

HERO

HERITAGE ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION
FOR INCLUSION OPPORTUNITIES



Co-funded by
the European Union

A photograph of a stone arch bridge spanning a river. The bridge has a wide, flat top and a large, rounded arch. Several people are walking across the bridge. The background is a lush, green forested hillside. The foreground shows some trees with yellowing leaves, suggesting autumn. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

Heritage Restoration at the Crossroads: Bridging Sustainability, Skills, and Social Inclusion

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1 INTRODUCTION

Heritage deterioration is an issue that a number of European countries face and heritage restoration suffers, today more than ever, from an increasing loss of traditional craftsmanship techniques

It is essential that traditional European restoration techniques are preserved, revitalised, sustained and adequately transmitted. At the same time, heritage preservation and restoration is a professional field that can meet the need to reduce unemployment and where social inclusion can be fostered, through training and upskilling of vulnerable unemployed people, including NEETs (young people neither in education, employment, nor training).

Thanks to professional training, vulnerable unemployed people can develop concrete opportunities and skills in order to enter the labour market through heritage restoration with the ability to stay on and apply their acquired knowledge in other restoration sites or to move on to the construction industry that is experiencing a worker shortage particularly since the COVID crisis. In this framework, trainers play a crucial role, and they need to be adequately trained and upskilled to better manage people in precarious situations and include an ecological dimension in their daily practices.

**Traditional
stonecutting
techniques,
Marseille,
France.**



**Restoring a thatched
hay roof of a mountain
shelter, Petrebišća, Učka
mountain, Croatia.**



The present publication aims to shed light on current challenges but also good practices encountered on restoration sites in Europe and proposes recommendations towards European stakeholders directly involved with the heritage restoration activities from a policy and strategic aspect, a technical and ecological aspects and also from a socio-economic point of view, as it has been clearly demonstrated, that heritage restoration stands at the crossroads of different policies, strategies but also solutions (see III Context). Neither these challenges or recommendations aim to be exhaustive. They are drawn from reflections, presentations, discussions and practical steps, actively involving work site trainers themselves, that have taken place in the framework of the HERO project (see below), in the past 36 months. It is important to note that recommendations are also inspired from good practices encountered while completing deliverables of the project and from the activities carried out directly on restoration sites. Project partners wish to highlight that numerous completed or ongoing projects on the topic of cultural heritage, as well as actors and experts in the field have already emitted key recommendations and have been engaged in regular and consistent advocacy work during the past years and those have also served as an inspiration to this publication.

2

PRESENTATION OF THE HERO PROJECT

A transnational cooperation of actors committed to the alliance of heritage, inclusion and environment

SHARED CHALLENGES

- *The deterioration of national heritage and the increasing loss of traditional restoration skills in a number of European countries;*
- *A major environmental crisis that calls into question our relationship with buildings and the preservation of our environment*
- *An increasing unemployment rate, notably in the wake of the Covid-19 health crisis, that reached 7.3% in the European Union in March 2021 (Eurostat).*

In this context, restoration of heritage sites enables us to safeguard our shared heritage, to offer training and employment opportunities for people in need and to promote the adoption of eco-friendly techniques.

A group of trainees practicing basic mathematics, Marseille, France ©JC. Verchère.



The above observations led five pioneer organisations from four countries, France, Belgium, Croatia and Greece, to collaborate and develop the HERO project - ***Heritage Ecological Restoration for Inclusion Opportunities*** - a European transnational cooperation funded by the Erasmus+ programme from December 2021 to October 2024.

With the ambition to contribute to a sustainable and resilient Europe, the aim of the HERO project was to improve training of instructors in the field of built heritage restoration, with particular emphasis on:

- the inclusion of people in precarious conditions, and
- the implementation of environmentally sustainable practices.

By combining heritage, inclusion and environmental aspects through training, HERO intended to enhance the skills of vocational training instructors in the built heritage by:

- developing more inclusive training practices aimed at people who are furthest from employment, and
- familiarising trainers with eco-friendly restoration methods and the preservation of traditional building techniques.

Traditional stone extraction by the riverside, Epirus, Greece.



The ultimate goal of the HERO project is that restoration of European heritage becomes a lever for professional, social and environmental inclusion.

To achieve these objectives, over the past three years, the consortium led several activities and events in France, Greece, Croatia and Belgium, such as:

- the creation of pedagogical material in close collaboration with trainers
- learning and training activities for trainers
- testing of the new material with trainees in precarious situations
- public gatherings that promote and increase visibility of the project and its achievements.

