

Cultural heritage in non-urban areas: identifying and understanding values

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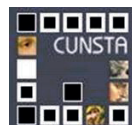
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Cultural heritage in non-urban areas: identifying and understanding values

Andrea Longhi*, Erica Meneghin**,
Giovanna Segre***

Abstract

This article aims to study the values of cultural heritage acknowledged in non-urban areas when cultural heritage is considered a key factor for development. The primary outcome of the analysis is the creation of a taxonomy of six values, derived from an interdisciplinary literature review, which can be used to interpret cultural heritage-driven projects and provide a deeper understanding of the role of cultural heritage for local communities. This, in turn, can guide successful strategies for local development through several types

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This contribution is based on research carried out during the doctoral thesis in Architectural and Landscape Heritage at the Politecnico di Torino (Meneghin 2022).

of heritage, such as museums, archives and libraries, archaeological and historical sites, community interest places, industrial, religious and rural sites. The findings contribute to a comprehensive description of cultural heritage's role in rural and mountain areas and offer a holistic perspective on the interaction among heritage values, new knowledge, projects, and local development.

Questo articolo si propone di studiare i valori del patrimonio culturale riconosciuti in aree non urbane e nelle condizioni in cui il patrimonio è considerato un fattore chiave per lo sviluppo. Il risultato principale dell'analisi è la creazione di una tassonomia di sei valori, derivata da una revisione interdisciplinare della letteratura, che può essere utilizzata per interpretare progetti *cultural heritage-driven* e fornire una comprensione più profonda del ruolo del patrimonio culturale per le comunità locali. Questo, a sua volta, può guidare strategie di successo per lo sviluppo locale attraverso diverse categorie di patrimonio, come musei, archivi e biblioteche, siti archeologici e storici, luoghi di interesse comunitario, siti industriali, religiosi e rurali. I risultati contribuiscono a una descrizione completa del ruolo del patrimonio culturale nelle aree rurali e montane e offrono una prospettiva olistica sull'interazione tra valori del patrimonio, nuova conoscenza, progettazione e sviluppo locale.

1. *Introduction*

Over the past decade, a new model of local development has emerged, focusing on the concept of heritage as a complex and valuable resource deeply embedded in the identity networks of local communities¹. The traditional approach of preserving individual objects, such as monuments and artworks, has been replaced by an emphasis on evaluating and safeguarding heritage as a system². Cultural heritage plays a multifaceted role beyond preservation and protection, encompassing social cohesion, well-being, creativity, and economic development. It also fosters promotion, understanding, and dialogue among communities. This evolving perspective has led to a growing integration between conservation and planning³, exemplified by the diffusion of concepts such as the protection perimeter of urban settlements and environmental complexes. By including new categories of heritage, there is greater potential for comprehensive heritage care, safeguard and management, as well as the creation of cross-sectoral networks, strategies and projects.

Drawing on the general context described above, cultural heritage can be a significant resource for development, especially in non-urban areas, like rural and mountain regions, where local development faces challenges related to the access to the major transport routes and essential services⁴. This phenom-

¹ De Varine 2005; Becattini 2015.

² Choay 2012; Montella 2012; Niglio 2016.

³ Bandarin, Van Oers 2012.

⁴ ESPON 2017, 2018, 2019; OECD 2018; OECD, ICOM 2019.

enon is particularly relevant in Italy, where depopulation and abandonment of built heritage have characterized a significant portion of the country since the post-war period⁵. In recent years, Italian scholars and policymakers have recognized these challenges and emphasized how investing in preserving and promoting cultural heritage can be an effective strategy to boost local economic development in peripheral and ultra-peripheral areas⁶. The restoration and conservation of cultural heritage directly generate job opportunities in the specialized building industry, including research and various professional categories, while also supporting the local economy through the promotion of related cultural services and creative industries. However, this culturally driven pathway can only succeed if it is based on the proper identification of the fundamental values attributed to cultural heritage by local communities⁷ and professional expertise, that, in non-urban areas, is often neglected and with limited artistic importance, intrinsically connected to productive activities and the landscape. Identifying these values is particularly relevant as it provides insight into how the community perceives and prioritizes local cultural resources. Furthermore, by identifying the heritage cultural values, local communities can generate other values, such as social and economic values, that contribute to the preservation of the heritage itself and the overall well-being. In this context, deep historical knowledge is necessary to drive the communities' assessments of the values embedded in the cultural heritage.

