EUROPEAN

POLICYBRIEF

Digital heritage dialogue[s]: the role of digitally-enabled conversations in constructing heritage identities in Europe
January 2019

This policy brief focuses on the role of digital technologies and design led practice in engaging reflexive dialogues regarding European identity and heritage.

This Policy Brief is relevant for:

EUROPEAN COMMISSION	because	It highlights the need for dialogue to be addressed across EU policies that deal with cultural and digital matters.
NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS	because	It suggests direction for cultural heritage policy that supports cultural diversity and community cohesion at a national level.
CULTURAL SECTOR PROFESSIONALS	because	It presents recommendations for new means of communicating culture in Europe through the incorporation of design practice and the use of digital technologies.
CULTURAL SECTOR RESEARCHERS	because	It encourages future transdisciplinary research and suggests the use of design practice methodologies.

Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1** – European policy should seek to develop understandings of 'dialogue' that recognise the impact of, and opportunities presented by, digital technologies. A recognition of the emergence of new dialogic spaces and possibilities is encouraged through the development of policy which inspires cultural institutions to consider themselves as active participants in these dialogic spaces.
- **Recommendation 2** – The heritage sector should embrace design practice that allows for the creation of new dialogic opportunities. This recognises the potential for semi-structured dialogue to create more reflective and reflexive conversation. Groups such as the newly founded **Cultural Heritage Forum** (European Commission 2018) should encourage the adoption of design practice in the creation of new European heritage policy.
- **Recommendation 3** – Greater 'techno-social literacy' (Galani and Mason, 2019) and the better incorporation of digital tools in the heritage sector should be facilitated through i) commissioning new research and ii) embedding digital skills training in heritage education – potentially through the E4P professional development programme (*European Past in the Present: Politics and Policy*) proposed in CoHERE Policy Brief *Productions and Omissions of European Heritage.* Through combining digital skills training with a focus upon facilitating dialogue, heritage institutions can reach new, particularly marginalised, groups who may previously not have interacted with existing cultural heritage provision. This will help heritage institutions to play a role in meeting European Union goals of strengthening democracy through open participation in cultural provision.
- **Recommendation 4** – The above recommendations are best facilitated through encouraging transdisciplinary approaches at all levels, engaging those with skills in digital technologies, design and co-creation in cultural sector research.

CoHERE: Critical Heritages – performing and representing identities in Europe, seeks to explore and analyse productions and meanings of the European past in the present.

Figure 1: Output from a 'futurescaping' workshop with museum professionals. (Copyright: CIID)

Heritage is made in the myriad practices and cultural forms where the past is valorised for the present, from folk traditions to museums and memorials, the management of historic sites and traditions, and everyday matters such as education, political discourse, home life, food consumption and people's relations with place. Likewise, contemporary connections with events, cultures and sites from prehistory to the very recent past may all be important for the construction of identities, values and futures.

Overview

Digital technologies are changing the way in which we produce and interact with European heritage. The conversations enabled by such technologies play an active role in the construction of heritage identities in Europe. The research in CoHERE Work Package 4 used design led methodologies, produced through collaborative and transdisciplinary working practices, to enable more reflective dialogue(s) regarding understandings of collective identities and heritage in an ever-changing Europe.

The research investigated the role of these digital design tools in helping to overcome potential problems stemming from antagonistic dialogues regarding cultural identity in Europe. Central to all the research is a consideration of what 'dialogue' means in these contexts. Where previous work regards dialogue as necessary to foster harmony, or as an act between two or more culturally distinct groups ('intercultural dialogue'), this research suggests a reconsideration of the role of dialogue.

In researching this topic, WP4 conducted workshops in a range of European venues, involving heritage professionals and the general public. Further fieldwork engaged with user-generated visual (photographic) representations of sites in Newcastle, Milan and Athens, in addition to researching the use of historical moments in online discourse.

Introduction

Dialogue as a delivery mechanism is at the heart of many European policies and projects and connects to key policy areas such as migration, education and social inclusion (for examples see European Commission, 2018). Intercultural Dialogue is also a focal point of specific European policy on ICD (European Commission, 2008). In recent years digital technologies have influenced and expanded the public sphere in ways which encourage us to problematize the very notion of dialogue. As digital spaces are considered to be a part of the public sphere, rather than a separate realm, digital dialogue should not be considered as separable from conventional notions of dialogue and political deliberation (see Kreide, 2016). Rather, new dialogic spaces and temporalities are emerging. Dialogue regarding European heritage and ideas of identity can be found in these spaces as much as any other topic. However, the imperative to develop the dialogic potential of these platforms and technologies has not been explored in relevant European policies.