The following outputs were delivered:

- A [gallery of inspiring initiatives](#) in Europe and Mediterranean region combining heritage restoration with social, economic and sustainable development and models to heritage restoration training in Europe
- A [toolkit for heritage professionals](#), trainers and organisations to upgrade heritage restoration worksite into inclusive and eco-friendly platforms for training and reskilling
- A [set of video tutorials](#), hands-on content and training activity concepts to equip the heritage restoration training community with ready-to-use material
- The present recommendation compiling the main findings and needs identified during the project to fully achieve the inclusive and eco-friendly potential of heritage restoration training in Europe

HERO partners



[Acta Vista](#) (leader of the project) implements back to work programmes on heritage restoration worksites for people in precarious situations. The organisation offers them paid working contracts, as well as hands-on experience in ancient masonry, training, social & vocational support. In 20 years, 40 sites have been restored in France, involving over 7000 participants.



[Bao Formation](#) is closely associated with Acta Vista and delivers qualifying training in the field of ancient masonry for Acta Vista's back to work programme participants. Bao Formation has developed a pedagogy through gesture and practice adapted to people with difficulties in accessing training opportunities. In recent years, Bao Formation has also developed training programmes for professionals in the field of energetic transition in the construction industry.



[4 GRADA DRAGODID](#) (short: Dragodid) is an education, training and awareness raising civil society organisation, whose work is focused on vernacular architecture, specifically dry stone techniques in Croatia and the Eastern Adriatic area. Dragodid is based on the recognition that dry stone masonry techniques are practical, culturally important and sustainable, as well as a part of the region's intangible heritage which is immensely important for future generations: they produce usable and aesthetic structures from locally available materials. Dragodid strongly believes that dry stone know-how contributes to the creation of a collective identity associated with the element at local and regional level, generating synergies and common bonds.



[Boulouki](#) - itinerant workshop on traditional building techniques, is a Civil Non-Profit Organisation established in 2018 in Athens, Greece. Boulouki means "gaggle", travelling group, a name evoking the tradition of travelling companies of stone masons and craftsmen. Boulouki is an interdisciplinary research collaborative, whose work is focused on the study of traditional building techniques and materials. Its aim is to trace craftspeople and document the historical knowledge; to study and to further disseminate it through workshops and actual building projects which are organised in collaboration with local communities.



[POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ - PLS](#) is an independent European think & do tank committed to promoting solidarity and sustainability in Europe. PLS brings its expertise in research, consulting, coordination of transnational projects and event organisation to companies, public authorities and actors of the civil society. Connecting with the field, PLS also strives to develop and implement innovative socio professional integration programmes benefitting young people. PLS keeps its stakeholders informed about developments at the European level by providing various resources (official texts, best practices, stakeholders and news) notably through its four European observatories: on Social Economy, on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Diversity, on Transition and on Citizen Participation.

EUROPEAN HERITAGE
EUROPA NOSTRA
AWARDS

Dragodid (2011), Acta Vista & Bao Formation (2023), and Boulouki (2024) are laureates of the [Europa Nostra Award](#) in category “Education, training and skills”.

A set of
traditional
tools for stone
cutting



3 CONTEXT

Cultural Heritage at the crossroads of sustainable development in Europe

This section aims to briefly highlight the efforts undertaken at the EU level over the past thirty years to preserve and safeguard culture and cultural heritage. These efforts have demonstrated significant economic and social benefits, including serving as an extraordinary lever for social inclusion. Additionally, the heritage restoration field holds invaluable knowledge and expertise in traditional and ecological building techniques and craftsmanship. Today, these elements are vital to be transferred to modern construction, restoration, or renovation projects. Since 1992¹, the EU has integrated culture in its competence and has, subsequently, mentioned the conservation and safeguarding of European cultural heritage in the EU Treaty². The European Agenda for Culture introduced in 2007³, underlined **the importance of cultural heritage as a priority for European cooperation on culture policy considering it as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe**. Programmes were already funded through the Cohesion policy or the rural development policy in promoting restoration of cultural heritage. Later, the Council Conclusions of May 2014⁴ further reinforced this perspective highlighting the need for sustainable management of cultural heritage. Being of value to society from a cultural, environmental, social, and economic point of view, its sustainable management was therefore identified as a key priority in the 21st century⁵.