With the aim of discussing the main issues involved in the process of enhancing cultural resources for local development in non-urban areas, in section 2, the study introduces a taxonomy of values, enabling comparative interpretation of interdisciplinary literature review. In section 3, the taxonomy is applied to a sample of EU Italian Interreg financed projects which are analyzed considering the values associated with the various heritage categories with a qualitative approach. Section 4 concludes the paper with research limitations and further developments.

2. Cultural values for local development: a taxonomy from the literature review

The identification and study of cultural values are crucial factors to be addressed in culture-based local development, not only in areas where heritage is outstanding but also in peripheral, rural, and mountain regions characterized by

⁵ Barca 2009, 2011; Dematteis 2011; Magnaghi 2010, 2020; De Rossi 2018.

⁶ Barca *et al.* 2014; Longhi, Segre 2015; Meloni 2015.

⁷ Avrami *et al.* 2000; Court, Wijesuriya 2015.

widespread and “minor” heritage. However, identifying architectural and landscape heritage is insufficient to drive strategies and projects that can positively impact economic and social contexts. It is, instead, necessary to delve deeper and study the values, changes, and conflicts that have occurred throughout different epochs. This includes understanding which values the communities consider relevant today and in the past, how they interpret them, how values stratified over time and what the material traces are. To drive the assessment of cultural heritage, the possibility of referring to cultural values can be a successful guide.

Drawing upon the various meanings presented in the literature of architectural and planning history, as well as cultural economics, six cultural values can be defined. Figure 1 provides an overview of the principal authors and their specific definitions of cultural values in chronological order, highlighting the evolutionary dynamics that have shaped the complex nature of heritage over time. Among the listed values, artistic and historical values have been consistently recognized as paramount by scholars since Riegl’s time. These values are universally recognized across disciplines, including economics and management, and are considered key for preserving and transmitting heritage to future generations. Another widely acknowledged value across various disciplines is the educational value, whereby cultural heritage is pivotal in contemporary society.

Furthermore, there is a unanimous consensus on the economic value generated by cultural heritage. However, a significant disparity emerges between historical and economic disciplines regarding the interpretation of economic value. While the first predominantly associates it with use values, the economic literature also encompasses indirect and induced impacts and non-use values.

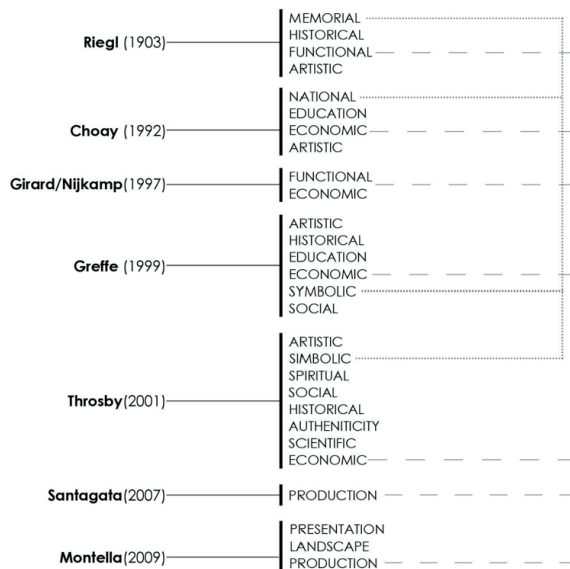


Fig. 1. Cultural values in the literature (Source: Authors’ own elaboration)

Based on this literature, we define a taxonomy of the six most important values that are the main components of the analysis of the role of cultural heritage for local development in non-urban areas.

