for this recognition are of three types:

- *sites*, i.e., a monument, a natural, underwater, archaeological, industrial, or urban site, a cultural landscape, a place of memory, a cultural asset in general, including intangible cultural heritage (if it is associated with a place) and contemporary cultural heritage.
- *transnational site*, i.e., a site composed of several sites, located geographically in different Member States, which converge on a specific theme to submit a joint application or a site whose geographical location straddles the territories of at least two of the Member States. For this specific type of site, special conditions for admission are foreseen in Article 12.
- *national thematic sites*, i.e., several sites, geographically located in the same Member State, that converge on a specific theme to present a common application. Article 13 sets out special requirements for admission for this specific type of site.

As already mentioned, this initiative also bears witness to the EU's collaboration with UNESCO. In fact, it is expressly stated in Article 5 that the label is in a complementary position and provides added value compared to other initiatives.

Art. 7 sets out the criteria that must be followed when applying for a site; these include, for instance, the fact that, as stated in let-

ter (a), candidate sites for the label must have a symbolic European value and must play an important role in the history and culture of Europe. Furthermore, in applying, a project must be prepared that includes all the elements indicated in letters (b) and (c) of the same article. These must be respected not only to be able to apply but also to be able to maintain the label once obtained.

Applications are subjected to a national pre-selection and at a later stage to a European-level evaluation.

Each Member State may pre-select up to two sites every two years. The pre-selection is done following the criteria of and based on the application form developed by the European Commission⁴⁸. Although each Member State enjoys a certain amount of freedom with regard to selection procedures, it is imperative that the selection always ends by 1 March of the year of selection so that the European Commission can inform the European Parliament, the Council, and the Committee of the Regions of the results.

The selection of sites at the European level is carried out by the European panel⁴⁹, under the responsibility of the European Commission. The panel is composed of thirteen independent experts, with strong experience and demonstrated competence in the fields relevant to the objectives of the action. Of these, four are appointed by the European Parliament, four by the Council of the EU, four by the European Commission, and one by the Committee of the Regions following their respective procedures. The European panel evaluates the applications of the pre-selected sites and chooses a maximum of one site from each Member State.

After obtaining the label, periodically, each site is checked to ensure that it meets the criteria imposed and the objectives established. The planned control phase is managed entirely by the Member State, which is responsible for collecting the necessary information and preparing a report every four years to be forwarded to the Commission.

⁴⁸ See art. 10 of the Decision.

⁴⁹ See art. 8 of the Decision.

According to Art.16, in the case in which there are problems for some sites to respect the criteria or the objectives imposed, the European panel initiates an exchange of opinions to try to remedy the situation. If the conditions do not improve within 18 months of the initiation of the dialogue, the panel shall inform the Commission. The evaluation of the various sites will then be analysed by the panel of experts once all documents have been submitted by the Commission.

If, after a further 18 months following notification to the Commission, the recommendations have not been implemented, the European panel shall issue a recommendation to the Commission for the removal of the label.

It may also be the case that it is the sites themselves that renounce the label; in which case they shall inform the Member States concerned, which shall, in turn, inform the Commission of the renunciation. The Commission will then inform the Parliament, the Council, and the Committee of the Regions.

In 2021 there was another selection of sites deserving recognition. Twelve sites of outstanding importance were chosen, among which we can mention as examples Ventotene (Italy), the Museum of Culture and Archaeological Site of Vučedol, Vukovar (Croatia), and the Historic Center of Turaida, Sigulda (Latvia)⁵⁰.

The next selection will be in 2023 while the next monitoring report will be held in 2024; In the meantime, national pre-selections will be conducted.

⁵⁰ The twelve selected sites in 2021 are: Ventotene (Italy); Vučedol Museum of Culture and Archaeological Site, Vukovar (Croatia); Nemea Archaeological Site, Ancient Nemea (Greece); Thracian Art in the Eastern Rhodopes: Aleksandrovo Tomb, Haskovo (Bulgaria); Almadén Mining Park, Almadén (Spain); Echternach Saint Willibrord Heritage, Ville d'Echternach (Luxembourg); Turaida Historic Center, Sigulda (Latvia); Medieval Mural Painting in the Gemer and Malohont Regions, Rimavské Brezovo (Slovakia); Oderbruch, Seelow (Germany); Danube European Commission Building, Galați (Romania); Seminaarinmäki Campus, Jyväskylä (Finland); MigratieMuseumMigration (MMM), Brussels (Belgium).