In 2018 European citizens celebrated the European Year of Cultural Heritage, a buzzing year of events, seminars and conferences resulting in numerous studies, projects and publications. The EU was able to put cultural heritage again on top of the Agenda, reminding policy makers and citizens all over Europe that European cultural heritage is an important source for economic growth, employment and social cohesion. Cultural heritage also provides a sense of identity and belonging while celebrating its diversity. The New European Agenda for Culture⁶ adopted in 2018 concomitantly with the European Year highlighted synergies between culture and education and the strengthened links between culture and other policy areas. It also recommended, in its economic dimension, to promote the **skills needed by cultural and creative sectors, including digital, entrepreneurial, traditional and specialised skills**.

[1] In 1992, Article 128 of the Treaty of Maastricht (which became Article 151 in the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam and consolidated as Article 151 of the Treaty of the EU) was the first formal legal instrument acknowledging EU-level competency in culture

[2] Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2012, p. 122

[3] Communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world, 10 May 2007

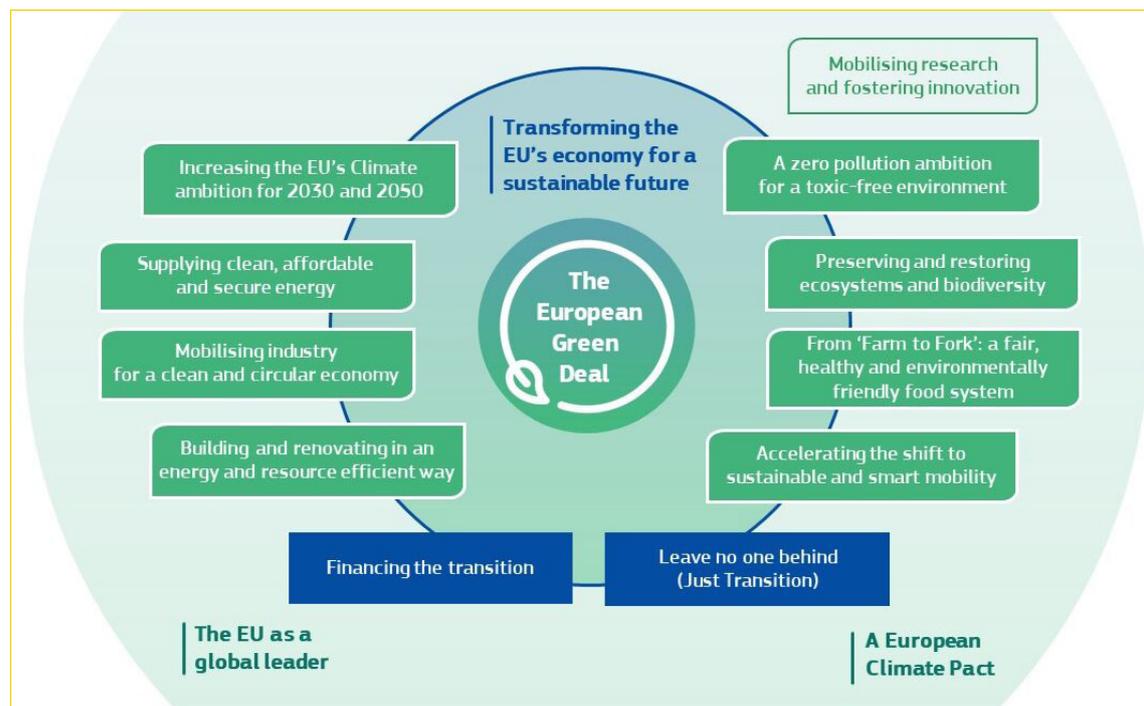
[4] Council conclusions on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe, 21 May 2014

[5] For a more thorough background and policy context, we refer to the full report of the survey "Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe", Executive Summary, CHCFE Consortium, Project co-funded by the Cultural Programme of the EU, p10

[6] Communication from the Commission on a New European Agenda for culture, 22 May 2018

As a legacy to the European Year of Culture, the European Commission presented the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage⁷, among which, Cluster of actions 12 under its Pillar 4 called for “boosting skills in cultural heritage professions”, whereby “the European Commission will support the initial and continuing development of qualified professionals and improvement in knowledge management and knowledge transfer in the cultural heritage sector through projects, including under the Erasmus+ programme”⁸, which in turn launched more initiatives and projects in the field and fed into other EU policies, programmes and strategies. Consequently culture, including the preservation and development of the built and cultural heritage have become unavoidable in the reflections about sustainable development and sustainable urban development as seen since 2019 with the European Green Deal⁹ and its various dimensions¹⁰.