The six values are historical, memorial, artistic production, social, educational, and functional, and are described as follows:

- a) *Historical value*: this value refers to the importance of preserving the cultural knowledge and awareness of local communities, as well as their history and legacy so that they are not forgotten. By maintaining historical values, we preserve the richness of our past, which serves as a valuable resource for future generations. It also helps promote sustainable development by preserving not only the tangible elements of cultural heritage but also the intangible cultural practices that are deeply rooted in local communities.
- b) *Memorial value*: this value represents a community's emotional and emphatic attachment to particular places, landmarks, or monuments. It is more accessible and relatable to the public than other values, such as historical or aesthetic values. Memorial value reflects the role of individual, collective, and public memory in shaping perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward the past. It has become an essential aspect of urban planning and heritage management in the 21st century.
- c) *Artistic production value*: this value focuses on the contribution of heritage to an artistic movement and its artistic qualities, such as style, form, and color. It is influenced by contemporary art and industrial design. It is often determined by analyzing the creative and technical aspects of heritage and how they reflect the cultural context in which they were produced. Recognizing artistic production value is essential for preserving cultural heritage and promoting a deeper understanding of its artistic and cultural significance.
- d) *Social value*: this value expresses the social utility of culture and landscape as they can strengthen a community's identity and the social cohesion of territories. This value emerges explicitly in the strategy of the European Union, which, through programs, communication, and training projects, aims to reinforce the European identity by promoting the common values for its society. In this sense, the intrinsic potential of cultural heritage as a strategic resource for the development of European society is recognized, and there is an increasing number of studies that aim to measure the social impacts that heritage – for example, cultural places such as museums – has on society, to reflect factors not only related to the economic sphere but also to the well-being of communities.
- e) *Educational value*: this value refers to the pedagogical function inherent in heritage, encompassing history, literature, ethnography, and more. This value is more contemporary than ever if we consider the current tendency to communicate and disseminate content in any form through

websites and social media. The importance attributed by contemporary society to the educational value is also demonstrated by the fact that knowledge of heritage is considered the first tool enabling citizens to regain possession of their heritage and attribute a 'value' to it. This is one of the reasons why, in recent years, cultural institutions have been trying to equip themselves with (more or less) innovative tools to ensure adequate communication to convey knowledge of heritage to visitors. Tourism and cultural services have, in fact, also the function of enhancing the educational value of heritage based on heritage pedagogical value.

- f) *Functional value*: this value, also known as use value, refers to the economic aspect of heritage and is central to heritage management. In contemporary society, the use of heritage is crucial for designing and evaluating local development strategies and policies, and the adaptive reuse of cultural heritage is becoming a widespread practice. The use value is closely related to sustainability, and the international debate focuses on the shift from the value of heritage to its use value. The aptitude of heritage to be readapted to contemporary uses, based on the compatibility of spaces, is an essential factor for the protection and sustainability of cultural and landscape heritage.

This taxonomy constitutes the framework for analyzing a sample of EU-financed culture-based projects in transboundary Italian rural and mountain areas. The aim is twofold: i) to guide the interpretation of the values to safeguard and enhance local cultural resources in non-urban territories; ii) to guide the understanding of the role of cultural heritage for the socio-economic development of non-urban territories and to facilitate the planning and management of cultural heritage, also identifying opportunities for further improvement of its safeguarding and promotion.

