

***Blended Intensive Programs (ERASMUS):
Tensions and Transitions
The Meaning of Tangible and Intangible Heritage
Today***

Syllabus

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage, whether in its tangible or intangible form, is considered of enormous significance in contemporary European and Western memory culture. This applies not only to individual and family contexts but also to national and even supranational ones.

With the help of remnants of the past—architecture, monuments, memorials, documents, and artifacts, as well as traditions, craftsmanship, customs, rituals, and festivals—states and governments, communities, minorities, and even individuals recall events that they select from the past and consider still relevant to the present.

Remembrance serves to shape identity (ethnic, regional, and political, but also ethical), to provide collective or individual self-affirmation, or to formulate mandates for action in the future. Such remembrance can be both positive—highlighting one's own values—and negative in the sense of "learning from history," as can be observed, for example, in Germany's collective culture of remembrance through the moral imperative "Never again!" following the horrors of World War II and the associated catastrophe of the Shoah (Assmann 2021; Baur 2024).

Cultural heritage occupies both a fixed and a dynamic place in this culture of remembrance: on the one hand, it enables future generations to visualize past times and events, for example through buildings and memorials (Foucault speaks of "heterotopias"—that is, places that enable a return to other eras or social orders—or through museums and archives that preserve a community's cultural, materialized, and mediatized memory, whereby the study of these preserved media of knowledge allows users to experience "slices of time," that is, to transport themselves back to other eras and to learn from them (Foucault 1981). Both

forms—places as well as artifacts—are simultaneously regarded as the cultural heritage of communities, which revitalize it through use, imbue it with meaning through interpretation and public remembrance, and keep it alive in the present for the future. This already suggests that cultural heritage is a “policy” concept that aims to “ensure the protection of cultural heritage for the enjoyment of present and future generations” (Hauser-Schäublin 2021: 64) and does not primarily refer to questions of ownership, but rather represents a social function. To describe it, three building blocks are drawn upon: the heritage itself, the community of heirs, and the value framework within which the heritage is embedded (Schüppel / Welzel 2020).

2. The Concept of Cultural Heritage

According to the conception of cultural heritage as a policy concept, actors in the policy field ascribe meanings to cultural heritage, drawing on religious, national, aesthetic, historical, or anthropological contexts. These contexts also determine the respective emphasis through

“frames of memory” (Halbwachs 1985) that a society establishes for itself. The selection and application of these contexts to the heritage thus reflect, on the one hand, the convictions of the actors who shape the policy field of cultural heritage and, on the other hand, the values of the society that preserves this heritage. The interplay of selection, interpretation, discourse, and transmission also gives rise to a community’s culture of remembrance, which, according to Aleida Assmann, is “merely another term for political education” (Assmann 2018: 56). This culture is itself dynamic, as cultural heritage can be interpreted and understood differently depending on one’s value system or ideology. Time-bound interpretations of cultural heritage can generate both concordant (harmonious) and tension-filled (contradictory) narratives; the program uses the term “tensions” to describe this phenomenon. At the same time, cultural heritage—despite all its apparent reliability (“eternal certainty”)—is subject to transformations (transitions) triggered by the act of interpretation at different times and in different places. Political designations such as “World Heritage Site” lead to universal reach in the reception of a locally produced heritage, while digitization brings about the idea of a universal