3.1. *Italian sites selected with the European Heritage Label*

Italy, strengthened by its centrality in cultural heritage matters, immediately understood the importance of such an action. This is why it decided as early as 2006, in Granada, to join what was then still only an intergovernmental scheme.

For Italy, what was then the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities identified the Campidoglio in Rome, the Casa De Gasperi Museum (Pieve Tesino, Trento), the birthplaces of the musicians Rossini (Pesaro), Verdi (Roncole di Busseto, Parma) and Puccini (Lucca), and the island of Ventotene (Latina).

The new, distinctly European initiative started the first selection of relevant sites almost 10 years ago, in 2013.

In the first selection only four sites were chosen, none of which were in our Country. It will be in the following year that the selection will reward the Museo Casa Alcide De Gasperi (Pieve Tesino, Italy)⁵¹. Since 2007, the De Gasperi Foundation has been working in numerous ways to valorise the Alcide De Gasperi House Museum.

The Foundation carries out research, training, and cultural dissemination activities. It promotes political culture, autonomy, and Trentino's historical and cultural identity, civil participation, and knowledge of international and community institutions.

The main message of this Museum is not the celebration of a great character such as De Gasperi, the founding father of what we know today as the European Union. The principal aim is, in full accordance with the objectives of the European label, to renew enthusiasm – especially in young people – for Europe.

Due to its centrality to European history, this Museum has also been included in another European initiative: the Network of Political Houses and Foundations of Prominent Europeans, established in 2017, which brings together houses and foundations of prominent personalities who have made a significant contribution to the process of European integration.

⁵¹ See R. SASSU, *European Heritage Label. L'Europa inizia qui*, Laboratorio Web per la Cultura, Roma, 2019, pp. 75-76.



Museo Casa De Gasperi (Pieve Tesino, Italy)⁵²

In 2009, on the initiative of the Fondazione Trentina Alcide De Gasperi, inspired by the green spaces annexed to the other houses of the Founding Fathers of the united Europe, the Garden of Europe was created. Inaugurated on 18 August 2011, the Alcide De Gasperi Garden of Europe has an area of about 830 square metres. It consists of 14 flower beds made of steel, a material that becomes rust-colored over time, blending harmoniously into the natural environment; the composition, in the shape of a parliamentary hemicycle, is bordered by a simple fence made of wooden stakes and cordage.

Also planned is the August degasperiano, a programme of events in addition to the traditional *Lectio degasperiana*, which is intended to open up new perspectives on the present.

The *Lectio degasperiana* is a large public event that is organised to honour the memory of the Trentino statesman in his home town

⁵² Photo by LigaDue, CC BY 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

on the anniversary of his death. Each year, a theme is selected to explore aspects of Italian and Trentino history, the figure of the statesman, and democracy.

Those just mentioned are just two projects carried out by the De Gasperi Foundation. Indeed, their commitment continues to be important and to develop in various directions in full implementation and enhancement of De Gasperi's ideals.

Certainly, thanks to all these initiatives, the visibility of the site in question is guaranteed and in line with all the objectives required by the brand. It is hardly surprising that it was the first site selected among the Italian sites.

Another site selected, this time with the 2017 selection is the Fort Cadine, which, as expressly stated by the European Commission on its official website is a representative fortification of the defence system of about 80 such monuments built between 1860 and 1915 in the Trent region⁵³.



Forte Cadine (Trento, Italy)⁵⁴.

⁵³ See R. SASSU, *op.cit.*, pp. 128-129.

⁵⁴ Photo by Llorenzi, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

It recalls historical divisions, military conflicts and border changes and provides the necessary context for a better understanding of the value of open borders and free movement.

This Fort has been owned by the Autonomous Province of Trento since the early 1990s and its management has been entrusted to the Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino.

