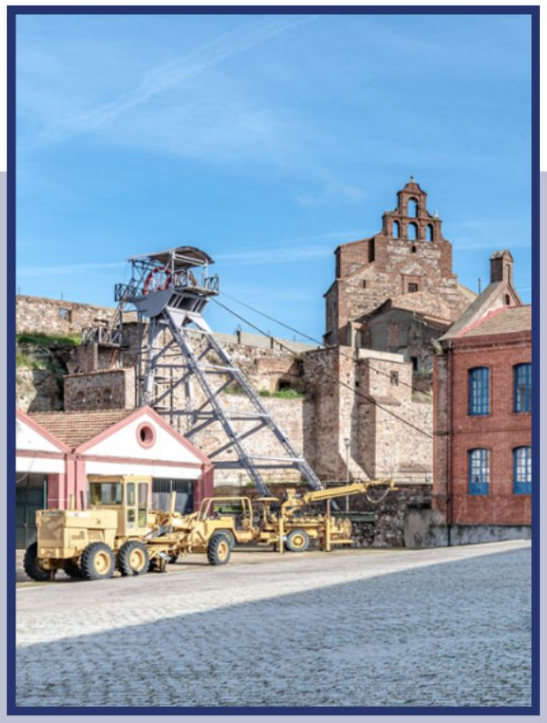
INTEGRATING EUROPEAN VALUES INTO CULTURAL HERITAGE

Monastery of San Jerónimo de Yuste, Spain

22 and 23 May 2025



PATRIMONIO NACIONAL

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SELLO DE PATRIMONIO EUROPEO

EHLBUREAU

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REPORT OF THE MEETING[1]

IVEPC – INTEGRATING EUROPEAN VALUES INTO CULTURAL HERITAGE

Monastery of San Jerónimo de Yuste, Spain
(22 and 23 May 2025)

This meeting was organised within the framework of the **IVEPC project —Integrating European Values into Cultural Heritage—** and aimed to explore strategies for more effectively embedding European values in sites awarded the European Heritage Label (EHL) as part of a pilot initiative. Initially, the Monastery of San Jerónimo de Yuste was taken as a reference case, with the aim of enhancing the visibility of these sites and fostering cooperation among European cultural heritage managers.

During the meeting, discussions focused on how to promote European values through **cultural heritage; how to foster culture and territorial identity through European cultural heritage in rural contexts; how to develop tourism around sites holding the Label and its contribution to sustainable socio-economic development; how to strengthen European identity and citizen participation through cultural heritage; and how to communicate and raise the visibility of European cultural heritage.** Participants also toured the site with the aim of formulating recommendations that could help develop strategies to align its offer more closely with European values.

To this end, the meeting brought together representatives and managers of sites awarded the European Heritage Label, experts in cultural heritage, representatives of Cultural Routes certified by the Council of Europe, representatives of cultural and academic institutions (the University of Extremadura and the University of Granada), and representatives of governmental and international institutions (the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Regional Government of Extremadura).

The IVEPC project aims, in general terms, to integrate European values into cultural heritage, and, more specifically, into sites awarded the European Heritage Label (EHL), while also strengthening these sites and promoting European integration. The initiative is led by the Monastery of San Jerónimo de Yuste, in collaboration with the Minas de Almadén – Parque Minero, and seeks to enhance the visibility and relevance of both sites as part of a shared European heritage. Through a series of cultural, networking and training activities, the project aims to foster the European dimension of these sites, highlighting their importance not only in historical and cultural terms, but also in the transmission of European values.

[1] Report translated from Spanish (original version) into English by Verónica Guillén Melo. European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste Foundation.

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IVEPC IN 10 SENTENCES

"Culture is not a luxury; it is a pillar of the Europe we want to build".

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"Heritage does not only preserve history; it creates future".

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"It is not about having a label, but about sharing a European misión".

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"The true value of a heritage site lies in its ability to inspire new generations".

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"Europe is also built from its villages, territories and memories".

***

"Without participation, heritage is only the past; with participation, it is also the present and the horizon".

***

"Educating in European values is just as important as preserving stones and documents".

***

"Cultural cooperation is not an add-on; it is a tool for transformation".

***

"Young people are not just audiences; they are protagonists of heritage".

***

"Telling a story well can be just as important as protecting a ruin".