From: www.switchtogreen.eu/the-eu-green-deal-promoting-a-green-notable-circular-economy/



[7] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European framework for action on cultural heritage, Publications Office, 2019

[8] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European framework for action on cultural heritage, Publications Office, 2019, p.53

[9] The European Green Deal is a package of policy initiatives, aiming to set the EU on the path to a green transition, with the ultimate goal of reaching climate neutrality by 2050; it supports the transformation of the EU into a fair and prosperous society with a modern and competitive economy, covering all sectors of the economy, notably transport, energy, agriculture, buildings, and the industries such as steel, cement, ICT, textiles and chemicals

[10] In addition the need for sustainable transformation is underlined by: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the Sustainable Development Goal 11, dedicated to making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

Cultural heritage plays a central role in the Green Deal, through the Renovation Wave¹¹ - which aim is to increase the rate and quality of renovation works of existing buildings so they emit less carbon dioxide¹² - and the [New European Bauhaus](#) (NEB). The NEB aims to bring together the worlds of art, culture, science, and technology to foster sustainable and inclusive development. It seeks to integrate heritage skills and knowledge with innovative and sustainable approaches to address the challenges of climate change and environmental sustainability. These programmes and initiatives were all the more important as the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of climate change - causing deterioration of buildings - reminded us how the preservation of European heritage, whether in the urban remit or in remote areas is vital and very clearly stated in the [European Cultural Heritage Green Paper](#)¹³ and further emphasised in the Council Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026¹⁴.

This evolution in strategies and programmes puts the question of skills at the centre of heritage restoration activities, which should go, according to this paper, a step beyond funding through Erasmus+ programmes and further taken in consideration by EU Member States at different levels of competences. This is strongly highlighted in the Council Conclusion of 2020 on risk management in the area of cultural heritage:

eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2020.186.01.0001.01
ENG

“THE COUNCIL INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE AREAS OF COMPETENCE AND IN DUE COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY, TO:

- **share information on existing heritage expert networks, at national and other levels, to promote the identification, protection, conservation and/or restoration of Europe’s cultural heritage;**
- **pay special attention to the protection of cultural heritage in less populated areas, with a view to making relevant risk mitigation measures available at local and regional levels;**
- **promote the safeguarding and transfer of traditional skills and crafts, and devise, where appropriate, specific training activities to address risk management in all phases of professional development for heritage experts and other relevant professions;**

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION TO:

- **encourage Europe’s young people to participate in various activities in the area of cultural heritage, including those which raise the importance attached to heritage safeguarding;**
- **continue the ongoing dialogue and cooperation with networks that have acquired valuable experience in the field of risk management in the area of cultural heritage;”**

[11] https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/energy-efficiency/energy-efficient-buildings/renovation-wave_en

[12] [The Renovation Wave is implemented in line with the principles of the circular economy, see also the Communication from the Commission on A new Circular Economy Action Plan for a cleaner and more competitive Europe](#) », 11 March 2020

[13] [Jointly published by Europa Nostra and the International Council on Monuments and Sites \(ICOMOS\), 2021, recommending the inclusion of energy efficiency measures in heritage buildings, the use of traditional construction materials, the deepening of knowledge of traditional buildings, the use of traditional construction materials, the deepening of knowledge of traditional buildings techniques, and the inclusion of cultural heritage in the Renovation Wave. The Green paper also highlighted that cultural heritage is itself a source of sustainable solutions and a potential means by which to promote the green transition.](#)

[14] [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022G1207\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022G1207(01))

Delivering on Principle 1 of [The European Pillar of Social Rights Action](#) (EPSR)¹⁵ and on the Green Deal, in 2020, the EU published the European Skills Agenda¹⁶, encompassing 12 actions (among which calling for vocational education and training (VET) centres to deliver relevant skills along the entire lifelong learning continuum, national upskilling actions, and the development for skills for life actions), subsequently also leading, in the same year, to the adoption of EU Council recommendations on (i) Vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience¹⁷ and (ii) **A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee**¹⁸, calling on EU Member States to “ensure that all young people under 30 years of age receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education, in line with Principle 4 of the EPSR”¹⁹. The Council further calls Members States on stepping up the outreach to vulnerable groups and “strengthen the focus on NEETs (in particular those belonging to vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities and with multidimensional problems), using specifically trained service providers and complementary strategies such as youth work, young ‘ambassadors’ and cooperation with partners that are in contact with specific groups of young people”²⁰.