Concurrently, Europe has been experiencing dramatic social, cultural and political changes. The impact of the Syrian refugee crisis, the continuing effects of the global financial crash in 2008, and the re-emergence of a populist politics based on antagonistic discourse, are issues which pervade all areas of European society. European cultural institutions face the

challenge of positioning themselves sensitively in this changing landscape, in addition to developing a cross-cultural approach to collecting, exhibiting and educational practices. Europe has, however, long been a region characterised and influenced by migration (see European Commission, 2015), a feature of European culture that the heritage sector is well placed to communicate (Whitehead et al 2014). WP4 explores the role of dialogue(s) around European heritage and identity in the double context of the implications of the increasing role of the digital and the wider political challenges that face Europe.

Research findings

What is the potential of 'transcultural dialogue'?

Our research suggests that there is a need to better define what 'dialogue' means in practice. We found that within the heritage sector, dialogue is often considered to relate to specific, face-to-face interactions. The movement of dialogue between spaces – both physical and digital – creates asynchronous dialogues, where conversation occurs across different timeframes and might only briefly or tangentially involve interaction in a traditional heritage setting and in a face-to-face manner.

European Policy often identifies the role that cultural heritage can play in promoting tolerance and mutual respect in Europe through facilitating 'intercultural dialogue' (European Commission 2008). We contend that this term suggests that dialogue often occurs between distinct, separate cultures. This gives little recognition of the difficulty in defining cultural boundaries, the variety of routes through which dialogue might take place, and the long history of Europe as a place of migration and cultural diversity. We propose the adoption of 'transcultural dialogue' as terminology which better reflects the diversity and mixed nature of European cultures, in addition to the plurality of directions and forms through which dialogue might take place (see Figure 1).
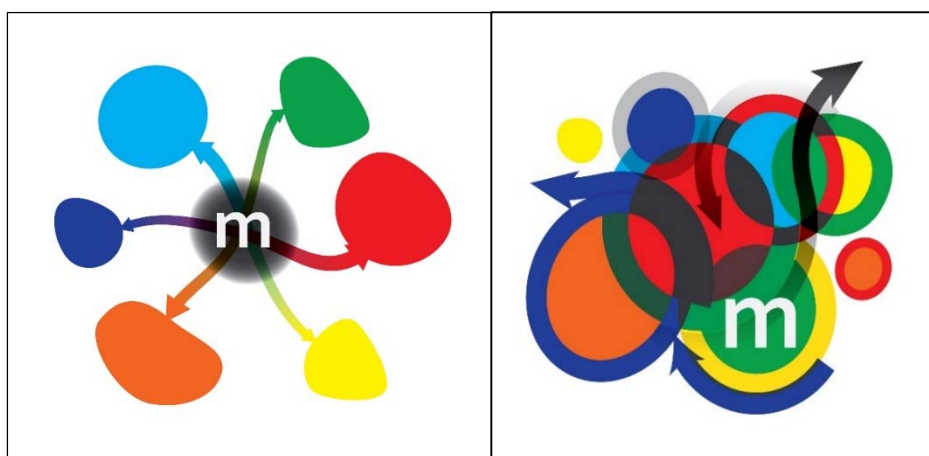

Figure 2: Visualising 'intercultural dialogue' (left) as communication between distinct cultures where cultural institutions act as mediators ('m'), against 'transcultural dialogue' (right), which recognises that cultures overlap and mix together. (Copyright: Richard Chippington)

> *"I believe that dialogue is between two people, so I think that real dialogue - real dialogue - is definitely happening during our educational activities and cultural activities, when you can face different people. And this is very direct."* (Museum professional on 'dialogue')

If cultural institutions recognise the variety of definitions for dialogue, and the range of tools for engaging in dialogue, they can fine-tune their own methods for inciting dialogue with their audiences, and new audiences, more effectively. Such institutions should also recognise that dialogue regarding European heritage is used by some as a tool for fomenting division. However, there are opportunities for both governments and cultural institutions to act against this division through:

- developing understandings of dialogue to include more than 'face-to-face' encounters, such as those facilitated by existing and emerging technologies,
- more effective incorporation of design practice and a range of digital technologies in the presentation and communication of cultural heritage.