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INTRODUCTION

European cultural heritage is not merely a collection of monuments, historic sites, or intangible assets. It is also a key tool for strengthening Europe's collective identity and conveying the values that have underpinned its unity: democracy, human dignity, equality, freedom, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. The European Heritage Label (EHL) initiative aims precisely to highlight those sites that embody these values and project them into the future, making heritage a platform for integration, participation, and transformation.

As expressed during the IVEPC Meeting in Yuste, "heritage does not only preserve history; it creates the future". Guided by this spirit, participants analysed the current situation through a series of thematic areas with the aim of proposing a set of measures to advance a deeper and more effective integration of European values into heritage policies and practices, with particular focus on sites awarded the European Heritage Label.

To this end, an open and flexible format was adopted, in which participants could contribute their knowledge and experiences around a series of topics. This approach aimed to help identify key actions which, enriched through debate and reflection with other participants, could lead to a set of conclusions and the development of effective strategies that could be implemented or put into practice at these unique sites of European heritage and memory. The ultimate goal was for these sites to become fundamental pillars in promoting and defending the European values they, in a sense, represent.

This process was based on the premise, emerging from discussions, that while there are numerous examples of good practice and growing interest in EHL sites, structural weaknesses persist: insufficient training of external heritage mediators, lack of integration between local and European identities, outdated communication strategies, and limited transnational coordination among sites. Furthermore, the low level of citizen participation in defining and managing cultural heritage restricts its impact on fostering active citizenship. These are undoubtedly significant challenges, the foremost being the recognition of these weaknesses —a crucial first step in responding to them with the concrete actions outlined in this document.

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KEY TOPICS

1. CULTURAL HERITAGE AND EUROPEAN VALUES

This section opened a reflection on the central role of cultural heritage as a catalyst for European identity, an element of integration, and a vehicle for the fundamental values of the European Union. Emphasis was placed on the need to provide heritage with a living, contemporary, and accessible narrative that strengthens citizen participation and fosters a sense of European belonging.

Topics Covered

- The role of heritage as a pillar of European identity, integration, and cohesion.
- The challenge of communicating heritage as a transnational common good.
- Reflection on the living nature of European heritage and its symbolic dimension.
- Identification of European values: democracy, human rights, human dignity, equality, freedom, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.
- The importance of education (formal and informal) in transmitting values through heritage.
- The role of heritage in times of crisis (geopolitical, identity-related, and social).

It was emphasised that cultural heritage acts as a catalyst for values, and that European Heritage Sites must clearly communicate the values they embody: democracy, human dignity, equality, freedom, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. From the outset, it was agreed that these are not the only values associated with cultural heritage; many others could be added, such as solidarity, social cohesion, the diversity they represent, the defence and respect of memory, or the values of respect for the environment in which the sites are located (so-called “green values”, as later defined by professor Ana Milosevic, a member of Yuste’s Alumni Network, in an interview conducted for this project by Yuste Foundation), as well as other values that the sites represent depending on their specific objectives. Achieving this requires educational strategies, powerful narratives, and qualified cultural mediation.

The exchange of opinions and experiences suggested that cultural heritage provides a privileged space to put the founding values of the EU into practice. It is not only about preservation, but about giving meaning. Sites such as the Archive of the Crown of Aragón or the Sagres Promontory demonstrate how historical legacy can serve as a platform for dialogue, inclusion, and democratic memory.

EHL sites should, therefore, be conceived as both pedagogical and symbolic spaces. To achieve this, it is equally essential to develop a shared narrative, build transnational educational projects, and promote critical and inclusive interpretations of Europe’s past.

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Conclusions

1. European heritage should be understood as a tool for dialogue and cohesion in addressing current challenges.
2. Sites awarded the European Heritage Label have the capacity to connect history and the future through living narratives. They allow us to reconnect with our past in order to project ourselves into the future.
3. Culture and heritage are a necessity for Europe. Culture must be placed at the heart of European policies: it is a pillar of Europe, not a luxury. We must recognise that Europe is culture, and that culture is something living. The initiative of a new cultural compass for Europe can contribute to this objective.
4. The concept of "European value" must be communicated in a concrete and emotional way. It should be regarded as an open concept that adapts to the place that promotes it. Culture is a pole of European values.
5. Citizen participation is essential to give contemporary meaning to heritage. Access to culture must be strengthened, and political commitment and effort in this direction should be promoted.
6. The sense of European belonging is strengthened when citizens recognise those values in heritage spaces.
7. There is a need for self-reflection on the current state of European values in cultural heritage.
8. Cultural rights form part of European values.
9. Heritage allows one to travel through time, through journeys back and forth that enabled the sharing of knowledge and values, at a time when today's borders did not yet exist.
10. Cultural heritage allows Europe to encounter and confront itself; it helps us to become better and is an element of adaptation, being in itself a reason for living.
11. It is essential to know and believe in European values, in their different dimensions, and to show what they are for. In this way, heritage can become a tool for overcoming current challenges, helping us to understand our past.
12. We must not forget uncomfortable cultural heritage, that which is linked to dark moments in our past.
13. Cultural heritage must have a human and humanistic dimension, projecting culture towards the subject rather than the object, and involving society as part of the process in a close and inclusive way.