Participants following a craftsperson demonstration on stone processing, Epirus Greece.



[15] “Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market”

[16] <https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2020-07/SkillsAgenda.pdf>

[17] [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202(01))

[18] <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11320-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

[19] Ibid, p.15

[20] Ibid, p. 17

The specific focus on the youth stems from the high youth unemployment rate in Europe. Considering that the measures under the Green Deal will “affect the skills required of construction workers (e.g. those skills which result from changes in the way building are designed and constructed)²¹”, we can advocate for heritage restoration sites to serve as invaluable training fields for training, reskilling and upskilling.

As per the HERO project’s objectives for the built heritage sites, the European Federation of Fortified Sites (EFFORTS) highlighted in its Venice Declaration²² that “Fortifications can offer a new workplace to people who are distanced from the traditional labour market. In a protected regenerative environment they can hone their skills. When working on monumental military heritage, quality takes precedence over speed. It is about craftsmanship and skills. The restoration, cultural and catering sectors for instance are ideally suited for the influx of **experienced professionals who can transfer their years of experience in construction to younger generations**. Repair work can often be carried out without great time pressure, which makes it suitable for the employment of all sorts of people, e.g. people with a mental disability, the long-term unemployed, ex-convicts and convicts. But also providing opportunity for practical training for drop outs acquiring recognized competences. (...) By linking their skills, dreams and ambitions to activities that are of value to their environment and society, all involved parties benefit.” In this way, they can further develop their skills and eventually apply them to modern construction or building restoration projects.

It is, however, crucial that the experienced professionals, who will train these groups, are themselves trained to work with this vulnerable public. They must acquire a set of soft and transversal skills and identify the right external structures, NGOs or social workers to assist them in addressing issues not directly related to the work site. On the other hand they also need to recycle their knowledge about additional traditional building or restoration techniques, as heritage projects can be multifaceted, often requiring different skill sets. A number of sites also recruit volunteers who should be valued and provided with adequate tools, guidance and training.

[21] [Construction workers: skills opportunities and challenges \(2023 update\)](#)

[22] [Venice declaration, six propositions on the future of European fortified heritage post-2018, European Federation of Fortified sites \(EFFORTS\)](#)

4

RECOMMENDATIONS

HERO Partners' recommendations to transform heritage into a lever for inclusion and sustainable development

Considering the adoption of the EU Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029, with the guarantee to "promote our cultural diversity and heritage"²³;

- Acknowledging the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026²⁴ along with various programmes contributing to cultural actions and numerous quality projects that have led to several key initiatives, including the NEB Academy²⁵;
- Considering CEDEFOP's 2024-26 Single Programming Document²⁶, and the resources provided by CEDEFOP, including Vet Action Evidence and its role in implementing EU priorities in national VET plans²⁷;
- Recognising the European Parliament internal study on The impact of climate change on cultural heritage²⁸ (18 April 2024);
- Recalling La Hulpe Declaration of April 2024, calling for the EPSR to be streamlined in other policies and that "the Pillar fosters the preservation of workers' rights, gender equality, equitable opportunities for skilling, reskilling and upskilling, fair working conditions, adequate social protection and inclusion, and accessible healthcare²⁹";
- Highlighting the demands of the campaign for a Cultural Deal for Europe Framework³⁰ (2020-2024), by actors in the cultural field, namely the European Cultural Foundation, Culture Action Europe and Europa Nostra (representing the European Cultural Alliance);

Considering the policy recommendations of the recent Study on a European Policy for Craftsmanship³¹;

[23] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/4aldqfl2/2024_557_new-strategic-agenda.pdf

[24] [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022G1207\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022G1207(01))

[25] The NEB Academy is a flagship initiative on skills for sustainable construction of the European Year of Skills

[26] Cedefop. (2023). Single Programming Document 2024-26. Cedefop

[27] Cedefop. (n.d.). VET Action: Evidence for implementing EU priorities in national VET plans. Retrieved August 26, 2024

[28] [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIEF/2024/762282/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)762282_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIEF/2024/762282/EPRS_BRI(2024)762282_EN.pdf)

[29] La Hulpe Declaration on the Future of the European Pillar of Social Rights La Hulpe, Belgium 16 April 2024, p.4

[30] "The Cultural Deal for Europe campaign asks for culture and cultural heritage to be duly included in the EU's recovery and funding programmes, its sustainable development strategies, and its relations with the rest of the world"

[31] Executive Summary, Study on a European Policy for Craftsmanship, study carried out by DATAD, Dynamic Research & Strategy by City-Wes Group, on behalf of Belgium Federal Public Service (FPS) Economy, SMEs, Self-Employed and Energy (initiated under the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU), 2024

- Reiterating the Council Recommendations on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (24/11/2020) and Council Conclusions of 2020 on risk management in the area of cultural heritage (5/06/2020);

Partners in the HERO project are proposing the following recommendations, which are the result of concrete work and interactions over the course of the project between partners, direct and indirect beneficiaries. These recommendations are addressed to EU policy makers as well as to regional, national and local authorities within their areas of competences.