The official reason indicated by the panel of experts that led to the acceptance of the application is the fact that this site brings to mind the divisions and the confiscations that characterized much of the 1900s and consequently places the emphasis on the importance of peace and of freedom of movement.

These last two aspects that have just been mentioned are very important for the European Union, not only in terms of cultural policy, but also at a general level. Inside the Fort there are very dynamic installations that want to reproduce in multimedia with sounds and images the reality that characterized the Fort at the time of conflicts.

The main measure organized in this site, in addition to the general restoration and installation that reproduces the war environment, is the provision of guided tours inside.

As expressly indicated on the official website of the Fort, since 2019 Forte Cadine is part of the EHL@Network⁵⁵, a network of 19 sites that is implementing strategies and good practices for the enhancement, promotion and communication of European cultural heritage. Among the initiatives promoted also the International Photo Contest ‘European Heritage Label. Europe Starts here!’.

In December 2020 the Forte and the Foundation won the call ‘2020 European Heritage Days’⁵⁶ promoted by the Council of Eu-

⁵⁵ The network was created due to the fact that there was no official one that would allow the various sites to create a common network also due to the various peculiarities that characterise them and make them very different from each other also in the way they are managed. More information at www.ehl-network.eu/.

⁵⁶ The European Heritage Days is co-organised by the European Union and the Council of Europe, which launched the action in 1985. See more at <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-heritage/initiatives-and-success-stories/european-heritage-days>.

rope and the European Commission for the development of a new educational project for high schools. The initiative, entitled 'Fort - Europe Nice to Meet You', combines the history of the Austro-Hungarian fortifications with current European themes. The project partners are the Antonio Megalizzi Foundation, the Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa, the School of International Studies of the University of Trento; with the participation of De Gasperi Foundation and Europe Direct.

The Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino, the managing body of Forte Cadine (Trento), one of the two Italian sites awarded the European Heritage Label, in 2019, has realized 'Travel in Europe' a programme dedicated to the prestigious award given by the European Commission. This program is curated by Valeria Balassone and Sara Zanatta (Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino). The realisation is by Busacca Productions Video; the clips of the sites were made by Mostra Sa, Bruxelles and the conduction is by Valeria Balassone.

All these different initiatives demonstrate once again how a winning feature of the European Heritage Label is the ability to create a network with which further activities can be undertaken.

In the 2019 selection there were two Italian sites nominated for the brand: on the one hand the site of Ostia antica and on the other the Castello del Valentino in Turin. According to the selection made at European level, the site of Ostia was worthy of the brand. This is the first time, in Italy, that the European Heritage Label has been awarded to a site belonging to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism.

As the main port of Rome, Ostia became a place of great strategic and commercial importance in the Mediterranean area. By the end of the 2nd century A.D. the city was still thriving and housed a population of more than 50,000. Its decline began in the middle of the third century.



Area archeologica di Ostia antica (Roma, Italy)⁵⁷

The Archaeological Area of Ostia Antica is a place where goods circulated and different cultures and religions were mixed. As access point to Rome Ostia was a meeting point of different people who lived under the Roman Empire and a place with far-reaching influence on the earth, through the Mediterranean basin and beyond.

Its European value lies precisely in being a point where different exchanges have developed and where the diversity fundamental concept for the current European Union has developed.

The Ostia site is predominantly archaeological and for this reason several areas have been maintained that can be visited by tourists. A number of panels have been installed to accompany the visitor inside the park. In order to adapt to new technologies and the challenges that the pandemic has created in recent years, the same panels have been made available on the site's official website so that they can also be used digitally.

⁵⁷ Photo by Sayaka Ganz on Unsplash.

In parallel, several educational services have also been developed that address children of different age ranges, starting with the very youngest and ending with university students. Again, a digital version of these services has been created to allow remote use. A sort of mascot of the park, the cat Cartilio, was also designed in 2019 to guide younger visitors to discover the heritage this site offers. Another competition to create the new mascot was launched in 2021. The winner was the donkey Eurisace.