	reception without the original bearer (content and idea are passed down, not materiality), the idea of community building reinforces the notion of cultural heritage's identity-forming function for a specific group, just as the emphasis on communities of heirs both below and above the national level can lead to a pluralization and democratization of the concept of heritage: People no longer become heirs simply by birth (as members of a heritage community or a country), but rather through the conscious choice of a cultural heritage that is not initially their own, yet which, over time, becomes a point of reference—for example, through interaction with other communities or migration to other countries (as described by the Faro Convention of the EU describes).
Learning Outcomes:	3. Approach and Objectives of the Program The planned Blended Intensive Program takes up these ideas of the concept of “policy” and embeds them in a comparative analysis of Germany, Italy, and Poland. The study will examine how, in all three countries, 1. cultural heritage is integrated into the national culture of remembrance, 2. what changes cultural heritage is currently undergoing, for example through new concepts of interpretation (e.g., open museum), and 3. what influence new, heterogeneous communities of reception have on the conception of cultural heritage—that is, what role cultural heritage plays in community building. The study will also examine which various actors are responsible for attributing meaning to cultural heritage in the individual societies—that is, how meaning is generated for whom. Already, alongside state heritage agencies and their experts (museums, historic preservation offices, archives) or marketing agencies (primarily the tourism industry), new players are emerging who are gaining influence within a civil society framework: Urban communities, church congregations, and migrant associations, as well as spontaneously formed initiatives or collectives, are participating in the preservation and interpretation of cultural heritage; the latter often operate in a non-institutional context that focuses on public spaces or heritage that has not yet been preserved (for example, “lost places”).

	The plan is to explore the questions outlined here with 5 Polish and Italian students and 10 German students as part of a cross-national comparison, in which two students will work together in tandems on each research question. The entire group will come together in individual online plenary sessions. By the end of the winter semester, case studies based on themes and institutions related to the dissemination of cultural heritage are to be developed in this way and presented during the joint week in Merseburg; visits to German institutions will take place (as part of field trips). Possible excursion destinations: World Heritage sites in Saxony-Anhalt, the Imperial Cathedrals, the Romanesque Route, the Francke Foundations, alternative cultural heritage, and “lost places.” Didactic Goals: • Knowledge generation • Didactic: intercultural, participatory learning • language training & understanding • comparative skills and abilities
Target Audience	Undergraduate/Graduate students and, where applicable, doctoral candidates
Credits/ SWS	3
Online Phase, Winter Semester 2026/27 – 4 online sessions in January 2027	
Session 1	Introduction, topic selection, group/tandem formation Kick-off: Getting to know each other, introduction to the topic, and presentation of research questions 1. How is cultural heritage integrated into the national culture of remembrance? 2. What changes is cultural heritage currently undergoing, for example through new approaches to outreach (e.g., open museum)? 3. What influence do new, heterogeneous audiences (institutional, civil society, church congregations, urban communities, rural municipalities, migrant communities...) have on the perception of cultural heritage?

	4. What role does cultural heritage play in community building (+ resilience?)
Objective: - Introduction to terms: policy, transition, tension, democratization of heritage, etc. - Further reading: Faro Convention, Assmann, Smith "Uses of Heritage," Sarah Gensburger "Can the Past Change the Future? A Sociological Reflection on What Memory Public Policies Actually Do" (https://europeanmemories.net/magazine/can-the-past-change-the-future-a-sociological-reflection-about-what-memory-public-policies-actually-do/	
Session 2	Identify actors, define the field of research - Groups select two locations in different countries that they wish to compare—e.g., at least one institution and one (community) actor (e.g., small churches/village churches) + organizations focused on reconstruction, intangible heritage, etc.) - Participants gather responses regarding the various dimensions of the concept of heritage as it relates to their issues, consider potential interview partners, walking interview routes, etc.
Goal: - Exchange and brainstorming: Starting conversations, forming tandems - Research: Gathering materials and identifying interview partners for one's own project - Reading: Provide background texts on models of reception	
Session 3	Introduction to Research Methods Guest: Prof. Katja Müller, Merseburg University of Applied Sciences - Explanation of walking interviews, interview guides, documentation (memos, research diary, photographs/drawings), ethics (informed consent, audio recording, data protection), visual ethnography, mapping - Development of interview guides (centralized, 3–5 core questions per dimension). - Teams formulate initial guiding questions and conduct 1–2 practice interviews (e.g., with local students or faculty members).
Objective: - Introduction: various ethnographic and ethnological methods - Selection: Which method should be chosen? - Reading: Provide texts on various methods	
Session 4	Finalization and consultations