Cited Examples

- Charles V's stay at the Monastery of Yuste, and that of religious communities, as a symbol of spiritual retreat and European unity.
- The awarding of the Carlos V European Award to individuals, initiatives or organisations in recognition of European values.
- Training initiatives such as the doctoral grants linked to the Carlos V European Award to promote research on Europe.
- The uncomfortable heritage that the Almadén mines may represent, as an example of forced labour.

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Recommendations

- To design interpretive itineraries that explain how European values are embodied in the site.
- To promote collaboration among transnational heritage sites with shared histories.
- To encourage educational materials adapted to different levels of schooling on the role of heritage in European construction.
- To incorporate inclusive narratives that reflect Europe's cultural and historical diversity.
- To create spaces for civic participation, interaction and debate around the contemporary meaning of heritage. Through interaction, we can promote European identity and better understand European values.
- To promote initiatives and educational programmes that engage and commit local communities and young people to enhancing European values through cultural heritage.
- To develop programmes that enable us to use cultural heritage to address current challenges, harnessing heritage in its social, economic and even scientific dimensions.

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2. IDENTITY AND THE TERRITORIAL AND RURAL DIMENSION TO STRENGTHEN EUROPEAN.

This block addressed the relationship between European cultural heritage and territorial identity in rural contexts. The role of heritage as a social, educational and economic driver was emphasised, especially in areas with lower population density. Participants discussed sustainable management models and community involvement, particularly that of young people, as a guarantor of the future of heritage.

Topics Covered

- The role of cultural heritage in the construction of local and European identities.
- Specific challenges of heritage management in rural settings.
- Involvement of young people and local communities in the enhancement of heritage.
- Sustainable practices and models of participatory governance.
- Risk of depopulation and the potential of heritage as a driver of territorial development.

Many of the sites awarded the European Heritage Label are located in rural areas, and much of Europe's cultural heritage is situated in spaces connected with the rural world.

Rural heritage is therefore key to connecting local and European identity in a two-way dialogue that must consider the participation of young people, the redefinition of sites, and their economic and social use as essential elements. This approach will allow culture to become a unifying and socially and economically cohesive force through strategies that foster socio-economic development via culture and through what these places represent, serving as hubs of historical, cultural, and touristic attraction.

It should also be noted that European identity is not built in the abstract, but from the local level, flowing from the bottom up. "Europe is also built from its towns, territories, and their memories". This idea emphasises the need to integrate rural areas, local communities, and their narratives into European cultural policy.

From projects recovering oral memory to initiatives redefining rural sites, heritage must foster territorial pride, social revitalisation, and generational inclusion, all through initiatives that encourage the participation of local citizens. The territorial approach should be based on participation, cultural interdependence, and the restoration of diversity.

Conclusions

1. Rural areas are key spaces for preserving and reinterpreting heritage from the citizen base. The local population is an integral part of the territory's identity.
2. European identity can be promoted locally through shared narratives and transnational cooperation.

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3. Youth engagement is essential to ensure the continuity of heritage enhancement. There is a gap between the custodians of cultural heritage and young people, which must be addressed and bridged.
4. Sustainability strategies must be adapted to rural realities, promoting flexible and collaborative models.
5. Involvement of local associations is essential, as they can act as heritage champions.
6. Cultural heritage in rural areas contributes particularly to socio-economic development and generates returns for the territory.
7. We must act locally and think globally.
8. Specific threats to cultural heritage in rural areas must be considered. Much of the cultural heritage in these territories is abandoned, a situation exacerbated by demographic change and population decline, leading to loss of values, memory, and jeopardising the transmission of knowledge and values to future generations.
9. Existing European tools linked to rural areas, such as the CAP, should be leveraged so that cultural heritage becomes part of the patrimonial and human development of these areas.