Through the use of ‘Cartilio’s notebooks’, a further connection with visitors is created because it is possible for younger visitors to leaf through these notebooks and take them home with them so that they can keep them as a souvenir and keep an even more vivid memory.

As mentioned above, the site’s offers are also aimed at senior students. They do this through the provision of school-to-work projects that are carefully developed from year to year in an innovative way to involve as wide an audience of students as possible.

A project called ‘Piccoli Ciceroni’ has also been developed whereby some students, after proper study and training, are able to illustrate the characteristics of the site and act as guides to their peers in order to further develop young people’s interactions with the heritage around them.

As the various illustrated initiatives show, the focus on young citizens is very broad and also involves the various schools in the area. Aware of the importance of bringing citizens closer to these issues from the outset, the Ostia site continues to develop innovative initiatives and, as the attention to digital aspects demonstrates, in step with the times.

Awarded the European Heritage Label in the last selection was the island of Ventotene (Latina). As explicitly stated in the 2021 selection report⁵⁸, the Ventotene Manifesto ‘For a free and United Europe’ is a historical document which inspired the construction of

⁵⁸ European Commission, *European Heritage Label 2021 Panel report*, European Commission, Brussels, 2021.

a federal Europe. It was on this exact island that, during their exile as opponents to the fascist regime, Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi signed the Manifesto.



Isola di Ventotene (Latina, Italy)⁵⁹

The strong interest in European issues is, for obvious reasons, also highly developed nowadays. In fact, the island has introduced several European-oriented initiatives. One of these is the ‘Chiave d’Europa’ (Key to Europe) with which it is intended to give recognition to those people who, at the head of prestigious governments or institutions, make an important contribution to supporting Europe and enhancing Ventotene for what it means. To date, the award was given to the previous President of the European Parliament David Sassoli and the President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen.

As can also be seen on the island’s official website, there are many associations and organisations that hold European values close to their hearts and want to develop them as far as possible.

⁵⁹ Photo by Cats094, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Thanks to the establishment of ‘Tavolo Europa’, it has been possible to connect pro-European movements developing projects on the island. These include public seminars, such as that of the Altiero Spinelli Institute for Federalist Studies, and training and history education activities in which the local community is also involved.

Altiero Spinelli himself decided in 1981 to organize an annual training seminar for young people on the island. And starting from this idea, the annual seminar was maintained over the decades thanks to the activity before the European Federalist Movement and now the Institute of Federalist Studies Altiero Spinelli.

In 2019, the island of Ventotene has applied for the Diploma of Europe conferred by the Council of Europe. In the application dossier⁶⁰, the island has shown that it is well aware of its characteristics and that thanks to them it can be considered a unique.

No less important is the project with which we want to start the recovery of the prison of Santo Stefano (former Bourbon prison). Despite the pandemic in 2020, work on the project continued smoothly.

The main objectives are: giving back to the collective memory historical events and human experiences that have marked the 170 years life of the Prison; promoting a ‘School of High Thoughts’ (Eugenio Perucatti, former ‘enlightened’ Director of the Prison) inspired by the values of the Italian and European Constitutions, for the future of Europe and the Mediterranean; protecting and enhancing cultural heritage, landscape and environment in line with the ‘Green European Deal’; promote cultural and artistic production.

In February 2021, the City Council of Ventotene took note of the project prepared under the supervision of the Special Commissioner of the Government and voted unanimously in favour of its implementation. In June 2021, the call for proposals was published for the international design competition for the entire former prison; the deadline for submitting projects was 23 September 2021.

⁶⁰ The dossier can be downloaded from the official website of the Island of Ventotene: www.ventoteneisolamemorabile.it/file/documentopresentatoalce-1.pdf.

At the beginning of July 2022, the winner of the competition was identified, so all that remains is to wait for the completion of the work to be able to observe the result of the restoration operation in person.

Even through this intervention, it is clear that the island of Ventotene is very active on European issues in general and on cultural issues.

In developing the various projects mentioned above, the local institutions have always had a special regard for the active involvement of the population, also due to the small number of locals. It has always been very important for citizens to be involved in the various activities, not only to be able to express their personal opinions but also to develop a conscious and mature awareness that can be passed on to future generations.