In addition, partners call on different stakeholders, whether in the area of construction, renovation or restoration to cross the border of their areas of interventions and interact with training organisations, social enterprises and social insertion organisations, employment agencies, social services providers, but also push doors of heritage restoration sites as the cultural heritage and crafts sectors offer solutions both in terms of responding to employment needs and transferring knowledge and skills and at the same time playing a role in the social inclusion and integration of vulnerable people.

Restoring a dry stone wall of a hut, learning by doing, Petrebišća, Učka mountain, Croatia.



1 — Connect heritage with modern training, employment and environmental sustainability considerations

HERO project partners believe that historic and traditional construction is marginalised within the Cultural Heritage Framework, linking most of the times only with touristic industry. The sector should not be viewed in isolation but rather as a critical player in the intersection of heritage preservation, sustainability, and economic & territorial development. By promoting traditional building techniques, investing in education and training, and adopting sustainable practices, the sector can contribute significantly to addressing modern challenges, from the climate crisis to the skills shortage in construction.

The climate crisis underscores the urgent need to adopt environmentally sustainable practices where the historic and traditional construction sector is uniquely positioned to contribute. Utilising local, low-carbon materials such as stone, straw, and wood reduces the environmental impact of construction, while also reviving traditional, nature-based solutions (NBS) that are often more adaptable to local climates and ecosystems. These methods, including drystone building techniques and the use of raw and agricultural byproducts, are examples of sustainable practices that reduce the need for transportation and synthetic materials, helping to minimise carbon emissions.

There is also a growing demand for craftspeople skilled in historic building techniques, particularly in restoration projects. However, there is a critical shortage of these skilled workers across Europe, as the traditional knowledge required for this work is increasingly rare. This shortage of craftspeople can be directly linked to a lack of vocational education and training (VET) in historic and traditional building methods. Most European countries lack comprehensive VET programs that focus on the restoration and preservation of historic structures. Addressing this gap through targeted training initiatives could provide a valuable solution to both unemployment and the skills deficit in the construction sector.

Moreover, the historic and traditional Construction industry is intrinsically connected to both the primary and secondary sectors. The production of building materials, often sourced from local agricultural byproducts such as straw, wool, and clay, forms a bridge between agriculture and construction. By fostering these interconnections, the sector can contribute to a circular economy, where materials are reused, and waste is minimised.

HERO project partners promote the interconnection of the historic and traditional construction industry with training, employment and environmental sustainability sectors, notably through EU and nationally funded programs. This would allow the development of VET programs that focus on traditional techniques, encouraging the growth of a skilled workforce capable of addressing the restoration needs of Europe's cultural heritage. At the same time, these programs foster sustainable practices that align with the broader goals of reducing carbon emissions and promoting the use of local, natural materials.

2 — Transform heritage worksites into training and inclusion platforms

When funding heritage restoration, HERO partners invite public authorities and policy makers to better consider projects with stronger social and inclusive impact.

In line with the New European Bauhaus ambition to develop adaptive reuse of heritage, Acta Vista’s back to work programme model illustrates the feasibility and economic viability of combining inclusion and training for people in precarious situations with the maintenance of the highest standards of quality in heritage restoration.

The back to work programme model implies that participants benefit from a working contract (allowing incomes and stability), but also training sessions and social & vocational support.

With 40 sites restored in France over 20 years, involving 7.000 participants, Acta Vista has tested and improved specific methods that are now ready to be scaled-up at the European level.

Back to work programmes model on heritage restoration have proven to be a good solution to reach people far from training opportunities and the labour market, especially in the construction industry where 50.000 qualified workers are still missing in the European union.

For example, the French government has developed a funding scheme (“integration contracts”) to financially support organisations developing such a model.

HERO project partners recommend European and national public authorities in charge of heritage to support the development of the “back to work programme model” as such a model can allow transforming a financial burden into a strategic investment, achieving both social and territorial impact.

