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Working with the cultural heritage of conflict for peacebuilding: Lessons learned from the Western Balkans

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<u>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</u>	3
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	4
<u>CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: POLITICS AND ACTORS</u>	5
<u>LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES</u>	8
LOCAL HERITAGE ANCHORS	9
GENDERED AND INTERSECTIONAL HERITAGE	10
HERITAGE PEDAGOGIES	11
INCOME-GENERATING HERITAGE	12
DIGITAL HERITAGE	13
DIVERSE HERITAGE-S	13
LAYERED HISTORIES	15
UNDERSTANDING PRESENCES AND ABSENCES	16
<u>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION</u>	17

Executive Summary

Violent conflicts often leave a legacy of destroyed, ruptured or segregated political landscapes. Accordingly, engaging the cultural heritage that emerges from periods of violence is a key factor for the construction of durable and inclusive peace. Many of the great challenges faced by conflict-affected societies are reflected in the politics around cultural heritage as it can be instrumentalised for war and peace alike, making it imperative for local, national and international stakeholders to engage with cultural heritage as a component of peacebuilding processes.

This discussion paper provides a deeper understanding of the role of cultural heritage in conflict-affected societies and, specifically, the Western Balkans. The paper examines how narratives and practices around cultural heritage can be developed to foster social cohesion and dialogue, and seeks to demonstrate how divisive uses of cultural heritage can be transformed in a way that is conducive to peace.

Using examples from Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) and Kosovo, the paper maps and identifies key cultural heritage sites and spaces that reflect a variety of cultural heritage narratives and practices in relation to peace processes. Tangible heritage including museums, memorials, plaques and religious buildings are discussed alongside intangible heritage including art installations and monuments. In particular, the role of local actors as anchors in cultural heritage processes is discussed, and attention is given to the gendered and intersectional power dynamics (re)produced through cultural heritage. Further, cultural heritage pedagogies are discussed as instruments to rectify divisive propaganda and build bridges between multiple narratives, including the recognition of multi-layered histories and memories. Digitisation processes, it is argued, can be part of such pedagogies, mitigating or ameliorating processes of exclusion. Further, the role of cultural heritage as an income-generating factor is considered, not only in terms of its political significance but also in terms of its role in addressing economic marginalisation. Further, the paper identifies and warns against potential gaps between external notions of reconciliation and local requests for justice. Finally, the paper demonstrates that by reading the material landscape of post-conflict societies through both the presence and absence of tangible cultural heritage, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of local power dynamics.

Based on this analysis, the paper draws out a number of key recommendations to the European Union's engagement in the field of cultural heritage and peacebuilding:

- 1) Any cultural heritage work should be anchored in the work that local heritage actors are already doing.
- 2) Not all cultural heritage is equal. There is a need to consider which heritage has been historically privileged and why, as well as how these privileges translate into the present.
- 3) The frictions around cultural heritage can be successfully addressed through work with educational actors.
- 4) Cultural heritage work should be considered as a potential income-generating factor in contexts of deprivation.
- 5) Digital opportunities for heritage transformation should be considered.
- 6) Cultural heritage interventions should not impose external notions of reconciliation but instead engage with the diversity of local requirements.
- 7) Cultural heritage work should be sensitive to the multiple layering of history.
- 8) A spatial analysis of presences and absences in the post-conflict landscape should be conducted to understand processes of exclusion and inclusion.

Introduction

Cultural heritage is not neutral. It can be instrumentalised for war and peace alike, mobilising post-conflict societies in divisive or unifying ways. In contexts of warfare, cultural heritage can be part of tactics to attack the foundations of a people's cultures and identities, thereby enticing fear and hatred with profound effects that linger far beyond the end of direct violence, war and mass atrocity. The loss of cultural heritage can be tangible, including the destruction of buildings of religious or cultural value, as well as intangible, including the damage to traditions and rupturing of social networks. Further, conflict-related violence creates its own cultural heritage, as ruined buildings and mass graves make their mark in the landscape and interlace with the destroyed heritage from earlier periods. In addition, the construction of monuments and memorial sites as well as commemorative events and rituals are vivid reminders of the conflict. More informal traces of the conflict become immersed in everyday life and are imperative for how meanings and narratives are constructed around notions of divisive pasts and possibilities for shared futures. Such tangible and intangible 'cultural heritage of conflict' is strongly present in societies transitioning from war.

Cultural heritage is thus inexorably part of post-war memory politics and a key factor for the success of constructing durable and inclusive peace. This is especially the case in societies where drivers of former violent conflict continue to fuel divisions. As peace is being built, there is a risk that destructive narratives and practices around cultural heritage (re)foster conflict. Just as culture refers to the diverse ways of living and impacts upon the ways in which identities are constructed and transformed,¹ so is cultural heritage entangled with processes of identity formation and delineation. It is not uncommon that cultural heritage is continuously used as a tool to marginalise and exclude parts of the population on the basis of markers such as ethnicity, gender or religion. As such, the structural violence of exclusion can be present beyond the violent conflict itself, and may persist across ethnic groups and in longer timeframes. Yet, at the same time, we can see numerous examples of how engagement with cultural heritage can be a strong component in fostering social cohesion, through processes that acknowledge minorities, promote gender equality and actively seek to address structural inequalities and ongoing insecurities. Cultural heritage can be a site for community engagements, activism, a space for dialogue as well as claiming rights and acknowledgement by marginalised groups.

Indeed, many of the great challenges faced by conflict-affected societies are reflected in the politics around cultural heritage, making it imperative for local, national and international stakeholders to engage with cultural heritage as a component of peacebuilding processes. The European Union (EU) has recently strengthened its engagement in the field of the protection of cultural heritage, most notably in peacebuilding contexts, recognising the importance of engaging with cultural heritage as a way of preventing, mediating and mitigating conflict.² Cultural heritage, it is proposed, should be integrated with the EU's political and diplomatic engagement, its crisis management approach, and specifically its work through its External Action Service (EEAS).³ The importance of 'local ownership' and the direct engagement of affected communities in contexts of cultural heritage protection has been particularly emphasised.⁴ The EU's recognition of the symbolic and material importance of cultural

¹ Smith, Mark J. (2000). *Culture: Reinventing the Social Sciences. Concepts in the social sciences*. Buckingham, UK; Philadelphia, USA: Open University Press.

