

**AWARENESS**

## Cultural heritage planning workshops as tools for awareness raising

Since 2017, the non-profit organisation “Culture Hub Croatia – Platform for Education, Creativity and Development through Culture” has implemented international documentation and interpretation workshops in partnership with European Heritage Volunteers.

The aim of Culture Hub Croatia is to share knowledge and collaborate in the field of culture at national and international levels to contribute to the development of local communities in Croatia. Partnering with the European Heritage Volunteers seemed like a logical choice from the very start – not only as a means of cultural heritage conservation and valorisation, but also as part of a community-building strategy. The methodology, based on the participatory approach and co-creation, proved to be very successful in these last three years. Culture Hub Croatia acts as a national focal point, connecting local activists, associations, educational institutions, municipalities and other actors with European Heritage Volunteers. Each year, a call for proposals is published at the national level and the location of the workshop is selected on the basis of the relevance of the proposed topic and the impact that the workshop might have for the local community. Culture Hub Croatia assists the local partners throughout the process by helping define the methodology, main aims, objectives and the programme prior to

the workshop and by coordinating and facilitating the workshop in its implementation phase. Finally, they take care of the reporting, dedicating special attention to the sustainability aspect of the project and allowing for proposals to be used or improved upon by the local partners and the community. Therefore, the objective to raise the awareness is one of the most important aspects and the added value of the workshops.



In 2017, the project “Revitalisation of the two towers” took place in Kaštela, in partnership with the Municipality of Kaštela. The participants worked on the concept for the sustainable use of the two monuments in ownership of the city, spread out in the area of the seven smaller settlements that are forming the city of Kaštela. One of the towers was very well restored but empty, without clear function, and the other one, the tower *Lodi*, in worse shape, being used by a boxing club. The main objective of

the project was to reflect on potential sustainable use of the towers, not only through the potential of the buildings themselves, but through their integration in the surrounding environment considered as a whole.

To do so, the participants analysed the sites’ strengths and limitations, which also included reaching out to the local community and asking them about this neglected heritage. Many of them didn’t know much about the history of the monuments, but they had many stories to share. They even invited participants into their homes and showed them interesting examples of photographic documentation. This particular experience gave the participants the idea to use the tower *Lodi*, situated in a small fishing port, as a space that could enable everyone to come and share their personal historical photos. In this way, not only would the tower itself be valorised by the community, but also the local fishing tradition and the personal stories of the inhabitants.

In 2018, the project took place in Rijeka on the topic of “Innovative interpretation of industrial heritage”. Two sites, in the ownership of the City, were selected: the former Sugar Refinery Palace situated in the *Rikard Benčić Complex* and the motor ship *Galeb* that will be both used as part of the City Museum of Rijeka.

The practical work was focused on the two locations and during the two-week period, the participants developed, under professional guidance, a proposal for good-quality interpretation of the two monuments – adapted to their context, historical role, actual function and potential users. The presence of international volunteers and the exchange of experiences were also relevant for the active involvement of the local population in the process of valorisation. They also assisted in raising awareness about the potential of the industrial heritage and the role it plays in fostering sustainable cultural tourism and development of the local community. Several public events were organised within the framework of the workshop, which allowed local students to get more involved in the development and brainstorming of the solutions together with the project participants. The proposals for the interpretation of both sites largely incorporated the community aspect:



from using the ship *Galeb* to share knowledge between generations, to ensuring that the needs and habits of the locals are integrated into the future renovation of the *Rikard Benčić Complex*.

Finally, in 2019, the project “Mapping and documentation of industrial heritage” was organised in Ivanić-Grad in collaboration with the local association “Friends of Heritage”. The programme was shaped to accommodate the challenges that the local community faces in the conservation of this important kind of heritage. The city’s industrial heritage faces several obstacles: disappeared industrial heritage, abandoned industrial buildings and the active industry still very relevant for the economic development of the city. For the first time in Ivanić-Grad, the European Heritage Volunteers Project addressed the issue of the lack of documentation and valorisation of industrial heritage.

The work consisted of material research and documentation in the archives and architectural mapping and analysis of relevant buildings in the central and industrial zones of the city. It resulted with the documentation of over three hundred items in the archives and the analysis of eighteen buildings. The project made industrial heritage more visible and accessible by providing coherent information about these buildings based on research and documentation. In addition, in order to involve the local population and make use of their

valuable knowledge and memories, interviews with several former workers of these companies were conducted in order to discover the social aspect of industrial heritage and get a more comprehensive overview of how the industry has influenced everyday life in Ivanić-Grad.

As usual in the framework of these documentation and interpretation workshops, community events were organised to share examples of good practice from the participants’ countries, inspire the local inhabitants, share ideas and present the results. In summary, the project provided the initial systematic overview of industry development in Ivanić-Grad, and through storytelling, helped raise awareness about the importance of conserving industrial heritage, continuing the work and using it as a resource. The results of the project – as with the other European Heritage Volunteers Projects in Croatia – are available in detailed reports on our website. The concrete outcomes of the project in Ivanić-Grad – the prototype for the website and the materials collected – are the basis for the future valorisation and sustainable management of industrial heritage. At a later stage, the local partner organisation “Friends of Heritage” will use these results to initiate a virtual museum – an online tool that enables the entire community to participate by directly uploading their personal archives, as photographs, objects, and documents.



The European Heritage Volunteers Projects not only generate interesting outcomes and results for the local actors in heritage, but they also gather motivated participants from all over the world. Despite their different backgrounds and experiences, all of them come together and are eager to contribute to the project. This is successful precisely because the team is always composed of young professionals specialised in different fields – from architecture, art history and cultural heritage management to sociology and other relevant disciplines – and all of them offer their different points of views on the topic. This makes the projects become very interdisciplinary but also quite interesting and intriguing for the locals.

The presence of the volunteers from all over the world in smaller local communities raises awareness of the inhabitants who often do not perceive their heritage as valuable or do not consider it as a potential resource, usually

taking it for granted. For this reason, the outreach aspect is integrated in Culture Hub Croatia's methodology. It consists of using the workshop as an opportunity to create community events such as "Open Doors Day", when every citizen can come meet the participants and actually contribute to shaping their proposals by offering feedback and sharing knowledge and experience. Participants also showcase examples of good practice from their countries through thematic presentations to a public audience. The final event is a crucial moment for presenting the results of the workshop to the local community, experts, and often, politicians. Therefore, these projects result in stronger engagement, visibility and potential influence on policy makers.

In the upcoming years we will continue to engage wide range of local stakeholders to become part of the European Heritage Volunteers Programme, especially targeting smaller communities to achieve a stronger impact and encourage even more participation of the local inhabitants. One of the main objectives for the future is to think of new ways of community engagement. It is precisely this awareness raising factor that can actually contribute to the sustainability of the projects, as it enables the local actors to become "carriers" of future activities in their local context.

■ *Marina Batinić*  
*Co-founder of Culture Hub Croatia*