Cited Examples

- Experience of Parque Minero de Almadén as an example of industrial heritage in a rural setting with an educational and outreach focus.
- Involvement of doctoral students in research programmes on European integration and cultural values.
- Cultural collaboration projects between Yuste and Almadén, such as concert exchanges or the development of community activities organised by the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes.

Recommendations

- To promote partnerships between rural sites with the European Heritage Label to exchange best practices.
- To design action plans for youth participation, ranging from formal education to cultural volunteering.
- To encourage co-management structures involving administrations, local organisations, and citizens.
- To align rural heritage projects with territorial development and sustainable tourism strategies.
- To create spaces for dialogue between sites representing cultural heritage and local communities.
- It is essential to convey the importance of cultural heritage and the values it represents in educational and academic settings, doing so in innovative ways to engage young people, without losing rigor, and taking into account the challenges and risks posed by new technological tools, such as Artificial Intelligence, which require a plan for their proper use.
- To incorporate early-warning instruments for at-risk assets, funding mechanisms adapted to rural contexts, and training programmes aimed at local communities.

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- Active youth engagement is identified as a key factor in ensuring the continuity of heritage and combating depopulation through initiatives that combine awareness-raising, participation, and intergenerational transmission.

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3. SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL TOURISM AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY

This block discussed the role of cultural tourism as a vehicle for promoting European identity and strengthening the recognition of shared values. Emphasis was placed on the need to avoid the commodification of heritage and to direct tourism towards quality, meaningful experiences, and an emotional connection with the sites and their history.

Topics Covered

- Tourism as a tool for raising awareness of European values.
- Risks of overexploitation and loss of authenticity.
- Designing cultural experiences based on respect and participation.
- European identity experienced through tourism.
- Connection between tourism, education, and sustainability.

Tourism, closely linked to the cultural heritage claimed by each site, should serve as a tool for learning, inclusion, and sustainability. It is proposed to more closely connect the tourist experience with European values, and for sites awarded the European Heritage Label, as well as other European cultural heritage sites, to develop activities for their visitors that complement the cultural, educational, historical, and formative experience. These activities should enhance understanding of what the European project represents and how these sites contribute to promoting European values, with sustainability, for example, serving as one of the current pillars of European integration and construction.

Well-designed cultural tourism, defined in a sustainable way, undoubtedly has educational, economic, and symbolic impact. As highlighted in multiple interventions, it is about “creating to engage”: offering immersive experiences that activate European values.

This implies moving away from mass tourism and focusing on transnational initiatives and routes, community tourism, and participatory models where visitors do not merely consume, but co-create meaning, following the example of the Council of Europe’s Cultural Routes. Examples such as the Network of the Routes of Charles V demonstrate that this is possible when there is a clear narrative, citizen engagement (including civil society, academia, and the business sector), a sense of community, and proper training.

Conclusions

1. Cultural tourism should promote a deep understanding of European values and contexts.
2. Cultural heritage impacts tourism development, and therefore has socio-economic and cultural effects.
3. The tourist experience should be respectful, participatory, and enriching, not merely observational.

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4. European Heritage Label sites should integrate tourism into their educational and social plans.
5. Cooperation between tourism and cultural stakeholders is essential to align objectives.
6. Developing a new narrative is crucial when explaining European values to visitors of cultural heritage sites, using implicit values and promoting cross-cutting values such as equality.
7. Cultural and tourism management follow different paths but must work together, coordinating and adapting to reality.

Cited Examples

- Development of European thematic routes linked to historical figures (e.g., Charles V) or to key events and major historical moments.
- Participatory activities with visitors, such as workshops, surveys, or citizens' forums.
- Integration of heritage into school and university tourism programmes.

Recommendations

- To develop tourism products aligned with European values and tailored to different visitor profiles.
- To establish mechanisms to monitor the impact of tourism on fragile or rural sites.
- To train tourism professionals, including guides, in European and intercultural content.
- To promote joint campaigns among European Heritage Label sites with shared themes.
- To improve communication tools.
- To work with local associations and communities.
- To create content for the educational community and promote it through non-formal education.
- To engage local stakeholders and provide training through structured programmes linked to the cultural heritage being promoted. Coordinate with active employment training plans (e.g., vocational training, training guides in European values).
- To focus on making the message appealing, and develop evaluation elements using existing tools.
- To develop management programmes that provide support and include communities, involving multidisciplinary teams that take into account elements of competitiveness and sustainability.
- To integrate training dynamics adapted to each territory, using tools that allow learning from mistakes and creating resilient systems, also based on the experience of users and local populations.
- To advance towards responsible and diversified cultural tourism models that highlight lesser-known sites and reduce pressure on the most visited destinations.