² Council of the European Union. 2021. 'Concept on Cultural heritage in conflicts and crises. A component for peace and security in European Union's external action', 9962/21. Brussels, 18 June 2021.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Council of the European Union. 2021. 'Council Conclusions on EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in conflicts and crises', 9837/21, 21 June 2021.

heritage as a precondition for locally meaningful peace processes goes hand-in-hand with its overall increased sensitivity to this issue. Indeed, a range of EU-funded projects and programmes are dedicated to the preservation and protection of cultural heritage, all relating to international cultural relations, broadly speaking. This is based on the assumption that the EU's strategic role in preserving peace and preventing conflict can be strengthened by adding cultural heritage to its toolbox. However, it is a challenging task to navigate in the contentious post-war memory politics and to understand the nuanced dynamics between divisive and cohesive societal forces as they play out in relation to cultural heritage.

Against this background, the objective of this discussion paper is to provide a deeper understanding of the role of cultural heritage in conflict-affected societies. The paper examines how narratives and practices around cultural heritage can be developed to foster social cohesion and dialogue. How can divisive uses of cultural heritage be transformed and repurposed in a way that is conducive to peace?

Using examples from Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) and Kosovo, the paper maps and identifies key cultural heritage sites and spaces that reflect a variety of cultural heritage-related narratives and practices in relation to peace. The Western Balkans are a region that has a history of peaceful co-existence as well as violence and war, and thus serves well as a context for understanding political transformation. Although the cultural heritage of the region has developed through ongoing cross-border dynamics, for this paper, specifically, BiH and Kosovo have been selected as most relevant due to the extensive peacebuilding processes in these two states, including a strong international presence, and the continued challenges to a form of peace that remains fragile and contested. The discussion paper identifies and analyses a number of negative as well as positive concrete examples, drawing from a rich flora of tangible and intangible cultural heritage from different periods, including the Ottoman period, the Yugoslav era and the cultural heritage of conflict generated by the last war, thus recognising that heritage is hybrid and layered with the legacies of multiple pasts.

From this mapping emerges a cultural heritage landscape that is multi-faceted and diverse and involves numerous actors, sites and practices. The illustrative case studies in the paper range from the restoration of cultural heritage dating from the 15th century to artistic installations that engage with intangible heritage and digital memorial sites that circumvent territorial boundaries and obstacles. The paper draws out a number of key recommendations to the European Union, regarding how to best support the mobilisation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage as part of peacebuilding efforts in societies transitioning from conflict to peace.

Cultural heritage in the Western Balkans: Politics and actors

Interventions in the Western Balkans come with a number of challenges as the region is faced with a fragmented political landscape, making it particularly difficult to find a one-size fits-all solution. Indeed, the breakup of the former Yugoslavia resulted in the emergence of nationally divergent approaches to cultural heritage.⁵ Given the relatively young nature of the states in the Western Balkans as well as a degree of fragility in their political structures caused by internal and external demands, many of the laws are still evolving. The policies in each state are the result of complex negotiation processes between local, national, regional

⁵ The Council of Europe hosts country-specific overviews of cultural heritage and its legal frameworks. See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/herein-system/country-profiles>.

and international actors. However, largely, cultural heritage has been recognised as an important stepping-stone towards peace and a cohesive national identity.

In Kosovo, for instance, as early as 2004, UNESCO suggested that, following the destruction of cultural heritage during the war, there was a need to recognise the cultural heritage of the respective other as a way of countering hatred.⁶ As a considerable amount of the religious heritage, primarily of the Serbian community, was destroyed during the war in the late 1990s, a law was passed in Kosovo to create ‘Special Protective Zones’ to maintain such cultural heritage.⁷ This has to be seen in a context where the Serbian minority had been fearful of the Kosovo’s declaration of independence that was to follow in 2008, and what that would mean to their own cultural heritage. The introduction of ‘Special Protective Zones’ therefore provided a level of reassurance and signalled a commitment to protecting the heritage of both the majority and minority ethnic groups. Administratively, at central state level, both the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Trade and Industry are involved in cultural heritage protection, with the Kosovo Council for Cultural Heritage fulfilling an advisory role. Some responsibilities are delegated to local authorities and, specifically, the municipalities with a Serbian majority are engaged in the protection of their communities’ own heritage within their territories.⁸ Meanwhile, not only the government of Kosovo and a variety of grassroots organisations and NGOs are involved in the protection of cultural heritage (for instance, Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB) had devised local cultural heritage plans from 2012-15),⁹ but also international actors such as the OSCE.¹⁰ The main challenge in this is, according to the OSCE, that the competencies and responsibilities in the search for the protection of cultural heritage are not clearly distributed.¹¹ As a result, certain projects get more attention than others and legal provisions lack the consistency that is needed to allow for more structural, rather than ephemeral, levels of transformation. Instead, not least given the complex legal situation, cultural heritage engagement risks being reduced to a political tool for either community, as a way to increase the presence of one community in public space over the other. The lack of funding for heritage projects that reach across ethnic boundaries or engage minorities beyond the two majority ethnic groups has further complicated a positive transformation of an otherwise segregated landscape of tangible heritage. More promising projects have happened in relation to intangible heritage, which is often engaged by NGOs, and has included storytelling and small-scale income-generation activities. CHwB, for instance, has led intangible heritage projects in Prizren as a way of combining heritage and development aims in one project.

The situation is equally complicated in BiH. Following the end of war in 1995, The Dayton Peace Accord organised the state according to a power sharing system along ethnic lines, creating the Bosnian Serb-dominated Republika Srpska and the Bosniak and Bosnian Croat dominated ‘Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina’, which in turn is subdivided into ten cantons. Memorialisation legislation is fractured along these lines and handled at local political and administrative levels, either at the cantonal (in the Federation of BiH) or entity levels. Hence, what is considered cultural heritage - or not - is defined by the dominant constituent group and decision-making around cultural heritage is embedded in an ongoing construction of three diverging and often antagonistic historical narratives of victimhood. An important actor is the institutional fund that manages most commemoration sites in the canton

⁶ http://portal.unesco.org/en/files/20053/10827207031Pages_1-14_KOSOVO_report_distilled.pdf/Pages+1-14+KOSOVO_report_distilled.pdf, p.11.

⁷ https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1235900/1504_1220513623_law-on-special-protective-zones.pdf

⁸ <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/Kosovo-Culture.aspx>

⁹ <https://mei-ks.net/en/kosovo/cultural-heritage->

¹⁰ <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/8/117276.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/8/117276.pdf>, p.10.

of Sarajevo, Fond Memorijala for short,¹² which has taken over an increasing number of sites, for example the well-known Tunnel Museum on the outskirts of the city that used to be run privately by the owners of the house where the tunnel opening is located, indicating a growing control by the canton over the so far fairly diverse memorialisation practices of the capital. Overall, many professionals in the world of cultural heritage and museums testify to the difficulties of navigating a fragmented political landscape where funding is erratic or non-existent.