The recommendations below highlight the need for more reflective and reflexive dialogue around European heritage and the complexities of such heritage within a diverse society. We encourage further research from designers and cultural institutions regarding tools for enabling and sustaining dialogue, even/especially with potentially antagonistic publics, as a means of encouraging social cohesion across a range of cultures.

Acknowledging disharmony

We found that workshops which embrace design methods and co-creation allow for the relevance of the past to be activated in the present. The co-creation encouraged by these methods can generate dialogic opportunities that may otherwise be absent. In our work this allowed for more reflective discussion around complex issues such as European identity or the future of the heritage industry (Chhikara et al, 2017).

We encourage future research which focuses upon the role of design methods as a means of encouraging reflective dialogue in engaging with more antagonistic or difficult questions of heritage and identity. Such research should seek to engage marginalised groups, including those who are most likely to adhere to anti-democratic viewpoints, in dialogue regarding their perceptions of identity.

> *"That's one of the biggest challenges: to create a space that invites people from very differentiated ideological regions."* (Heritage professional on the challenge of creating positive dialogic spaces)

The need to acknowledge the potential for cultural heritage to be used antagonistically is echoed in recent European Commission policy guidelines (Sonkoly & Vahtikari 2018). By supporting the

research detailed above, European institutions can engage with the use of such heritages more critically and productively, helping promote a more inclusive understanding of European heritage.

Design Practice and Futurescaping

We made use of design methods to help industry professionals and stakeholders better reflect on the future of the industry by rehearsing imagined but plausible potentialities. Cultural heritage sites and museums are under threat across the world, and the uncertainties that have led to the resurgence of populist and anti-democratic politics – financial instability, austerity, threats from climate change – are felt within the heritage sector. Workshops following design methods allow conceptual or abstract questions about the future of museums to be grounded in tangible, immersive scenarios.

Professionals are encouraged to move beyond conventional thought processes, with new spaces and ideas allowing for a better focus upon the values and meanings that are embedded within the objects and sites cared for, preserved, and created.

Embracing design methods allows for a more detailed and grounded planning for the future of the cultural sector which is itself more inclusive and accountable as the process itself actively engages with a range of stakeholders. The application of such practices could equally be applied in other sectors, including in the development of policy through groups such as the Cultural Heritage Forum.

In addition, it can allow for a more reflective consideration of what we consider European identity to be now and, what it might look like in the future. Research of this type can better inform not only heritage sector professionals, but also national and European policymakers in their funding of future research.

Additionally, new European initiatives, such as the #WeareEuropeForCulture project and the European Year of Cultural Heritage, recognise the importance of bringing cultural heritage to previously hard-to-reach groups. Through collaboration between the heritage sector and local government authorities, the design-led practices trialled in our research could help facilitate dialogue regarding cultural heritage at a local level, supporting the development of a sense of belonging within diverse communities.

Digital Opportunities

Our research encourages the recognition of new dialogic opportunities presented by new digital technologies. Nevertheless, a number of participants, particularly heritage or museum professionals, expressed scepticism around the potential of digital tools to

encourage dialogue, with one suggesting: 'let's talk without technology, we don't need mediation'. This returns to a conception of dialogue as solely face-to-face.

We believe that this overlooks the influence of digital technologies on dialogue in everyday lives. In the political sphere there has been a growing recognition of the role that digital dialogue can play in the promotion of political viewpoints, e.g. through apps, micro blogging and social media. Politically, history is mobilised through these means. We see it as essential that heritage professionals similarly recognise the range of spaces and forms of dialogue present within the public sphere, thus ensuring that informed understandings of European heritage are effectively communicated.

"The top challenge is not the technology itself, it's the management of it. […] Digital has no boundaries, no physical boundaries, so we have to embrace it, we have to try and use it but be mindful of all the things that we can do wrong." *(Heritage professional on the opportunities and dangers presented by digital technologies)*

Equally, the design methods adopted in our research allow for the incorporation of digital tools into heritage sites in an inexpensive manner. The rapidly increasing range of open-source digital tools and software should be welcomed and promoted. We encourage thinking that extends the use of digital technologies as tools for the display or preservation of objects (e.g. through portals like Europeana) towards integrating digital tools and design practices into each stage of the protection, promotion and communication of European heritage.

Whilst we recognise the role of digital tools in spreading divisive dialogues, we contend that this is not an inherent feature of digital platforms, but rather instigated by human actors. We further recognise that digital technologies and devices are an integral part of the everyday lives of people in Europe. The opportunities presented by digital technologies to engage in different forms of dialogues and to reach new audiences should be actively explored.