A team of trainees working on the ramparts of the Fort St Nicolas, Marseille, France.



3 — Make craftsmanship more attractive and valued

In the past decades, the image of manual jobs has been decreasing, resulting in a loss of attractiveness for this field and a workforce shortage. A growing part of the European young generations are turning away from traditional craftsmanship, endangering the transmission of these techniques. At the same time, and while being essential to our modern societies, stereotyping construction and craftsmanship as “second class jobs” contributes to people leaving this industry.

Organizing visits in heritage restoration worksites is a powerful tool to improve collective representations on construction and craftsmanship industry, by the prestige and importance it inspires. It is also a great opportunity to provoke the encounter between the young generations and heritage restorers and inform about the professional opportunities in this field.

Since 2021, Bao Formation have developed such programmes for local schools and have reached over 8000 participants. Such mediation programmes are effective to contribute to creating vocations among the young generations, and to improve attractiveness of construction and craftsmanship.

HERO project partners invite public authorities to develop awareness raising programmes on construction and traditional craftsmanship for the younger generations in order to improve the collective representation and vocation of this professional field.

Trainees explaining their work to a group of kids visiting the Fort St Nicolas worksite, Marseille, France.



4 — Utilise heritage to drive ecological transition

The construction industry in Europe is responsible for approximately 20% of CO2 emissions, due to the use of polluting materials, energy-intensive methods, and a lack of optimisation in reuse and recycling circuits for materials.

Conversely, heritage restoration aims to be very environmentally friendly, through the use of traditional techniques and materials that are low in pollutants.

Training future construction workers by using heritage restoration as a practical support can raise early awareness in the industry about sustainable practices and techniques that are more environmentally friendly, and often cheaper solutions.

At the same time, prioritising sustainable development helps reinforce the role that the construction sector can play in the ecological transition, giving more meaning and attractiveness for a new generation of masons, engineers, or architects.

HERO project partners invite authorities to embed ecological techniques into certification and training programs for construction professionals. By incorporating heritage restoration into these educational programs, the construction sector can better promote sustainable practices and advance the ecological transition.

Trainer and trainee practicing traditional stone extraction in the riverside, Epirus, Greece.



5 — Promote and update vocational training in traditional craftsmanship techniques in all European countries

In most European countries, there are no certified -public or private- vocational training programs for traditional/historic building techniques/crafts. It is recommended that each country that lacks such programs develops a national working group and a transnational committee to exchange knowhow, capacity, expertise, develop twinning and exchange programmes, in order to establish public vocational institutes, as well as certification procedures.

Moreover, many of the existing relevant vocational training programs are outdated in terms of the contemporary construction sector, the concepts of sustainability and climate crisis, as well as in terms of social and professional responsibility. Most of the traditional crafts sector is often associated with cultural preconceptions regarding the gender, the ethnicity and the capabilities, making it difficult to accept for example women, transgender, immigrants, people with disabilities or other minorities within the traditional construction sector.

HERO project partners recommend that the relevant authorities, as well as the national and transnational committees should take in account the above and update the existing training structures towards prioritising skills along with personal and social development, in order to update traditional professions and create socially responsible practitioners/professionals, emphasising pride and inclusion/inclusiveness, particularly with young people and vulnerable populations.

Trainees preparing mortar, ©J.C. Verchère.



6 Promote training programmes and employability in remote areas through heritage

Promoting training programs in remote areas, particularly in mountainous and island regions, is essential for revitalising rural communities facing population decline and limited job opportunities. Focusing on vocational education and training (VET) related to traditional building techniques and infrastructure can address these issues while also preserving local heritage.

Valuing vernacular infrastructure, such as houses and water systems, is crucial, especially in the context of climate change, as these structures often embody sustainable practices. Organisations like Boulouki and Dragodid have successfully implemented participatory construction projects that restore traditional infrastructure while engaging local communities.

A notable example is Dragodid’s annual program for restoring the summer village of Petrebišća in Učka Nature Park, which has been ongoing for 14 consecutive years so far. Around 150 young professionals in construction, architecture, and related fields have participated, using traditional techniques and materials such as wood, stone, and hay to restore the village and gain hands-on experience. The program is organised in partnership with the local municipality as part of a public-civil collaboration.

These initiatives serve as models for similar efforts elsewhere, demonstrating their potential for both cultural preservation and economic development.