Notably, changes in the criminal code of BiH have recently been made, with relevance for cultural heritage politics. In July 2021 the OHR¹³ introduced prison sentences for up to five years for genocide denial as well as glorification of war criminals. The law forbids the erection of memorials, as well as the naming of streets, schools or other public institutions after such individuals and thus has direct consequences for how the cultural heritage of conflict is expressed and framed.¹⁴ As an illustration of the visibility and presence of such glorifications of war criminals, in 2020 a report estimated that there were more than ten streets, squares, parks and public buildings that had been named after war crime convicts, including Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, both currently serving life imprisonment for their role in genocide and crimes against humanity. In addition, numerous street names were dedicated to military units involved in war crimes.¹⁵

In the context of such divisions as they can be found in both Kosovo and BiH, a number of actors have become involved in heritage work. They include local heritage organisations (some ethnically organised, some invested in shared heritage), such as the OKC Abrašević, Mostar, the Mothers of Srebrenica, local and national museums, associations, curators and artists; transnational organisations, such as CHwB and the WARM Foundation,¹⁶ as well as individual embassies. Those actors often try to modify the work done by national cantonal and local governments but often have less funding than bigger organisations working in the field of cultural heritage (such as UNESCO or the OSCE). Indeed, the region of the Western Balkans has attracted the interest of numerous international organisations with the aim of supporting constructive engagements with cultural heritage. The EU supports a number of projects with a specific focus on the Western Balkans¹⁷ and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is engaged through the project entitled ‘Cultural Heritage as a Driver for Intercommunity Dialogue and Social Cohesion’ in Kosovo, launched in 2021.¹⁸

For international, national and regional actors alike, the divergent political contexts call for a context-sensitive approach which needs to be informed by local communities’ needs on the

¹² The full name of the fund is the ‘Fund of Canton Sarajevo for the protection and maintenance of cemeteries for Shahids and killed veterans, memorial centres and monuments for the victims of genocide’.

¹³ The Office of the High Representative, OHR, is the international body overseeing the implementation of the civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement. It has extensive authority, including imposing decisions and dismissing officials.

¹⁴ HR’s Decision on Enacting the Law on Amendment to the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina | Office of the High Representative (ohr.int). Of particular relevance for cultural heritage is paragraph 6 of the law: “Whoever gives a recognition, award, memorial, any kind of memento, or any privilege or similar to a person sentenced by a final judgement for genocide, crimes against humanity or a war crime, or names a public object such as a street, square, park, bridge, an institution, building, municipality or a city or similar, or registers a brand, after or under a name of a person sentenced by a final judgement for genocide, crimes against humanity or a war crime, or whoever glorifies a person sentenced by a final judgement for genocide, crimes against humanity or a war crime in any way, shall be punished by imprisonment for a term not less than three years.”

¹⁵ Bosnian Streets and Squares Named After War Criminals | Balkan Insight)

¹⁶ <http://www.warmfoundation.org>

¹⁷ <https://www.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/category/resources/eu-programmes/region/western-balkans/>

¹⁸ <https://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/projects/cultural-heritage-as-a-driver-for-intercommunity-dialogue-and-so.html>

one hand, yet seek to avoid being co-opted into ethnically-driven power politics on the other hand. Many of the heritage practices that we see in the region are in fact exclusive in terms of ethnicity (only representing members of a particular ethnic group), gender (for instance by only focusing on male heroes of the past) or generation (excluding particular age groups from its representations). Importantly, such exclusions are intersectional: the ‘Mother Teresa Boulevard’ in Pristina, with the exception of Mother Teresa herself, primarily features male heroes supported by the Kosovo-Albanian community, so children, women and ethnic minorities may feel less welcome in this specific public space. This is particularly challenging in a context in which the protection of cultural heritage has been known to serve the exclusion of particular population groups from the definition of a national identity. One particularly notable example in this context is that of education in BiH. Given that most schools continue to operate a nationally-defined curriculum, students in primary and secondary education are exposed to history curricula that are specific to their own ethnic group and, therefore, are likely to be most familiar with ethnicised, rather than shared, cultural heritage. The country’s ‘two schools under one roof’ system has become a key symbol of segregated education and poses a major challenge to any efforts that aim to overcome divisions in cultural heritage in the longer run. Such competing narratives are also translated into the tangible heritage of museums, monuments and public art. What is more, most of the tangible cultural heritage in the region is located in urban areas, with much less funding allocated to rural communities. The latter have a rich repository of intangible heritage which, however, tends to be less known beyond its immediate community.

Some ethnic groups are missing altogether when it comes to acknowledging cultural heritage, most notably the Roma community. These voids in the regional cultural heritage landscape reflect a social hierarchy that was in place before the war. The Roma had gained recognition as a National Minority during Yugoslav times, yet discrimination against Romani is entrenched across the Western Balkans. While this particularly vulnerable group also suffered extensively from mass human rights violations during the wars, they are practically invisible in the commemorative landscape. Further, their already vulnerable position has been exacerbated in the post-war period through ongoing practices of marginalisation. The largely intangible Romani cultural heritage has been affected by the wars and, so far, little has been done to safeguard it. Interventions to support the cultural heritage of the Roma bring an opportunity to rectify intersectional forms of marginalisation and take issue with excluding discourses of citizenship and identity that date back to long before the most recent wars.

Lessons learned and good practices

Tangible heritage generally refers to the material, physical cultural heritage such as buildings, bridges, monuments and objects. Intangible heritage can take a variety of forms and outlooks. It ranges from ritualised events and commemorations to newly produced artistic interventions that process and transform heritage in aesthetic ways. Yet, despite this seemingly neat boundary, much cultural heritage tends to consist of entangled tangible and intangible elements alike. In the following, we outline a variety of heritage projects from both Kosovo and BiH in an attempt to cast light on the diversity of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, examine how narratives and practices around cultural heritage have been and can be further developed to foster social cohesion and dialogue, and identify best practices. These implications will be filtered into policy recommendations in the final section.

Local heritage anchors

Cultural heritage work can be conducted by local, national, regional or international actors. Crucially though, any successfully and sustainable intervention needs to be done in cooperation with local actors and grounded in local community work. In the following sections, this process of local anchoring emerges as a key theme that supports the grounding of heritage work in local communities in various ways. While local actors supporting such anchoring processes represent a range of institutions and associations, in this particular section we foremost draw attention to actors engaged in what can broadly be defined the art sector. Often, activists or artists can provide important insights into the diversity of local memories and needs, and potentially support consultation processes, whether these are initiated locally, nationally or internationally.