This can help facilitate wider access to cultural heritage, as encouraged by the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage (European Commission, 2018), through the use of digital tools to communicate with audiences who may not access existing cultural heritage provision. Through facilitating increased digital training for new and current heritage professionals, European policymakers and national governments can ensure the cultural sector is equipped to effectively communicate understandings of European heritage widely.

Policy recommendations

Recommendation 1 – European Policy should adopt 'transcultural dialogue' in place of 'intercultural dialogue' so as to better recognise the longstanding diversity of European cultures and influences. European policy should also seek to develop understandings of 'dialogue' that recognise the impact of, and opportunities presented by, digital technologies.

We encourage recognition of the emergence of new dialogic spaces and possibilities through the development of policy that inspires and motivates cultural institutions to consider themselves to be active participants in these dialogic spaces.

European policymakers and national governments should direct funding towards research that helps develop more reflective and diverse dialogic spaces as a means of countering divisive discourse regarding European heritage and identity. In doing so, a more inclusive discourse regarding the diversity of European cultural heritage can be fostered, supporting existing policy goals on integration and social cohesion.

Recommendation 2 - The heritage sector should embrace design practice that allows for the creation of new dialogic opportunities. This recognises the potential for semi-structured dialogue to create more reflective and reflexive conversation. Heritage institutions are well placed to communicate the long history of migration as a part of European culture, doing so as a means of countering antagonistic discourse and developing a sense of belonging and social cohesion across diverse European cultures.

Groups such as the newly founded Cultural Heritage Forum should encourage design practice in the creation of new European heritage policy.

Futurescaping, and similar design practices, should be encouraged within the heritage sector through European and national government cultural policy which recognises positive impact of design-led practice**.** By grounding speculative plans for an uncertain future in tangible scenarios, the sector can better prepare for changes in coming years. These

Figure 3: ErDi, a digital dialogic tool which requires visitors to listen to previous responses before asking them to record their thoughts. It is an exercise in both listening and providing a spoken response. (Copyright: CIID)

approaches can encourage new forms of critical and reflective dialogue regarding our cultural heritage.

Recommendation 3 – Greater 'techno-social literacy' and the better incorporation of digital tools in the heritage sector should be facilitated through the incorporation of digital skills training in heritage education and the encouraging of digital heritage research. This can ensure that the European Commission and national governments are equipping the cultural sector not just in the preservation and digitisation of heritage, but also in communicating the role of cultural heritage through the new routes presented by digital technologies.

The better incorporation of these digital skills can equip the cultural sector to engage in digital work that goes beyond tools for archiving and dissemination, such as Europeana, by additionally encouraging the use of technologies and platforms that are already a part of the everyday lives of people in Europe.

Through combining digital skills training with a focus upon facilitating dialogue, cultural institutions can reach new groups who may previously not have interacted with existing cultural heritage provision, particularly marginalised groups. This will help heritage institutions play a role in meeting European Union goals of strengthening democracy through open participation in cultural provisions.

Recommendation 4 – The above recommendations are best facilitated through encouraging transdisciplinary approaches at all levels, engaging those with skills in digital technologies, design and co-creation in cultural sector research.

Further research into engaging with antagonistic dialogues is encouraged, helping to ensure that heritage sector professionals are equipped to communicate our European heritage in a rapidly changing society.

This recognises that cultural institutions are well placed to communicate the diversity of European culture, doing so as a means of countering antagonistic discourse and developing a sense of belonging and social cohesion across diverse European cultures.

Summary statement

Europe is changing. The challenges of the last decade reach into the cultural sector, but this sector can also help meet these challenges. Our research shows that effective dialogic practice, led by design methods, can create a more reflective understanding of what constitutes European heritage and identity. These approaches can allow the cultural sector to plan for an uncertain future in a more confident and grounded manner. As our society changes so must our understanding of what dialogue is. Digital technologies are changing dialogue. No longer can we consider dialogue solely in terms of coordinated structured events, focused around face-to-face interactions. Rather, new spaces for exchange allow for new forms of dialogue, facilitating the introduction of a wider range of voices into conversation. These conversations can occur across a range of timescales and are less attached to a single place. Effective digitally-mediated dialogic practice, based upon a good foundation and structure, can encourage better sharing of beliefs and understandings across, between and through cultures.