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- A greater use of digital tools and innovative approaches linked to territorial exploration will generate high-quality experiences aligned with sustainability principles and provide direct benefits to local communities.

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4. COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

This block addressed the importance of communication as a cross-cutting element in the management of European heritage. It was emphasised that communicating the value of a heritage site should not be limited to tourism promotion, but should also strengthen the connection between the site and its citizens. The need to adapt communication styles and formats to diverse audiences, particularly younger generations, and to make greater use of digital technologies, was also highlighted.

Topics Covered

- Communication as a strategy for social engagement.
- Use of digital tools, social media, and short-form formats to capture young people's attention.
- A balance between historical interpretation and contemporary storytelling.
- The importance of the collective brand of the European Heritage Label.
- Cooperation between sites in joint outreach campaigns.

"Telling a story well can be just as important as preserving a ruin", the walls of the Monastery of Yuste heard during the meeting, as participants also called for an urgent modernisation of communication strategies, using collaborative narratives, social media, accessible digitisation and creative formats aimed at diverse audiences.

Participants pointed out that heritage communication must evolve even further towards digital, collaborative and accessible models, and that strategies need to be able to integrate digital platforms, augmented reality, social media and audiovisual narratives in order to connect more and better with young and diverse audiences.

A joint networking strategy among the EHL Sites is recommended, along with the development of influencer-led campaigns and the creation of multimedia educational materials. Europe's history should be told from its places, but in the language of the present.

Conclusions

1. Effective heritage communication requires a clear, consistent strategy tailored to each type of audience.
2. It is essential to humanise the heritage narrative by showing stories and values that connect with people.
3. The "European Heritage Label" brand must be positioned as a cohesive and recognisable network. It is important to invest more in communication.
4. The emotional bond with heritage is strengthened through simple, visual and participatory messages, and by distinguishing what matters to us from what matters to the audience we want to reach.

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Cited Examples

- The production of a short video about the Monastery of Yuste and the European Heritage Label, designed for dissemination on social media.
- Experiences in other European countries where successful collaborative campaigns have been carried out among EHL Sites.
- An example of the guided tour at the monastery with a focus on values, not only on historical facts, or examples such as the actions undertaken by the Archive of the Crown of Aragon.

Recommendations

- To establish a continuous, multi-channel communication strategy for each EHL site.
- To create content specifically for social media, including short videos, testimonials and visual narratives.
- To strengthen the collective EHL brand through shared materials and coordinated action between sites.
- To associate clear values with each site.
- To link sites with the most appropriate stakeholders depending on each site's potential (music, sport, volunteering, history, etc.).
- To periodically assess the impact of communication actions using qualitative and quantitative indicators.
- To learn from existing initiatives linked to the promotion of cultural heritage (e.g., Europeana, the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes, ICOMOS, etc.).
- To showcase the experience, not just the product, to make cultural heritage sites more attractive.
- To allocate resources and invest in visibility as an investment in the general interest that will deliver concrete returns.
- To train local communities and citizens, fostering their sense of responsibility in promoting their cultural heritage. An informed and skilled community is essential.
- To create a European Heritage Label ambassadors programme.
- To work with influencers and public figures, as well as innovative tools — including video games and audiovisual productions— to promote cultural heritage.
- It is essential to strengthen inclusive narrative strategies that bring heritage closer to diverse audiences, combining digital media, awareness-raising campaigns and educational projects.
- To strengthen and encourage the sharing of local stories and good practice in order to reinforce the emotional bond with citizens and promote co-responsibility in the care and enjoyment of cultural heritage.

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5. COOPERATION, GOVERNANCE AND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

This block focused on how institutional cooperation, innovation and sustainability can strengthen the management of European heritage. Participants stressed that open governance, strategic partnerships and a focus on ecological, social and economic sustainability are key for EHL Sites to be resilient and exemplary at European level.

Topics Covered

- Strategic partnerships at local, national and European levels.
- Social and technological innovation in heritage management.
- Sustainable practices in the conservation of cultural assets.
- Participatory and decentralised governance.
- Measuring cultural and social impact.