In terms of artistic interventions, groups such as the interreligious choir Pontanima are doing important work in terms of preserving the intangible religious heritage of multi-religious BiH. Based in Sarajevo and initially founded as a small Catholic church choir after the war, the choir has become famous for their performance of religious works from the Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim spiritualities that can be found in BiH. While this endeavour initially faced resistance and criticism from those disillusioned by the war in BiH, which was based on religious differences rather than similarities, it has meanwhile become an important ambassador for peace, not only in the region but even internationally where the choir has been much applauded for its work. Much of this success is due to the choir's musical skills, which have impressed audiences from a variety of backgrounds and serve as an important connector to its wider peace-related ambitions.

Other forms of arts-based work include the Mostar sound archive, which is currently being produced by the cultural youth centre OKC Abrašević and led by sound artist Ronald Panza. The archive is an attempt to revisit some of the sites in the divided city of Mostar, BiH, and produces sound material on those sites by reinterpreting them creatively. In the face of the rigid division of the city's tangible heritage, the different sound stories can be listened to as a way of learning about different versions and histories of the city. This means that, rather than focusing on the post-war divisions of the city, there can be a focus on a past in which urban citizens had shared dreams, where ethnic divisions were not dominant and in which a different future could be imagined. It is important to acknowledge the role that the youth centre itself plays in challenging the divided nature of Mostar. It is the enthusiasm and commitment of those running the centre that allows such a space to exist, on the former frontline of the war and on a street still marked by destructive violence. Nevertheless, OKC Abrašević has offered a space in which a non-ethnicised version of Mostar can be celebrated and lived, by reference to a shared past and creating space for the future. Such activities often rely on a cross-generational dialogue that the centre promotes, and allows for young people to engage with the past of the city they live in. The centre remains an important anchor point in Mostar and has been curating the famous 'Street Arts Festival', mobilising local and international artists alike in their ambitions to imagine a different city.¹⁹

Showing how local activism can be linked to transnational commemoration, 'Što te nema' ('Why are you not here') is a travelling installation/memorial that engages with the intangible heritage of coffee rituals. The project started out in Sarajevo, where Bosnian-born American artist Aida Šehović in 2006 displayed 923 of the thimble-like Bosnian coffee cups given to her by the association Women of Srebrenica, and filled them with the frothy, thick Bosnian coffee. Since then, Šehović has organised the installation in cities all over the world, the

¹⁹ <https://streetartsfestivalmostar.com>

number of cups growing each year as members of the Bosnian diaspora as well as others added more and more. The cups are a material manifestation that reminds the onlooker of the loss of those killed and missing. At the same time, it is a manifestation of intangible cultural heritage. It speaks to the importance of the coffee ritual in BiH, as a means to engage and maintain good neighbourly relations - an intrinsic part of the upholding of the pre-war multi-ethnic weave in communities such as Srebrenica. Further, it is a highly gendered heritage and the installation foregrounds the important emotional work of women in maintaining this cultural practice. At the 25th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide in 2020, more than 8,000 coffee cups had been collected and were laid out on the grounds of the Potočari memorial site outside Srebrenica and laboriously filled with coffee. This event attracted considerable media attention internationally and involved much of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian diaspora. The cups have meanwhile become a permanent part of the memorial.²⁰

In essence, much of this locally-grounded heritage work is based on many years of activism and presence in the city. The artists' standing in their respective communities are key to understanding their wider impact and ability to mobilise participants and audiences alike.

Gendered and intersectional heritage

Cultural heritage tends to reflect power dynamics with regards to social hierarchies around for example ethnicity, gender and age. Monuments and statues are widely-used forms of tangible heritage that are often biased towards male, heroic representations of history, both globally and specifically in the region. The statue dedicated to Mother Teresa or the 'Heroinat' memorial in Pristina, designed to commemorate the suffering of the women of Kosovo during the 1990s war, are exceptions rather than the rule in this male-dominated memory landscape of sculptures. Often, when women are represented through statues, this is linked to their prominent role in the partisan movement and role as fighters in WWII. The 'Partisan Mother' in Novi Grad or the 'Monument to Women Fighters & Victims' in Vraca Memorial Park in Sarajevo are part of this commemoration. In general, there are very few monuments that are specifically dedicated to women and, when they are, they tend to refer to women as a generic category rather than specific, named women. An exception is a monument that was erected in the town of Bijeljina in Eastern BiH in 2016. However, the monument provides a narrow reading of women's roles as it celebrates 'Mothers to Serbian Warriors of all times', thus confirming the well-established gendered positioning of women as producers of soldiers and recategorizes them as victims rather than direct agents in the wars of the 1990s.

In addition to gender, there are a number of other heritage exclusions. Certainly, the most expected one following the breakup of Yugoslavia concerns exclusions based on ethnicity. Indeed, the memoryscape of post-war BiH continues to be fragmented along ethnic lines. For instance, when the 'The Monument to the Killed Children of Besieged Sarajevo' (inaugurated by Sarajevo Canton and in cooperation with the Association of Parents of Children) was erected in downtown Sarajevo in 2010, it specifically acknowledged the child victims of 'besieged Sarajevo', thus excluding the children who lost their lives in Eastern Sarajevo, which is part of Republika Srpska. In cases like this, the decision as to where the respective monument is placed, the terminology used in its inscription as well as the symbolisms used can, advertently or inadvertently, exclude or alienate certain groups, based on the ethnicity, religion, gender, age or other characteristics.²¹ It is therefore important when mobilising cultural heritage for peace, to be aware of such (potentially subtle) exclusions and to consider

²⁰ ŠTO TE NEMA (stotenema.com)

²¹ <https://kulturasjecanja.org/en/sarajevo-memorial-to-children-killed-in-the-siege-of-sarajevo/>

how heritage can be transformed in the light of generating inclusive, rather than exclusive, dynamics.

One example which is particularly relevant in its transformative potential is the military bunker in Konjic, BiH. A traditionally highly masculine space, filled with weaponry and Cold-War-style accessories, it used to serve as a hidden underground maze to ensure the survival of Tito and his immediate surroundings in case of a nuclear attack. The bunker has since then been partially transformed into an exhibition space in which innovative contemporary artists have exhibited their work. Among the exhibits are powerful representations of the Roma community (artist Damien Le Bas) as well as attempts to challenge the masculine tone of the bunker. The artist Adela Jušić has notably produced a large exhibit entitled ‘Eto nam žena’ (‘Here come the women’), which highlights the centrality of women in industries, resistance and family life in the context of the of the Antifascist Front of Women of Yugoslavia.²² Through Jušić’s artistic practices, previously excluded groups are invited into closed, male-dominated spaces. The effects of such initiatives may be limited and primarily only visible to those specifically interested in art to begin with, but they are powerful stepping stones towards the demilitarisation of heritage and its opening up from a nostalgic view of a male-dominated past to a more gender-sensitive understanding of history.