HERO project partners advocate for expanding VET programs and apprenticeships in rural and remote areas -in collaboration with local bodies, focusing on traditional infrastructure. This approach strengthens local economies, empowers communities, and provides young people with skills that encourage them to stay in or return to their rural areas. By investing in these programs, we address both heritage conservation and economic revitalisation in rural regions.

A theoretical introduction to dry stone walling - Dragodid village, island of Vis, Croatia.



7 Foster collaborations between public authorities and civil society through heritage

To enhance the effectiveness of public training programs, it is crucial to foster collaboration between governmental institutions and NGOs that share similar objectives. NGOs often bring valuable grassroots experience, flexibility, and innovation, complementing governmental resources and policy frameworks. For example, initiatives like Boulouki demonstrate how governmental bodies can benefit from partnering with NGOs to drive sustainable development in cultural heritage sectors. These collaborations ensure that local needs are met through community-driven approaches, promoting social cohesion and economic development in line with governmental goals.

Boulouki has been granted the use of an old primary school in the mountainous area of Tzoumerka by the local authorities for the next 10 years, in order to transform it into a centre for traditional and sustainable construction, as well as a community centre. During this endeavour, Boulouki has been establishing long-term partnerships with institutional bodies, academic organisations and NGOs from Greece and abroad, which are going to contribute in complementarity for the aim of the centre.

By connecting public programs with NGOs, governments can leverage the latter's expertise in participatory and inclusive approaches, ensuring that training programs not only preserve heritage but also build local capacity. Such partnerships are key in areas facing socio-economic challenges, as seen in the success of European projects that combine local policy innovation with NGO-led community engagement to revitalise remote areas and heritage sites. Ultimately, bridging these efforts ensures more comprehensive and sustainable outcomes for all stakeholders.

HERO project partners strongly encourage regional and local authorities to support restoration initiatives in rural areas combining transmission of traditional techniques and local communities engagement.

View of Boulouki's School at Tzoumerka - Greece, under the process of restoration, in collaboration with local and national public institutions.





ANNEX

Non exhaustive list of projects (completed and ongoing)

European Heritage Hub

Co-funded by the EU (2023-2025), the pilot project's objective is to set up a permanent and autonomous heritage hub in Europe. The project brings together a large array of heritage stakeholders and initiatives, responding to the need for a more structured cooperation and coordination at all levels of governance, from local to European and international. The Hub builds on the success of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 and the ensuing European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage and it will also carry on the legacy of the European Year of Youth 2022 and the European Year of Skills 2023.

European Heritage Alliance 3.3

An informal European sectoral platform composed of 52 European or international networks and organisations active in the wider field of cultural heritage to work more closely together to promote the untapped potential of Europe's heritage, cultural and natural, immovable and movable.

European Cultural Heritage Agora

Funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the EU the network project European Cultural Heritage Agora: "Empowering Europe's Civil Society Movement for Heritage" (2022-2024), of which Work Package 3, Training and Providing Advice to Professionals, builds capacity of heritage actors across Europe and beyond to adapt to new societal phenomena, especially the green and digital transformations.

- [Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe \(CHCFE\)](#)

Funded by the EU Culture programme (2013-2015), the cooperation project CHCFE resulted in a comprehensive Report of nearly 300 pages that demonstrates the multiple benefits of heritage for Europe's economy, society, culture and the environment, and presents policy recommendations on how to tap into heritage's full potential.

- [Open Heritage Project](#)

OpenHeritage aims at creating sustainable models of heritage asset management. The project puts the idea of inclusive governance of cultural heritage sites together with development of heritage communities at its centre. This means empowering the community in the processes of adaptive reuse.

- [HeritACT](#)

Funded by Horizon Europe programme and launched in 2023, Heritage Activation Through Engaging Experiences Towards Sustainable Development -HeritACT- introduces innovative and inclusive architectural and design solutions as well as cultural-artistic practices to support environmental and cultural sustainability and to strengthen the cultural and creative industries through community awareness and policy-making across European urban areas of different scales and cultural settings. The innovative methodology and activities proposed aim to achieve the ambitious goals of the New European Bauhaus to connect the European Green Deal to our living spaces and experiences in a creative and interdisciplinary way.



HERO

HERITAGE ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION
FOR INCLUSION OPPORTUNITIES



Co-funded by
the European Union

This is the result of the Erasmus+ project "HERO - Heritage Ecological Restoration for inclusion Opportunities", result of a cooperation between Acta Vista (France), BAO Formation (France), Pour la Solidarité (Belgium), Dragodid (Croatia) and Boulouki (Greece).

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