Digital skills must become embedded into the cultural sector, as much as they become embedded in any other sector. These strengthen, rather than compromise, the capacity of heritage professionals to communicate culture. Through the development of greater digital literacy within the cultural sector our heritage professionals will be better equipped to move beyond a focus upon the digital archiving and storage of our cultural heritage. This can encourage the use of existing digital practices, those already common to the everyday lives of people in Europe, to create spaces for reflective dialogue. Such dialogue can facilitate the encouragement of a better understanding of European heritage and identity across Europe, an understanding that communicates the diversity of European heritage as a means of fostering social cohesion through developing a sense of belonging across diverse European cultures and communities.

Additional Sources

Chhikara, A., Berner, A., Galani, A., Arrigoni, G. and Seyfried, M. (2017) *Design Research to Investigate Dialogue and Heritage-Identity,* Available at: http://cohere-ca.ncl.ac.uk/#/grid/269 [Last accessed: 8 January 2019]

European Commission (2018) *European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage*, Brussels: European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/culture/library/commission-swd-european-framework-action-cultural-heritage_en [Last accessed: 8 January 2019]

European Commission (2015) *A European Agenda on Migration,* Brussels: European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration_en [Last accessed: 8 January 2019]

European Commission (2008) *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue: "Living Together as Equals In Dignity"*, Strasbourg: European Commission.

Galani, A. and Mason, R. (2019) 'Dialogues and heritages in the digital public sphere', in Galani, A., Mason, R. and Arrigoni, G. (eds.) *European Heritage, Dialogue and Digital Practices*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Kreide, R. (2016) 'Digital spaces, public places and communicative power: In defense of deliberative democracy', *Philosophy and Social Criticism,* 42(4-5), pp. 476-486.

Whitehead, C., Mason, R., Eckersley, S. and Lloyd, K. (2014) *Museums & Identity in History and Contemporaneity.* Available at: http://www.mela-project.polimi.it/publications/1144.htm [Last accessed: 8 January 2019]

Sonkoly, G. and Vahtikari, T. (2018) *Innovation in Cultural Heritage Research: For an integrated European Research Policy,* Brussels: European Commission. Available at: https://publications.europa.eu/s/jHVc [Last accessed: 8 January 2019]

Authors

David Farrell-Banks, Doctoral Candidate, Media, Culture, Heritage, Newcastle University

Dr Areti Galani, Senior Lecturer, Media, Culture, Heritage, Newcastle University

Dr Gabi Arrigoni, Research Associate, Media, Culture, Heritage, Newcastle University

Annelie Berner, Researcher, Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design

Monika Seyfried, Researcher, Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design

Editors

Dr Susannah Eckersley, CoHERE deputy project co-ordinator and Work Package 7 leader; Lecturer in Museum, Gallery and Heritage Studies at Newcastle University

David Farrell-Banks, Doctoral Candidate, Media, Culture, Heritage, Newcastle University

Professor Christopher Whitehead, CoHERE project co-ordinator and Work Package 1 leader; Chair of Museology at Newcastle University

COORDINATORS	Project Coordinator: Professor Christopher Whitehead, Newcastle University, UK. chris.whitehead@ncl.ac.uk
	Deputy Project Coordinator: Dr Susannah Eckersley, Newcastle University, UK. susannah.eckersley@ncl.ac.uk
CONSORTIUM	Newcastle University (UNEW), Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
	Aarhus University (AU), Aarhus, Denmark
	University of Amsterdam (UvA), Amsterdam, Netherlands
	National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (UoA), Greece
	Istanbul Bilgi University (IBU), Istanbul, Turkey
	University of Bologna (UNIBO), Bologna, Italy
	Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design (CIID), Denmark
	Latvian Academy of Culture (LKA), Riga, Latvia
	Heriot-Watt University (HWU), Edinburgh, UK
	European Network of Cultural Centres (ENCC), Brussels, Belgium
	POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews (POLIN), Warsaw, Poland
	National Museum of World Cultures (SNMW), Amsterdam, Netherlands
FUNDING SCHEME	Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme 2014-2020, "Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies", REFLECTIVE 2 (Emergence and transmission of European cultural heritage and Europeanisation)
DURATION	March 2016 – March 2019 (36 months)
BUDGET	EU contribution: €2,499,651.75
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	CoHERE has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 693289
ONLINE PRESENCE	Website: https://research.ncl.ac.uk/cohere/
	Twitter: https://twitter.com/cohere_eu @cohere_eu
	Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/cohere.eu/