Another example of a museum that provides cross-ethnic and cross-generational perspectives on cultural heritage is the War Childhood Museum, initiated and developed through an activist call on social media by Jasminko Halilović, who is now the museum director.²³ Having spent his childhood in the besieged city of Sarajevo, he opened a website where he asked a simple question: What was a war childhood for you? Thousands of people shared their stories as well as donated objects from their childhood. The museum refrains from any meta-narrative about the war and is entirely focused on the collected objects. They are the most ordinary things that form part of many childhoods – a game of monopoly, a diary, a swing, each presented with a personal story told by its owner. By affording children’s everyday objects the status of cultural heritage, the museum refuses ethno-nationalist, divisive remembering and plays an important role, not only as an exhibition site, but as an ongoing activist engagement through continuously collecting oral testimonies and accepting items from ordinary people who remember their war childhood. The siding with the child’s perspective on war has earned the museum international acclaim, including being awarded the 2018 Council of Europe Museum Prize.²⁴ The museum is mostly funded by international donors, yet some funds come from crowd-sourcing. The importance of crowd-sourcing as a method for raising funds is not linked to the amount of money but to its productive role in community engagement and building a sense of local ownership, according to Jasminko Halilović.²⁵ The museum is testimony to the power of an inclusive, intersectional approach, which speaks to a shared experience of people from different sides of the conflict.

Heritage pedagogies

As we outlined above, segregated education structures have presented an obstacle to the use of heritage as a unifying factor and have instead contributed to the fragmentation of heritage work. However, there have been (mostly NGO-based) initiatives to counter this tendency and

²² <https://adelajusic.wordpress.com/2015/05/08/here-come-the-women/>

²³ <https://warchildhood.org>

²⁴ Council of Europe Museum Prize | War Childhood Museum

²⁵ Personal interview, Sarajevo, 14 February 2018.

to engage in pedagogies that promote heritage work as an inclusive practice. There are several examples in the region of networks stretching across academic institutions, museums and NGOs that collaborate in providing a rich and pluralist understanding of the past. For example, in light of the ongoing politicisation of cultural heritage in the region, the civil society organisation Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB) has been attempting to rebuild a sense of collective responsibility for the rich and diverse cultural heritage through a number of activities, including the so-called Regional Restoration Camps. So far, more than forty camps have been organised in BiH, Kosovo, Serbia and Albania. The camps are an interesting example of how engagement with cultural heritage can be a peacebuilding activity in itself, building trust and understanding. Young professionals and students in the Western Balkans and beyond are brought together to study techniques for restoration/conservation projects. For a couple of weeks, they engage with the cultural heritage of a specific place, working closely with the local community. The camps develop professional knowledge, help local residents in repairing and conserving their cultural heritage, seeking to create an appreciation for the multivalent heritage. Given the fact that the camps take place at the very heritage sites that were subject to violence and destruction, they have an important spatial dimension, transforming the sites into 'safe spaces'. These safe spaces are produced through the familiarisation process with cultural heritage that may be perceived as alien by participants of another ethnicity. The familiarisation process happens through working together on a practical task and building something together. In addition, as participants interpret the heritage they restore, tracing it to real people and events, they build connections to it and a shared heritage emerges through this process. The participants also connect to local, intangible heritage, for example through dancing and cooking lessons.²⁶ An important aspect is the long-term consequences of building regional networks among young professionals who increase their opportunities to work in the field, thus providing a socioeconomic component to the camps. The work of CHwB has been internationally recognised and in 2014 the camps were awarded the European Heritage Awards/Europa Nostra Awards, initiated by the European Commission.²⁷ It speaks to the importance of engaging with pedagogies not only as part of formal school curricula, but to consider the different ways in which learning happens – in museums, public spaces and extra-curricular activities.

Income-generating heritage

One may also note that heritage sites in the region have been subject to a degree of commodification and now serve as tourist attractions.²⁸ An emerging business stream of 'dark tourism', particularly concerning the cities of Sarajevo, Mostar or Srebrenica, is problematic due to its prioritisation of international over local interpretations of heritage on the one hand, but can serve as an important source of income to local populations on the other hand. The famous Old Bridge in Mostar, for instance, has limited social functions for the immediate local community, but attracts a considerable number of visitors every year and thus generates income to the vendors, bridge divers and tour guides who operate in the context of the bridge. Comparably, the city of Prizren in Kosovo has also been marketed as 'Kosovo's 'cultural

²⁶ Hadzic, Leila and Eaton, Jonathan. 2017. Rebuilding the Broken: Regional Restoration Camps as a Meeting Platform in the Western Balkans. In *Heritage and Peacebuilding*, Eds Diana Walters, Daniel Laven and Peter Davis. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press.

²⁷ 'Cultural Heritage without Borders' Regional Restoration Camps - European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards.

²⁸ Björkdahl, Annika and Kappler, Stefanie. 2019. The creation of transnational memory spaces: professionalization and commercialization. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 32(4): 383-401.

capital' and many of its activities are directed at foreign travellers.²⁹ A number of actors, including tour guides, commercially-oriented museums and galleries and local businesses have therefore come to exploit the economic benefits of heritage. Such endeavours can represent an important source of income-generation to local communities, particularly in a context of deprivation and lack of available funding (both national and international) to mitigate the financial repercussions of post-conflict inequalities and violence.

Digital heritage

The transformation of tangible heritage into digital artefacts has become increasingly important. The UNESCO has, indeed, repeatedly highlighted the importance of digital heritage³⁰ and digital preservation,³¹ and adopted a Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage in 2009.³² This is not to say that the digitisation of heritage always and necessarily leads to positive transformation. Instead, societal dividing lines can be reproduced or even exacerbated inside digital echo chambers. At the same time, digital heritage allows, at least potentially, for the engagement of audiences beyond the immediate locality of cultural heritage and can thus build links between diasporas and home communities.

In the Western Balkans, much of this digitisation process has been driven by individual activists or smaller, privately funded entities. A well-known example is the 'Spomenik Database', documenting the monuments that were erected in post-WWII Yugoslavia, often with an anti-fascist stance.³³ The website is based on the initiative of an individual and serves as a tool to reactivate the often-forgotten memory landscape of this era as well as documenting those monuments who have suffered from decay and, sometimes, vandalism. Such digital projects have increasingly also been used to trans-nationalise the commemoration of traumatic events and as a way to engage with diasporas around the world. The Srebrenica Memorial Center, for instance, has strengthened its web-presence and now allows the digital visitor to experience much of its testimonial and visual work through its interactive website.³⁴ There is now even a 'Web Genocide Museum',³⁵ hosted by Al Jazeera Balkans, which allows the digital visitor to experience the Potočari memorial site (where most of the killed in the Srebrenica genocide are buried) as a particularly interactive experience. The website additionally features, films, interviews and artwork and carries the badge of Remembering Srebrenica, a UK-based charity concerned with the genocide and its wider ramifications on society.