"The challenge of heritage is not just to conserve, but to conserve well", the participating experts emphasised. **This requires multilevel collaboration, integrated sustainability strategies and shared governance between institutions, communities and professionals. Promoting decentralisation, networking and sustainable management models that involve young local communities and cultural actors is therefore essential, in line with points made earlier.**

Cooperation between EHL Sites, the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes, and organisations such as Yuste Foundation, Patrimonio Nacional, Hispania / Europa Nostra, Ibermuseos, and other networks and entities that defend, protect or promote European cultural heritage at national or international level can enhance both territorial and European impact. Furthermore, sustainability entails investing in adaptive, multilingual and resilient models to face challenges such as climate change or depopulation. **The New European Bauhaus could be an effective initiative to support these efforts.**

Conclusions

1. Cooperation between heritage sites strengthens the resilience and profile of the European Heritage Label.
2. Innovation must serve the cultural mission, not replace it.
3. Sustainability should be approached from a comprehensive perspective: environmental, economic and community-based.
4. Strategic planning shared among diverse stakeholders improves the effectiveness of cultural projects.

Cited Examples

- A case of cooperation between local and European institutions in the sustainable development of the Sagres site (Portugal).
- Use of digital tools for mapping and smart visitor management.

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- Self-financing models in rural areas through the circular economy and the use of clean energy.

Recommendations

- To promote permanent cooperation networks among EHL Sites with common objectives.
- To encourage the use of sustainable and open technologies in heritage management.
- To incorporate sustainability criteria into grants and public policies linked to the EHL.
- To design participatory evaluation tools to assess the site's impact on its surroundings.
- To collaborate with different networks, such as the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes, World Heritage, and Geoparks.
- To establish a coordination committee to promote joint signage and standardise the promotion of sites.
- To create a guide of good practices related to environmental recovery or protection carried out by EHL Sites (e.g., Minas de Almadén, or rural path restoration).
- To encourage gatherings like this one that promote collaboration and cooperation among EHL Sites. It is essential that sites know each other and are well-known within their local communities.
- To take advantage of opportunities offered by European programmes such as Creative Europe, CERV, Erasmus Plus, the European Solidarity Corps, or the New European Bauhaus.
- It is important to build stable partnerships between public administrations, third-sector organisations, local communities and heritage professionals. Networking will optimise resources, strengthen capacities and ensure the long-term viability of projects, integrating environmental, social and economic sustainability criteria to face challenges such as climate change or depopulation.

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6. CITIZENSHIP, CULTURAL HERITAGE AND EUROPEAN MEMORY TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY

This final block examined how cultural heritage can become an active vehicle for strengthening a sense of European citizenship. It explored heritage's capacity to foster critical awareness, democratic participation and a sense of belonging to a shared political community, particularly through inclusive and collaborative processes.

Topics Covered

- Heritage as a tool for citizenship education.
- Citizen participation and cultural democracy.
- Empowerment of diverse groups through the appropriation of heritage.
- The role of young people as agents of European transformation.
- Heritage projects as civic laboratories.

Heritage is conceived as a platform for building active citizenship and a plural memory, including difficult histories and minority voices. In short, European heritage should act as a driver of citizenship. From community workshops to citizen laboratories in archives, heritage sites have the capacity to make participation, inclusion and diversity tangible.

The connection between young people and heritage should be promoted through creative residencies, collaborative mapping, intercultural events and training in mediation. As was emphasised during the meeting: "young people are not just an audience; they are protagonists of heritage".

Conclusions

1. European heritage must become an active space for exercising citizenship, with particular attention to young people.
2. Heritage activities can stimulate critical thinking and debate on democratic values.
3. The active inclusion of underrepresented groups in cultural management strengthens European cohesion.
4. EHL Sites should promote co-responsibility and civic engagement.
5. Citizen participation must be well organised, including participatory governance, so that it develops in a qualified manner, while recognising that some citizens or social groups may not be interested in being active or participating.
6. Take into account the Faro Convention (accessible culture, socio-economic development).
7. Recognise that heritage competes with many other forms of entertainment. It is necessary to seek the added value that cultural heritage can provide to citizens, so that they perceive it as appealing.

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Cited Examples

- Pilot youth participatory budgeting projects focused on heritage in European towns.
- Activities in Yuste organised by and for young Europeans (debates, exhibitions, workshops).
- Initiatives linking heritage with human rights, equality and diversity in the European context.
- Citizen laboratories developed by the Archive of the Crown of Aragón or the Archive of the Indies.

