

# Cultural heritage revitalization in European urban fringes.

## Stakes and opportunities

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### 3. Keywords (max. 5)

Cultural Heritage, suburbs, urban fringes, urban peripheries, urban tourism



Figure 1: “Urban Renovation yes! But no without the inhabitants!”. Residents mobilization in front of the Maladrerie Social Housing at Aubervilliers, Northern Suburbs of Paris. Though labelled “remarkable heritage”, the social housing estate, outstanding work of the architect Renée Gailhoustet, is threatened by a renovation project. © M. Gravari-Barbas, Jan 2022.



Figure 2: The changing face of the Vaartkom in Leuven © D. Vanneste, Dec 2021.

#### **4. Abstract (max. 100 words )**

The paper aims at presenting how and why seven research teams from urban areas spread all over Europe tackled the cultural heritage of their urban fringes. It builds on cross- and interdisciplinary methodologies. A critical analysis of the approaches of local stakeholders aims at constructing an agenda for future actions in these urban peripheries and developing a manifesto.

#### **5. Body of the text**

##### **Introduction**

The paper presents the results of a research carried out in the framework of seven Una Europa Universities in seven European metropolitan areas (Bologna, Edinburgh, Helsinki, Krakow, Leuven, Madrid, Paris). Therefore, the used methodology was largely comparative.

The research asks to bring answers to the following questions:

- What are the trajectories of heritagization for heritage located at the urban peripheries, both bottom up (recognition by the local populations) and top-down (institutional recognition and labelization) and to what extent are they successful?
- How do the heritagization processes depend on the typology of heritage (former industrial sites; transport infrastructures; 'dark' memories sites) and are they embedded in structural projects for the protection/re-production of tangible heritage?
- Beyond these heritage typologies is "peripherality" a common characteristic impacting heritage trajectories?
- How does heritagization interfere in terms of local attractiveness, in particular in the field of tourism?

### **The meaning of urban fringes**

Usually considered as the 'city's backyards', urban fringes are crucial for contemporary metropolization. They attract a new interest from national, regional and local governments, private investors and local communities. They are the theatre of diverse social processes and reconfigurations. These processes involve formal, functional and symbolic changes that include the formulation of new uses of public space, the creation of new landmarks, references or heritage symbols; and they offer the potential for renewed and more inclusive understanding of (often contested and dissonant) cultural heritage.

Undervalued in recent years, the heterogeneous vestiges and heritages of the urban fringes are beginning to be recognized by both institutional authorities and the people who occupy them as assets on which one can build new and more inclusive scenarii for local development. De- and post-industrialized areas are redeveloped and former factory buildings are converted into cultural and leisure spaces, attracting new visitors to formerly stigmatized areas. An "off the beaten tracks"<sup>i</sup> tourism is developed in these areas attracting visitors to 'adventurous' spaces, offering new experiences (ie URBEX)<sup>ii</sup> under the guidance of local communities and with use of digital technologies for discovering, recording and sharing adventures. The 'backyards' may evolve into new places with their own centrality.

### **Heritagization and metropolisation**

Multiple reasons cause not capturing any economic or cultural benefit due to a “negative spiral” from which these fringes and/or urban areas are historically suffering (de-industrialization, desertification, marginalisation, etc.). This spatial imbalance fuels a territorial injustice. Targeted and specific tools and instruments are needed in order to use cultural heritage as a resource not just in the centres of cities, where we expect to find it, but in their peripheries, where its appearance is more unexpected.

The development of particularly strong metropolitan nodes at an international (Paris), national (Edinburgh, Bologna...) or regional (Leuven) scale, tend to modify urban networks inherited from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Urban areas are globally rescaling<sup>iii</sup> as they try to reposition themselves in a globally shifting urban and metropolitan hierarchies. The entanglement of heritage, development, tourism and (local) stakeholders is particularly important, since, politically speaking, they have also become important in the current COVID context, in which local authorities aim at developing alternative cultural offers. The (re)discovery of fringe areas becomes crucial in that respect.

## **Conclusion**

The project is still ongoing but from the intermediate results, we are able to confirm a double hypothesis. First, cultural heritage at the edge of European metropolises represents new oxygen for current metropolization processes. It contributes to the metropolis narrative, while it offers also local narratives, contributing to the building of local identities. Second, cultural heritage at the urban peripheries is currently particularly strong and important due to the transition of European urban space and as an attractive resource for external stakeholders such as tourists<sup>iv</sup> and local (re)development<sup>v</sup>. For the dissemination of results we opted for the publication of a **manifesto** on cultural heritage of urban fringes aimed to be submitted to local stakeholders.

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## **7. REFERENCES**

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