4. *Conclusions*

In general, since the EU is made up of so many different States, it is difficult to describe exactly the fundamental characteristics of European heritage. If they had to choose Citizens themselves would certainly feel more attached to their national heritage than to the EU one.

This is not necessarily a bad aspect if one thinks that, in this way, national identities can be maintained, but it is undoubtedly necessary to strengthen the European feeling in citizens first and consequently in the communities.

One of the characteristic features of the European Heritage Label is that while it is inherent to heritage, it does not emphasise its preservation or protection as other measures generally adopted by both the EU and UNESCO and other actors do.

In awarding this label, special attention is paid to the intangible and symbolic aspect that these have for the main European values. The same idea of 'European meaning' has been used to condition sites to govern themselves both through and for Europeanisation.

The lack of economic funding for these places, however, also forces them to have to develop considerable visibility for themselves in order to find other solutions to raise the necessary funds for the maintenance of the site but also to develop the activities and the objectives set out in the plan which they achieved at the time of their application.

The 2017 European report⁶¹ points out that there are great hopes for this initiative that is expected to grow considerably. This could also have negative implications for those who hoped to get the brand and to be able to focus on the small number of sites as a specialty indicator.

Given the lack of knowledge, for those who are not experts in the field, this initiative is not considered to share these concerns for a possible substantial expansion of the sites awarded the label. This is undoubtedly the aspect that differentiates the label from measures such as the UNESCO List drawn up thanks to the 1972 Convention which, without any doubt, enjoys a reputation that expands internationally.

For this reason, the choice to create a system that is complementary and that adds value to existing initiatives worldwide is the best choice because it allows States to base a system based on different protections that are not excluded among them but, on the contrary, they are meant to coexist.

A key aspect of European heritage management is the considerable attention paid to social aspects. This undoubtedly implies that, as far as possible, an attempt is made to avoid interpreting the heritage as a denial of the rights of certain groups in favour of others. In fact, we want to find a link between different cultures that allows us to arrive at a transcultural perspective.

What is envisaged at European level must always be coordinated with national frameworks because of the Union's only comple-

⁶¹ European Commission, *European Heritage Label. 2017 Panel report*, European Commission, Brussels, 2017.

mentary competence, and this is very clear to the European institutions when they envisage the measures to be taken in the territory.

Considering the care taken in the choice of sites to be awarded the label, it is evident how this measure is also characterised by aspects related to general EU policy. In fact, it can be seen that unlike other international measures already mentioned in this case there is also an overall view. Each site is indeed assessed individually but also as part of the more general whole of the other sites already included in the measure.

The motto 'Europe starts here!' is intended to emphasise that these sites are only the basis for building and strengthening Europe. With the continuous evolution of Europe in the first place, but also of all its constituent states and their citizens, it is essential to read the various measures taken in a dynamic manner, prepared for change.

There have been many challenges that the EU has had to face and just as many will be in the future, so being able to create a common basis in the sentiment of citizens and especially of the new generations will make it possible to face them with an eye to acceptance, to inclusion.

The continued insistence on the citizen underlines how the EU is also trying to develop participatory policies that start from the bottom and are not just imposed by the institutions so that citizens feel more involved and also accept them more easily.

By putting itself in this perspective, the Union will be able to use the various differences of the Member States as a strength to amplify the common base it has been creating for several years through its policy.

Of course, it will also be essential to approach cooperation with other international organisations with the same proactive spirit as it has already done and continues to do today.

In this case, the challenge is certainly more arduous because, unlike in purely domestic situations, in this case it has to interface with parties that may have priorities that are somewhat different from its own.

Obviously, despite the difficulties there may be, the continuous confrontation also at international level can only create insights and reflections for the entire European system.

With regard specifically to the European Heritage Label, it can be seen that this is undoubtedly a tool with multiple potential on several sensitive fronts for the EU. At the same time, unfortunately, at least at present, it is unable to fully guarantee the achievement of its objectives. There are still many shortcomings, especially when considering factors related to dissemination among non-experts in the field and the recognisability of the label, which, as already mentioned, is often overlooked by much more famous international measures.