Recommendations

- To promote educational programmes focused on heritage and European citizenship.
- To design permanent mechanisms for citizen participation in heritage decision-making, using language accessible to the public, especially young people.
- To create pilot projects or laboratories to bring cultural heritage and European values closer to citizens, enabling both creation and co-creation. Not be afraid to experiment and innovate.
- To enhance the role of EHL Sites as spaces for intercultural dialogue and European debate.
- To promote youth-led activities that incorporate their own perspectives on Europe and its legacy.
- To develop programmes for community and societal engagement, such as EHL Friends.
- To involve different actors and social agents (writers, artists, historians).
- To promote actions that consolidate cultural heritage as a key vehicle for strengthening European citizenship by fostering understanding of diversity, encouraging active participation, and reinforcing social cohesion. Direct engagement with heritage will help internalise common values and foster a shared, inclusive and democratic European identity.

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the IVEPC Meeting held in Yuste, a set of key and cross-cutting ideas emerged across all thematic sessions:

1. **Heritage as a tool to strengthen the European project:** Sites with the European Heritage Label should not be limited to preserving the past; they must actively contribute to building a common, democratic, inclusive and supportive European identity.
2. **Citizen participation and youth as central pillars:** Collaboration in heritage management by civil society, particularly young people, is essential to ensure its present and future significance.
3. **The need for living and inclusive narratives:** Heritage communication must evolve towards storytelling that engages emotionally and reflects European diversity.
4. **A cross-cutting approach to sustainability**: Every heritage-related action should integrate environmental, social and economic sustainability criteria, especially in rural contexts.
5. **Cooperation as a structural strategy:** The creation of networks among EHL Sites, educational institutions, cultural organisations and public authorities is considered a necessary condition for effective and coherent management.
6. **Overcoming both external and internal resistance:** It is essential to create internal dialogue spaces that allow innovation and risk-taking, developing new models for citizen participation and the promotion of each site's values beyond the usual comfort zone.
7. **Identifying the values each site represents:** This will help convey messages implicitly and more attractively.

Similarly, more concrete actions to be carried out were identified, such as:

1. Creating a common European framework for **training cultural mediators**, including content on values, accessibility and participatory interpretation.
2. Developing **joint**, multilingual **communication campaigns** with engaging narratives, digital platforms and direct participation.
3. Implementing **youth co-creation projects** that combine local history with European storytelling (storytelling, video, theatre, music, social media).
4. Designing **heritage routes focused on European values**, collaborating with other initiatives and networks, linked to Cultural Routes and oriented towards experience and community engagement.
5. Establishing **multi-level action plans** coordinated from the local to the transnational level, involving universities, cultural networks, World Heritage cities, and more.
   Evaluate EHL actions using **cultural, social and educational impact indicators**, ensuring transparency and collective learning.

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NEXT STEPS AND ACTION PLAN

Based on the exchanges held during the meeting, the following lines of action are proposed for EHL Site managers and institutional leaders:

1. **To design local strategic action plans** grounded in European values and in dialogue with the community.
2. **To create coordination units** among EHL Sites to share good practices, resources and joint campaigns.
3. **To establish partnerships with the education system**, from schools to universities, to integrate European heritage into curricula.
4. **To develop technological innovation projects** in support of cultural mediation, sustainability and participation.
5. **To promote participatory monitoring and evaluation mechanisms**, measuring the social and educational impact of heritage activities.
6. Provide **European-level training** for heritage mediators.
7. Implement **pilot projects** for youth storytelling and citizen **laboratories**.
8. **To integrate EHL Sites into cultural routes and international networks**.
9. Develop **digitalisation** and gamification **strategies** tailored to young audiences.
10. To establish **common indicators** to measure social, economic and educational impact.

These actions should be seen as a starting point to strengthen the role of cultural heritage in building a more united, democratic Europe that is aware of its diversity.

1. **Establishing a permanent working group** on values and heritage, with representation from EHL Sites, young people, experts and cultural networks.
2. **Launching pilot projects** at 3–5 EHL Sites, including routes, participatory events, guide training and digital materials.
3. **Submiting joint proposals** to programmes such as Creative Europe, Erasmus+ and the new regional funds.
4. **Holding annual rotating meetings** of EHL Sites, integrating memory, diversity, innovation and evaluation.
5. **Developing a European guide of good practices** for integrating values into heritage sites, inspired by experiences such as those of the ACA or Sagres.

