



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
FIRENZE

FORLILPSI
DIPARTIMENTO DI FORMAZIONE,
LINGUE, INTERCULTURA,
LETTERATURE E PSICOLOGIA

Rethinking Heritage Education Through a Historical-Educational and Participatory Lens

Marianna Di Rosa – PhD Student – marianna.dirosa@unifi.it

INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVE

This research focuses on **heritage education as an evolving field**, questioning its **epistemological foundations** and exploring its potential to foster **community participation and strengthen local knowledge**. Heritage education is conceived as a collaborative endeavour that brings together multiple educational agents—most notably the university, through its public engagement mission, alongside local cultural institutions, public bodies, and community groups. Investigating this field requires activating a **transdisciplinary dialogue** capable of transforming both theory and practice. At the same time, it demands **medium- and long-term processes** that enable meaningful community participation and produce **tangible impacts on democratic life and citizenship**. Such an approach seeks to cultivate trust, mutual exchange, and the inclusion of marginalised voices, ultimately enhancing the shared understanding and valorisation of the territory.

Research novelty: integrating historical- educational and participatory approaches

The research employed a **recursive, multi-stage literature review** to examine the plurality of meanings attributed to cultural heritage and its educational dimensions, and to clarify the epistemological underpinnings of heritage education. This was complemented by a **historical analysis** of national and international policies, conventions, and resolutions, which provided the framework for understanding the evolution of the field. To broaden the interpretative lens, the study incorporated **oral history sources**, collecting **interviews in Belgium and Portugal**. These narratives offered insight into memory-based heritage practices and contributed to the formulation of a historical and participatory perspective.

The methodological design also integrated qualitative and participatory approaches developed within the public engagement initiatives of the FORLILPSI Department. Through **structured co-design processes** involving educators, researchers, and cultural practitioners, the study explored how theoretical principles could be translated into educational practice. Activities were organised as **iterative cycles that connected analysis, design, and practices**, generating a feedback process that informed the refinement of concepts and tools. This **integrated methodology**—combining historical inquiry, policy review, oral history, and participatory design—enabled a comprehensive understanding of how heritage education can support community participation and the co-construction of knowledge.

SOURCES and METHODOLOGY



PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE HISTORICAL-EDUCATIONAL APPROACH TO HERITAGE EDUCATION

The long-standing public engagement initiatives of the FORLILPSI Department—particularly the programme “**Constructing Educational Pathways Across schools, University, and local landscape**”—provided the context for the implementation of the historical-educational approach to heritage education. The programme collaborates with schools across Tuscany, from preschool to secondary level, and focuses especially on the areas of Signa and Sesto Fiorentino, where the co-design process started respectively in 2021 and 2022.

Within this framework, the approach was applied by:

- **integrating historical analysis, local memory, and community knowledge** into the design of educational pathways;
- **engaging in co-design processes** with teachers, university researchers, cultural institutions, public bodies, and local associations;
- **structuring activities through iterative cycles** that linked theoretical reflection with practical experimentation, allowing for continuous refinement.

This participatory and collaborative work supported the development of an educational community committed to promoting key citizenship competences and to building a shared narrative of the territory. By connecting historical memory with local heritage, the pathways encouraged students to engage actively with their cultural landscape and to contribute to a collective memory that links the community's past, present, and future.



CONCLUSION and PERSPECTIVES

The study demonstrates that **heritage education is a fragmented and dynamic field**, yet increasingly calls for collaborative and transdisciplinary frameworks. The historical-educational approach adopted in this research proves effective in connecting historical analysis, memory, and community knowledge, and in supporting participatory processes that strengthen democratic engagement.

The research highlights the potential of this approach to:

- **foster the co-construction of knowledge** across schools, universities, cultural institutions, and communities;
- **promote reflective and context-sensitive educational practices**;
- **enhance the role of heritage as a dynamic space of dialogue** between history, memory, and contemporary social needs.

Future developments should consolidate a shared research agenda, reinforce the university's contribution across its missions (research, teaching, and public engagement), and expand training opportunities for professionals. Initiatives such as the new FORLILPSI **Master's programme *Educating to Cultural Heritage through History and Memory*** represent promising steps in this direction.

Overall, the field remains open and evolving: **heritage education emerges as a dialogical and generative process, where theory and practice continuously inform one another and where shared experiences become a living form of cultural heritage**.

KEY REFERENCES

- Astudillo A. E., Salazar N. B. (2024). Heritage imaginaries and imaginaries of heritage: an analytical lens to rethink heritage from 'alter-native' ontologies, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 30/2: pp. 181-194.
- Bandini G., Bianchini P., Borruso F., Brunelli M. and Oliviero S. (eds.) (2022). *La Public History tra scuola, università e territorio*, Firenze: FUP.
- Colomer L., (2023). Exploring participatory heritage governance after the EU Faro Convention, *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 13/4: pp. 856-871.
- Di Pasquale C. (2019). *Antropologia della memoria. Il ricordo come fatto culturale*. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Duval M., Smith B., Hœrlé S., Bovet L., Khumalo N., Bhengu L. (2019). Towards a holistic approach to heritage values: a multidisciplinary and cosmopolitan approach. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 25/12: pp. 1279-1301.
- Ireland T., Schofield J. (eds), (2015). *The Ethics of Cultural Heritage*. New York: Springer.
- Meda J., Paciaroni L., Sani R. (eds) (2024). *The School and Its Many Pasts*, Vol. 4. Macerata: Eum.
- Fouseki K. (2022). *Heritage Dynamics: Understanding and adapting to change in diverse heritage contexts*. London: UCL Press.



Researching with conscience: Ethics as the foundation of knowledge

10-12th December 2025