Diverse heritage-s

Whilst the integration of cultural heritage work with peacebuilding ambitions may strive to activate notions of reconciliation around shared elements of history, this may not always resonate with communities that hold vivid memories of a violent past and seek both acknowledgement and justice. This search can translate into nationalist politics on the one hand, or into political activism challenging the political stalemate of the status quo on the other hand.

²⁹ <https://kosovotouristinformation.com/cities/prizren/>. See a photographic exhibition at <https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/expos/expoprizen/index.html>

³⁰ <https://en.unesco.org/themes/information-preservation/digital-heritage/concept-digital-heritage;>
<https://en.unesco.org/themes/information-preservation/digital-heritage>

³¹ <https://en.unesco.org/themes/information-preservation/digital-heritage/concept-digital-preservation>

³² <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000179529.page=2>

³³ <https://www.spomenikdatabase.org>

³⁴ <https://srebrenicamemorial.org>

³⁵ <http://www.srebrenica360.com>

The fact that divisionist politics still conglomerates around historic religious buildings is illustrated by the difficulties in restoring two of the major mosques dating from the 16th century Ottoman era – the Aladža Mosque in Foča and the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka. They were blown up as part of the ethnic cleansing campaigns directed against the Bosniak population during the war and the stone fragments were thrown into rivers and spread over a large area. In 2018 and 2019, respectively, the buildings were reopened after an extensive rebuilding and restoration period that strove to involve local community members, resulting in people coming forward with information about where to look for the stones. In the case of the Ferhadija Mosque, some were found at local stonemasons, and the Banja Luka Diver’s club rescued the only remaining whole pillar from a lake. An attempt to restore the Ferhadija Mosque had already been made in 2001, however it was thwarted by orchestrated ethnonationalist demonstrations by violent protesters, many of them bussed into the city. Since then, there has been an encouraging development as the mosque now is open and the restoration was financed partly by the Bosnian Serb Republic government, as well as by international donors. In the case of Foča, developments have gone in the other direction as recent events indicate. In spring of 2021, there were reports of shots being fired at the newly renovated mosque, damaging the minaret as part of generally deteriorating climate in the town.³⁶ At the same time, such heritage interventions in public space are often highly choreographed and militarised.

In contrast, the ‘House Museum’ in Kosovo is an illustration of the fact that cultural heritage also includes the ordinary and indeed the immense power of ordinary artefacts in transmitting both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The museum was set up by Ferdonije Querkezi, whose husband and four sons have been missing since the war in 1999. She transformed her own house into a memorial site that displays, mourns and protests the loss of her lifeworld. The plates on which she served food to her family were never meant to be anything but ordinary, yet they now are on display, demonstrating the loss of everyday social fabric that war entails. Notably, Ferdonijue Querkezi constructed the museum as a site that strives for acknowledgement and justice - not for reconciliation.³⁷

Rather than acting as catalysts to forgetting, these and other artistically initiated monuments encourage a critical reflection on the past. This is not dissimilar to the unique ‘Sarajevo Roses’, a type of citizens’ monument in the city.³⁸ The places where mortar shells hit were painted (and occasionally repainted during the course of the recent years) with red resin as a way of acknowledging the victims of the war and serving as an important step towards making visible the scars that the violence has left not only on the people, but also on the urban landscape as a whole. They were not facilitated by the state or a powerful donor, but instead result from the activism of citizens, some of whom have been using the urban infrastructure as a way of addressing the trauma of the city and its inhabitants. Such more abstract monuments offer more room for interpretation, are non-specific in terms of gender, ethnicity and other possible categories of exclusion. They share their call for public acknowledgement for the suffering that has occurred and generally shy away from a terminology of peace and reconciliation.

³⁶ [Homage to Ratko Mladic Provokes Fear in Bosnian Town | Balkan Insight; https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/06/banja-luka-mosque-bosnia-herzegovina-serbia-reopens-reconstruction](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/06/banja-luka-mosque-bosnia-herzegovina-serbia-reopens-reconstruction)

³⁷ Schwandner-Sievers, Stephanie and Klinkner, Melanie. 2019. Longing for Lost Normalcy: Social Memory, Transitional Justice, and the “House Museum” to Missing Persons in Kosovo, *Nationalities Papers* 47(2): 232–47.

³⁸ <https://balkaninsight.com/2012/05/28/reconstruction-of-wartime-shelling-street-scars-started/>

Layered histories

Memories of the past and the production of cultural heritage are multi-layered: they include diverse time periods, episodes of peace or violence, and grievances. The different layers of history thus extend to a timeframe that is wider than that of the wars in the 1990s. One example of the important role played by pre-war historical cultural heritage is Stari Most, the Old Bridge in Mostar. The bridge was destroyed during the war and reconstructed in 2004 with the financial support of the World Bank. It has since acted as a flagship project to symbolise reconciliation and a coming together of the Bosnian Croat and Bosniak side of the conflict. However, such interpretations often neglect the fact that the bridge itself is not the former frontline, but is instead embedded within the Bosniak part of the Old Town. And while it is a significant landmark for the city of Mostar, its primary attraction is geared towards tourists who enjoy taking pictures and watching the famous Mostarian bridge divers jump from the bridge into the river. Locally, the bridge has mainly started to act as a source of income generation through (dark) tourism, with English-language based memorial artefacts ('Don't Forget') yet limited presence of the surrounding communities. Instead, local organisations and activists have shifted their activities away from the city centre towards other locations, such as the Partisan Memorial on the outskirts of the city dating back to Yugoslavian times, or through a number of smaller interventions in the urban landscape, as promoted through the well-known Street Arts Festival, hosted by the cultural youth centre Abrašević.

It is particularly relevant to note that some of the monuments in the region are not restricted to purely local dynamics, but also refer to the involvement of the international community in the war and/or post-war reconstruction period. For instance the 'Ambassadorial Avenue' in Sarajevo, with its line-up of statues and plaques, was originally intended to serve as a thank you to the international community, but has partially been sprayed, so that the inscriptions now also carry the anger of some citizens who feel that the international community has abandoned, infantilised or disrespected them.³⁹ It demonstrates that cultural heritage can carry ambivalent messages, so whether heritage is exclusive or inclusive is decided not only by its curators, but also its audiences.⁴⁰

Nebojša Šerić Shoba's famous food can monument, placed outside the Historical Museum in Sarajevo, similarly illustrates the disillusionment of the local residents with the international community, specifically with regards to the kinds of humanitarian aid they were given during the siege.⁴¹ As an ironic 'thank you' note, the monument takes offense with the dehumanising form of aid provided during the humanitarian airlift, which consisted of sometimes outdated and hardly edible cans of food for the population under siege. Such forms of tangible heritage act as powerful reminders of the hardships during the war. A comparable critical monument in Sarajevo is the 'New Monument', by Braco Dimitrijević. It consists of a stone cube with the inscription in several languages: 'Under this stone lies a monument to the victims of War and the Cold War'.⁴² The monument is inverted, invisible, buried, and raises questions of who is to be commemorated and even what war it refers to, thus pointing to the multiple layers of memory that curators and artists are working with.