3. *Cultural heritage and values in transboundary Italian rural and mountain areas*

The recognition of cultural heritage and the identification of the values attributed to it by the communities are crucial components of the enhancing process of cultural resources. With the aim of understanding the role of cultural heritage in the development of rural and mountain areas, we examined a sample of projects funded by the Interreg programs of the European Commission from 2014 to 2020. Specifically, we focused on the six values mentioned above to highlight the intrinsic perspective of cultural heritage that communities hold and to outline the main driving components behind culture-based development projects. The research included a critical act of re-categorizing the project descriptions made by the designers according to the taxonomy, making the projects

comparable and processing data and dynamics in a quantitative and normalized approach. The selected projects provided valuable case studies, demonstrating strategies and initiatives to leverage the cultural, social, and economic potential.

A three-step qualitative methodology was applied to investigate trans-boundary Italian rural and mountain areas where a minor and widespread heritage is associated with territorial resources. In the first step, we identified 166 projects by applying two selection criteria: projects involving Italian partners with international collaborations in European countries (Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, Slovenia) and projects focused on cultural heritage and landscape as key elements of local development. In the second step, we established eight heritage categories that encompass the widely recognized types of heritage in non-urban areas⁸, namely: landscape; historical settlements; rural heritage; industrial heritage; religious heritage; museums, archives and libraries; the heritage of community interest; archaeological heritage. In the third step, we critically interpreted the selected project sample to build a comprehensive database associating the six values and the eight heritage categories for each project.

The database investigation produced the distribution of values attributed to cultural heritage in the projects and highlighted the interconnection among the different heritage categories (fig. 2).

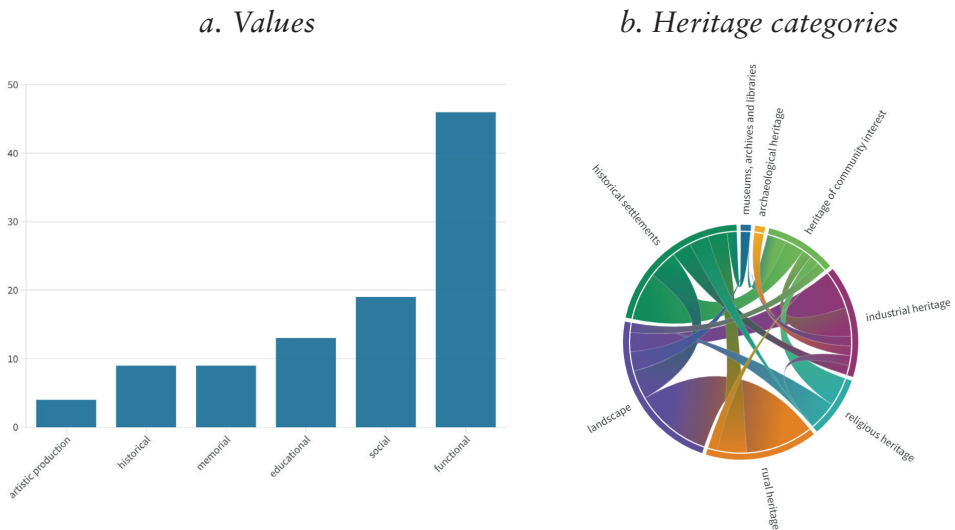


Fig. 2. Values and heritage categories connections in Italian Interreg EU projects (2014-2020) (Source: Authors' own elaboration)

⁸ The categorization was guided by contributions from authors such as Jokilehto (2015), Bannard and Van Oers (2012) and, at national level, the *Codice dei Beni culturali e del paesaggio*.

The results presented in Figure 2a highlight that, as expected, the functional value is predominantly assigned to heritage. Most of the projects, although located in remote and marginal areas, are focused on the use of cultural heritage in terms of improved accessibility for tourism purposes. The interplay between the tourism industry and heritage is evident, with cultural tourism being recognized as a crucial catalyst for local development through heritage enhancement. Moreover, cultural tourism represents a significant opportunity for partnerships with the productive and entrepreneurial sectors. The results also show that social and territorial cohesion built on culture is important since the social and educational values assigned to heritage are the second and the third most referred to. In the projects, these relational values are addressed mainly by including communication and dissemination activities to various target groups.