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PROPOSAL FOR A MULTI-LEVEL ACTION PLAN[2]

1. Approach by territorial levels

- **Local:** Municipalities, neighbourhood associations, school groups, civic centres.
- **Regional:** Regional governments, provincial councils, museum networks, regional universities, local action groups.
- **National:** Ministries, Patrimonio Nacional, cultural foundations.
- **Transnational:** Yuste Foundation, Council of Europe Cultural Routes, EHL Network, Hispania/Europa Nostra, Ibermuseos, EU programmes.

2. Social Actors Involved

- Public institutions (educational, cultural, tourism).
- Civil society (cultural associations, NGOs, artistic, neighbourhood and youth groups).
- Private sector (tourism companies, tour operators, cultural consultancies, media).
- Academic and research networks (universities, heritage centres).

3. Types of Thematic Actions

a. Outreach

- Social media campaigns with shared hashtags.
- Mobile app with interactive cultural maps.
- Thematic events and awareness-raising activities.

Suggested Responsible Parties: EHL Bureau, EHL Sites, institutional social media; cultural centres; associations, public and private foundations.

b. Educational

- Educational projects in schools (primary and secondary).
- University seminars on European values and heritage.
- Summer courses, MOOCs, and thematic guided heritage tours.

Suggested Responsible Parties: Universities, educational regional ministries or national ministries, Yuste Foundation, associations and cultural networks.

c. Participatory

- Community workshops on memory and identity.
- Cultural events with local artists (music, theatre, reenactments).

[2] Following the proposal of Professor Felipe Leco Berrocal

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- Participatory cultural budgets developed in collaboration with public authorities at local, regional, national and European levels.

Suggested Responsible Parties: Municipalities, local associations, provinces, regions, social or cultural centres.

d. Tourism-Related

- Design of interpretive routes focused on European values and cultural heritage.
- Community tourism programmes and experience-based activities linked to EHL Sites.
- Partnerships between EHL Sites and tourism stakeholders.

Suggested Responsible Parties: Tourism business associations, tour operators, tourism boards, EHL Sites, Council of Europe Cultural Routes linked to the EHL Sites.

e. Research

- Documentation of cases of heritage re-signification.
- Studies on the cultural, social and economic impact of EHL Sites.
- Observatories for evaluating heritage policies.

Suggested Responsible Parties: University chairs, research centres, think tanks.

f. Safeguarding

- Long-term management plans for heritage assets.
- Accessible and open digital inventory of EHL Sites.
- Participatory audits and community assessments.

Suggested Responsible Parties: Patrimonio Nacional, regional governments, provincial councils.

g. Cooperation

- Joint programmes between EHL Sites from different countries.
- Youth and professional exchange networks.
- European projects (Creative Europe, Europa Creativa, CERV, etc.).

Suggested Responsible Parties: Yuste Foundation, EHL@Network, Europa Nostra, Ibermuseos, ICOMOS, European platforms.

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CONCLUSION

The 2025 Yuste Meeting made it clear that European cultural heritage is not a closed archive. It is a **continuous invention**, a **shared narrative**, a **public square where European identity is reinvented every day**.

A common narrative emerged across all sessions, emphasising that European heritage must be living, accessible and participatory; it must link the rural with the European, the digital with the emotional; young citizens are key, not just as an audience but as authors; and networks, partnerships and laboratories constitute the new cultural infrastructure.

Among the next steps are the creation of a European educational kit based on heritage and values; strengthening the EHL network through joint projects; promoting training for cultural mediators; funding technological innovation from a public and participatory perspective; establishing an annual forum for young Europeans at EHL Sites; designing impact indicators (economic, cultural, emotional); and consolidating the European narrative across all digital and educational channels.

We therefore conclude by noting that integrating European values into cultural heritage is not a symbolic choice, but a strategy for cohesion, belonging and projection. In a global context of polarisation, heritage offers a unique opportunity to educate, foster dialogue and build community. As expressed during the meeting: “without participation, heritage is only the past; with participation, it is also the present and the horizon.”

The challenge now is to turn this vision into public policies, concrete actions and lasting partnerships. Because “culture is not a luxury; it is a pillar of the Europe we want to build”, and there is no Europe without citizens who live it, and no European citizens without spaces in which to recognise themselves. Cultural heritage is one of those spaces, and the European Heritage Label, properly activated, can be its catalyst. Achieving this also requires overcoming internal resistance at each site and stepping out of the comfort zone.

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