³⁹ Cf. Kappler, Stefanie. 2017. Sarajevo's Ambivalent Memoryscape: Spatial stories of peace and conflict. *Memory Studies* 10(2): 130-143.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/oukoe-uk-bosnia-monument-can-idUKL0657786020070406>

⁴² https://bracodimitrijevic.com/kolekcije_Museum+of+History,+Sarajevo&image=collections_023.html

Understanding presences and absences

In terms of understanding the role of cultural heritage in acknowledging the past, it is important to take into consideration not only what is (socially) remembered, but also what is forgotten. Here, the material visibility of plaques and other similar, less dominant markers in the everyday make them an accessible tool for informal and spontaneous engagement with narratives of the past in public spaces, while their waxing and waning presence reflects ongoing contestations. Having a plaque gives presence to a particular event and acknowledges victims, whereas the lack of plaques marks an absence in cultural heritage that negates the suffering of particular groups or communities.

In Sarajevo, for instance, a number of sites of importance to the 1992-1996 siege have been selected for memorialisation through some 20 plaques on building facades, for example commemorating the Markale market massacre where a shelling attack killed 68 and wounded 144, or the landmark Vijećnica (National Library), whose bookshelves of 1.5 million volumes was turned into ashes. Combined, the plaques connect the various sites into a weave of an urban cultural heritage of conflict. The texts on these plaques follow a similar script and while the victims are described as 'citizens of Sarajevo', thus de-ethnicising them and making their civilian status of city residents the main denominator, the perpetrators are described as 'Serbian criminals'. Certainly, the perpetrators were members of the Bosnian Serb Army that besieged the city, yet the wording of the plaques can be read as collectively blaming Serbs and thus excluding those who feel uncomfortable with the wrongdoings of their own ethnic group. In addition, there are other sites that have not been marked. For example, there is an ongoing controversy regarding the murdering of at least 30 Bosnian Serb Sarajevans who were killed by a notorious unit of the Bosnian army and dumped in the Kazani pit on the outskirts of the city. Despite protests and pleas by relatives, no plaque commemorates these victims.

A similar erasure has taken place in the small town of Foča in eastern BiH, the location of some of the gravest crimes of the war. For example, the Partizan Hall, a sports and cultural activities hall, had temporarily been transformed into an infamous rape camp. To date, there have been repeated protests and commemorations organized by survivors and activist groups such as Women Victims of War, demanding that the municipality put up a plaque on the facade in order to commemorate the victims - as of now to no avail. In this case the denial of crimes committed against the Bosniak population also has a gender dimension, as it feeds into the overall lack of attention to victims of sexual violence, most of which are women and girls.

International actors have entered into this local contention as the building was renovated recently through the LID (the Local Integrated Development) initiative, implemented by UNDP with EU funding. The initiative aims to rebuild the social fabric of daily life in local communities through projects that focus on physical infrastructure. The building today is a well-equipped centre for sports and other activities, however the fact that it carries a difficult burden of the past and is highly symbolic, locally as well as nationally and globally, remains unacknowledged. In this case the LID initiative arguably fed into the erasure of a difficult heritage and strengthened forces of denial.

As noted above, plaques are an accessible tool for memory activists to use public spaces to challenge official narratives and turn the spotlight on unmarked sites, thus exposing facts about the past that have been erased from the hegemonic collective memory. The Bosnian-Herzegovinian informal activist group *Jer me se tiče* (*Because it concerns me*), for instance, puts up 'guerrilla memorials'; plaques erected without permission, often during the night. In for example the towns of Foča, Bugojno and Konjic, heavy plaques were glued or cemented

at contested sites where victims of a different ethnic identity were killed. The actions of the activist group, at least momentarily, reclaimed public spaces for (all) citizens, including those whose experiences have been rejected and excluded. Although the memorial plaques were removed shortly after they were put up, the effects of the ‘guerrilla’ interventions’ have long-term effects on the public discourse as they insist that public space should be a site for dialogue and debate about a suppressed difficult heritage. Their actions can thus be seen as a response to both formal, top-down uses of plaques that cement a particular narrative of the past, and more fleeting protests and interventions in the form of for example graffiti that emerge and fade in public spaces.

Policy recommendations for the European Union

Based on the lessons learned of the projects above, it becomes clear that, in order for heritage work to be locally meaningful and sustainable, any kind of intervention (financial, diplomatic, political) needs to be very mindful of the socio-historical context in which divisive heritage has formed as well as the often-conflictive local interests that surround it. In terms of what this may mean for the EU’s engagement with the cultural heritage of conflict in the Western Balkans, we propose the following key points:

- 1) Any heritage work needs to be anchored in the work that local heritage actors (in the broadest sense) have been conducting over a longer period of time and in numerous and sometimes unexpected ways.**

Our analysis has shown that there is already ample engagement with cultural heritage, and specifically the cultural heritage of war, in the region. It is imperative for any outside intervention to engage with this long-standing body of work of activists, museums, institutions and curators. Their work is often progressive in nature and highlights some of the missing pieces of the peace process, vocalising issues that have remained unresolved in the post-war reconstruction process. This means that even where such engagement may be suggestive of exclusive (for instance, ethnicised) dynamics, the EU should seek to understand the unmet needs that lead to such exclusive practices in the first place. To establish how transformations can be operationalised, much of the existing work with communities can be built upon as local heritage actors will be familiar with the sensitivities, tensions and pitfalls of such interventions. Crucially, we recommend the development of a locally-sensitive protocol around heritage consultations. This should emphasise the necessity to work with communities over extended periods of time, to engage a multitude of local actors and activists, ideally including those who hold different views on the heritage intervention in question, to conduct such consultations in the local language(s), to ensure that incentivisation mechanisms do not inadvertently skew the consultation results, and to engage in the complex ways in which any heritage project can affect local communities unequally.

- 2) Not all heritage is equal. Consider which heritage has been historically privileged and why, as well as how these privileges translate into the present.**

It is crucial to understand the power imbalances that lead to certain heritage objects or processes to be privileged over others. Our analysis has shown that, for instance, women-led initiatives have been primarily successful in the field of intangible heritage, but have struggled to acquire material presence in the physical memory landscape of cities and villages alike. Victims of gendered violence of the war, specifically in relation to war rapes and the imprisonment of women in ‘rape camps’, are hardly commemorated and these sites have not

been marked as part of the cultural heritage of conflict, reflecting the overall marginalisation of women victims. This is due to the social stigma related to this particular kind of suffering as well as entrenched patriarchal structures. It is therefore important for donors to ask what is *not* commemorated, and why, in order not to inadvertently support existing gendered hierarchies.