	Role of research groups/tandems, expectations, ethical principles, feedback from instructors Assignments: - Establish formal contacts with stakeholders - Set dates for walking interviews (if online) - Possibly conducting short online interviews in your own country (e.g., a Zoom interview with an institution) to practice the methodology - Checklist including: participants, routes, guide, methodological steps
On-site phase in Merseburg (March 1–5, 2027)	
Day 1,	10:00 a.m.: Welcome at Merseburg University 11:00 a.m.: Welcome by German students 12:00 p.m.: Introduction to the program 1:30 PM: Working groups, first poster presentation 7:00 PM: Dinner, party
Day 2	9:00 a.m.: City tour of Merseburg, visit to the cathedral, discussion with cathedral trustees, Cultural Affairs Office 12:30 p.m.: Lunch 1:00 PM: Trip to Halle: walking tour, “lost places,” and discussion with the Lost Places Initiative (?)—fieldwork
Day 3, February 17, 2027	9:00 a.m.: Meet at the university, departure for the Romanesque Route I, discussion with tourism professionals, Magdeburg 12:30 p.m.: Lunch 1:00 PM: Romanesque Route II, discussion with volunteers, on-site 6:00 PM: Stop in Naumburg
Day 4, February 18, 2027	9:00 a.m.: Trip to Leipzig (or Luther memorial sites), discussion with collectives, City of Leipzig 1:00 PM: Lunch 3:00 PM–: University, Workshop I, Incorporating the results into the poster presentation 7:00 PM: Gathering at the Wärm student club
Day 5, February 19, 2027	9:00 a.m.: University, Workshop II, incorporating the results into the poster presentation 12:00 PM: Lunch in the cafeteria 1:00 PM: Final presentation

	7:00 PM: Group dinner
February 20, 2027	Extra day at your leisure

Methods:

Walking Interview	https://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/22878/1/How%20to%20...%20conduct%20a%20walking%20interview.pdf https://www.dlr.de/de/vf/forschung-transfer/forschungsinfrastruktur/analysetools/methoden-toolbox/methode-walking-interview https://blogs.uwe.ac.uk/sustainable-planning-and-environments/walking-interviews-as-a-research-method/ https://www.utb.de/do/10.36198/9783838565132-demo/full/text/topic_01-03.htm https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/51685
Digital Version of the Walking Interview	
Guided interview	https://home.uni-leipzig.de/methodenportal/leitfadengestuetzt-es-interview/
Research diary	
Cultural mapping	https://data.jrc.ec.europa.eu/dataset/jrc-citsci-10003 https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-84248-2_11
Pecha Kucha	
Visual Ethnography	
Documentation	
social media	https://dhd2022.dig-hum.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/DHd2022_226_Be

	rg_Doing-Digital-History_b.pdf
International, Collaborative Research	https://boasblogs.org/decolonizinganthropolgy/collaborative-methods-for-heritage-research/ https://uni-freiburg.de/ska/startseite/studium-und-lehre/internationale-tandem-lehrforschung-in-ko-operation-mit-der-gadjah-mada-universitaet-yogyakarta-indonesien/

Web Links:

Faro Convention, <https://edoc.coe.int/en/cultural-heritage/8757-the-faro-convention-the-way-forward-with-heritage.html>

The Heriland Handbook https://www.iccrom.org/sites/default/files/publications/2026-02/en_heriland_handbook_2025_iccrom_2026.pdf

Climate Change as a Threat to Peace, https://www.academia.edu/57176534/Climate_Change_as_a_Threat_to_Peace

A Critical Review of the Function of Intangible Cultural Heritage as a Driver for Social Resilience and Cohesion, <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-8392/5/4/189>

Enhancing Resilience of Cultural Heritage in Historical Areas: A Collection of Good Practices, <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/9/5171>

Embracing Change: How Cultural Resilience Is Enhanced Through Cultural Heritage, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00438243.2018.1510340>

Heritage Community Resilience: Toward New Approaches for Urban Resilience and Sustainability, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40410-020-00126-7>

Absence Heritage: A Critical Analysis for Awareness, Preservation, and Resilience, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S257744412300076X>

First draft:

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