In Figure 2b, the interrelationships between different heritage categories are examined, considering that most projects included multiple heritage categories. When a category was identified to have a connection with another category, a value of 1 was assigned within a correspondence matrix. The resulting chord diagram, generated to visualize these relationships, presents the interplay and mutual influence among diverse heritage categories. These findings not only deepen the understanding of the role of heritage management within local projects but also have implications for preserving and promoting heritage on a broader scale.

The results highlight that landscape and historical settlements are the heritage categories with the highest relationships with other types of heritage, mainly serving as assets that integrate nature and culture. While these relationships are well-established in literature and practice, some projects employ innovative approaches to heritage management. For example, the project “RUINS – Sustainable re-use, preservation, and modern management of historical ruins in Central Europe” aims to develop an integrated model of contemporary use, management, and protection of landscape and medieval ruins in a transnational setting.

There is also a noticeable association between landscape and rural heritage. While this connection may seem obvious, particularly when considering a rural landscape, creative interpretations of this connection are proposed in the projects. One notable example is “TERRACT – Actors of the Earth” project, which aims to provide young local actors with the skills to narrate and enhance the tangible and intangible rural heritage of the region. The rural landscape is enhanced through the rediscovery of cultural sites giving them a different use by working on the recovery of testimonies, community animation, event planning, and involvement of citizens, particularly the younger generations. Finally, a significant relationship can be observed between the landscape and industrial heritage. This connection is mainly influenced by cross-border collaborative endeavors, which often employ strategies aimed at

enhancing the territory by establishing interconnected pathways, historical routes, and borders and historical fortification systems. An illustrative case is exemplified by the “IDAGO – Cross-border marketing initiatives for the networking of the region’s natural and cultural heritage” project. Its primary objective revolves around the enhancement of cultural heritage along the Adria Radweg Alps through the establishment of a bicycle route that traverses several territories, featuring a transformed abandoned customs house that serves as a versatile structure providing tourist information and functioning as an integrated museum center. Industrial heritage frequently plays a pivotal role in reuse projects that encompass extensive areas, acknowledging the landscape as a unifying element. An example is the “REFREsh – Rural revitalisation for cultural heritage” project, which tackles the challenge of reusing industrial heritage in rural regions through a comprehensive approach integrating the most established stakeholders from commerce, industry, and services with the creative community.

In Figure 3, the analysis results obtained by combining heritage categories and cultural values are presented. The graph shows how different values emerge for each type of heritage and, vice versa, how different heritage categories are associated with different values. When a heritage category was identified as having a connection with one of the six values, 1 was assigned within a correspondence matrix.

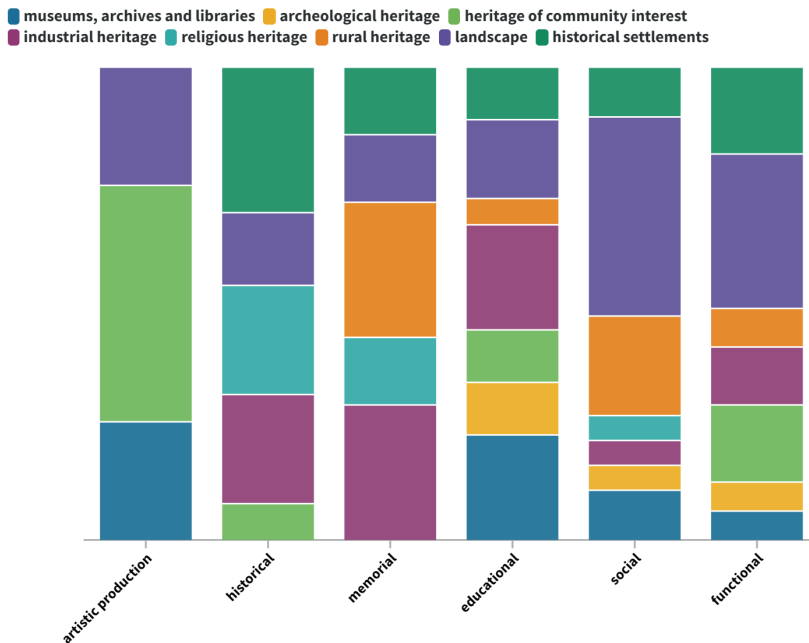


Fig. 3. Heritage categories distribution in values (Source: Authors’ own elaboration)