Similarly, the marginalisation of Roma communities in the overall heritage landscape reflects the marginalisation of this particular group from political decision-making processes more generally. An intersectional understanding of politics and social norms will help grasp the reasons for which certain heritage actors are more or less visible in public space. Heritage engagement can play an important role in rectifying such forms of marginalisation in the public sphere and support local actors in achieving a stronger political voice, too. For instance, our case studies dealing with the experience of war from the perspective as a child (such as the War Childhood Museum) are illustrative of the benefits of an intersectional approach. Viewing the lives of children in war as trans-ethnically connected on the one hand, yet shaped by different forms of inequality created through the war, can illuminate the direct and structural violence inherent in the creation of such inequalities.

3) The frictions around cultural heritage can be successfully addressed through work with educational actors.

Much of the dynamic developments that allow for an opening up of seemingly frozen processes lie in the field of education, where tangible heritage is taught, normalised, legitimised, or challenged. Schools, museums, galleries and heritage organisations involved in public outreach work have a crucial role to play in changing public perceptions and activism around heritage practices. In both Kosovo and BiH, this is, however, complicated through the continuing dominance of ethnically-based educational systems, which favour nationalistic and exclusive understandings of history. An engagement with educational practices, within and beyond the school system, is therefore a crucial element in addressing the consolidation of exclusive heritage practices in the present and future. The EU can build on the ongoing work done in this area by local, regional and international actors (OSCE, Obrazovanje gradi BiH, OKC Abrašević, CHwB and many more).

4) Heritage work must not be seen in terms of its political repercussions only, but also in its function as income-generating factor in contexts of deprivation.

Heritage may fulfil an important function in generating income and livelihoods for citizens in precarious economies. Heritage interventions should therefore strive to primarily employ local citizens under non-precarious contracts and make sure that any kind of symbolic intervention also has positive material spill-over effects into the local economy. In so doing, it is crucial to take into consideration the above recommendations regarding intersectional inclusion.

5) Digital opportunities for heritage transformation should be considered.

Beyond engagement with the physical artefacts of tangible heritage, new digital technologies allow for a broad spectrum of possibilities in terms of how heritage can be curated, preserved and edited. Not least the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic have accelerated digital forms of heritage activism. While most forms of digital heritage work have broadly stayed in line with the tangible heritage itself (in terms of its objectives and perspectives), digitisation practices allow for an opening up to bigger, transnational audiences. It also allows to preserve tangible heritage in digital ways while the physical heritage may be under threat or in the

process of being modified. Digital heritage engagement, particularly when it involves creative actors and artists, can offer new possibilities of connecting with heritage, imagine new possibilities of curating the past and provide alternative platforms of discussion, involving not only local actors, but also diasporas and solidarity movements from across the globe. Those excluded from the physical heritage (due to access barriers, disabilities, travel restrictions, or fears of moving in the area of a different ethnic group) can thus find new ways of accessing heritage, although digital echo chambers still exist, not dissimilar from those around tangible heritage.

6) Heritage interventions should not impose external notions of reconciliation but instead engage with the diversity of local requirements.

Post-conflict countries continue to carry sensitivities from the past into the present. These need to be treated with caution as any heritage work risks re-triggering trauma. Often, heritage work will face a tension between the hope for reconciliation on the one hand, and the need to acknowledge wrongdoings on the other hand. The latter may require naming perpetrators, risking to cause offence with certain parts of the population. Such decisions need to be taken with much consideration and an acceptance of the fact that not all cultural heritage work can be transformed into a neutral, conflict-free zone. Instead, such interventions are highly political in terms of who they give public presence to and which voices remain unheard. Only long-term engagement with the affected communities (not on a project basis but instead as a longer, open conversation, which is subject to continuous challenge and modification) can be key to getting the tone right in engaging in such sensitive work. Hiring staff with in-depth local knowledge and language abilities is part and parcel of meaningful and informed engagement in the field of cultural heritage. In that, artwork is a dynamic arena for engaging with cultural heritage in ways that do not necessarily advocate for a specific interpretation of the past, either in terms of expectations of reconciliation or in terms of continued divisions, but rather open up for contestations, acknowledgement of pain and fear and making visible new, transformative ways of relating to the past. Constructive engagements would include finding ways to support artists that do not risk enrolling them in specific externally constructed projects but rather expand their artistic freedom.

7) Heritage work should be sensitive to the multiple layering of history.

The cultural heritage of conflict is connected to different historical periods, from distant pasts to the pre-war period, as well as the times of war. ‘Authentic’ sites of violence and commemorative spaces, events and rituals interlace with heritage from earlier periods that may have been targeted during the conflict, thus becoming doubly contentious. At the same time, the Western Balkans hold a history of co-existence and peaceful diversity that deserves attention. The tangible and intangible heritage consisting of the rich experiences of shared identities and multi-cultural practices is an important component for peace. Much of the locally-grounded heritage work has managed to find contextually-specific anchor points in history which point to shared and inclusive histories that often pre-date the war itself. Some of the work we have highlighted successfully mobilises cross-generational dialogue as a way of referring to peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups during the Yugoslav era. Such work sees ‘transformation’ less as the invention of new policies or ideas, but more as a way of connecting to marginalised or forgotten shared histories grounded in the past. At the same time, such engagements must also be aware of underlying contentions and exclusions that were also part of these times. To acknowledge and work with heritage from different times can thus contribute to overcoming divisions and (re)building a sense of a shared past that support imaginations of a shared future.

8) A spatial analysis of presences and absences in the post-conflict landscape should be conducted to understand processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Divisions and exclusions in fractured societies are visible in the material manifestations of tangible cultural heritage. Paying attention to who and what is commemorated provides insights into power dynamics in local communities and beyond. Crucially, it is just as important to identify those events and victims that are *not* afforded any commemoration. Such absences may be at least as meaningful as the cultural heritage that is materially manifested. In particular, it can be fruitful to trace and map the presence/absence of plaques and other similar, less dominant, forms of commemoration. Plaques are flexible instruments for smaller interventions in public spaces and tend to be put up and taken down in a reflection of fluctuating and ongoing memory politics. In addition, they are employed by a broad spectrum of actors. We recommend that a systematic spatial analysis is conducted in relevant communities, taking note not only of large-scale monuments, but also of the presence/absence of plaques, street names and other seemingly small-scale symbols.