The most evident result is that the functional value exists in nearly all the heritage categories (except for the religious heritage) for most projects, and this provides evidence of the need for specific heritage management models to be applied to the various heritage types. The distribution of the heritage categories in association with the other values offers interesting insights for a deeper understanding of heritage potential use and management. Social and educational values are present in seven categories out of eight, implying that a central role is given to relational and communication needs. In the social value, also religious heritage is included, whereas, for the educational value, this category is not envisaged, and the heritage of community interest is included.

Furthermore, Figure 3 highlights that the landscape category is the only one to which all six values are attributed. The values most frequently associated with it are social and functional, such as community engagement and the promotion of knowledge exchange. For instance, the “TANGRAM – Transnational parks and gardens resources in Adriatic and Ionian tourist marketplace” project employed participatory approaches to strengthen local community identity through the immersive exploration of landscape.

For the historical settlement category, historical and memorial values are, as expected, predominant. Projects aimed to enhance heritage’s historical and identity components, such as the “ITINERA ROMANICA – Cross-border governance of Romanic itineraries” project, focus on improving the accessibility to historical sites and exploring new management models for enhancing the use of cultural heritage. Industrial heritage, associated with five types of values as well, involves predominantly memorial and educational values. The “TRENTO – Promotion of tourist railway lines and historic trains” project, for instance, interconnects functional and memorial elements to give new life to industrial relics to promote tourism and foster local economic development.

Rural heritage is integrated with five values and refers mainly to memorial and social values, whereas educational value is scarcely considered. The “SHELTER – Smart rural heritage along tourism routes” project, for instance, with the scope of revitalizing abandoned rural heritage, integrates it into existing hiking and cycling routes and supports local associations and productive activities. Differently, the category of museums, archives, and libraries is mainly valued for its educational significance. For example, the “Interactive Alpine Museum” project connects Alpine museums by introducing innovative tourist products and technologies.

Religious heritage predominantly conveys historical value, accompanied by memorial and social value, as in the case of the “LOOK UP – The rediscovery of the cross-border artistic and religious heritage in the mountains” project where faith and spiritual sites are intended as spaces for rediscovering local history and traditions. Likewise, archaeological heritage encounters only three values: educational and, at a lower level, social and functional. As exemplified

by projects like “TRANSFER – Integrated management models for archaeological parks” and “VirtualArch – Visualize to Valorize – For a better utilization of hidden archaeological heritage”, innovative management models and visualization techniques unearth the untold narratives of the past, propelling territorial development. The heritage of community interest is mainly represented in the artistic production involved in many projects focused on reusing and requalifying buildings of interest for local communities.

Overall, the study’s results underline the importance of considering multiple values when assessing and interpreting cultural heritage in projects for local development. Furthermore, adopting a multidisciplinary approach facilitates a more profound comprehension of heritage and the formulation of shared criteria for value recognition. Notably, this is not a one-time process but rather an ongoing and evolving one. The active involvement of the local community holds paramount importance in this undertaking. Through active participation in identifying and selecting heritage values, the communities can perceive cultural heritage as a collective resource, ensuring that the assigned values remain relevant and meaningful to them. This collaborative approach serves to facilitate the planning and management of cultural heritage for its safeguarding and promotion, while also identifying opportunities for further improvement.

4. *Conclusions*

The identification and recognition of the values expressed by cultural heritage – attributed by local and scientific community, considering the mediation of funding organizations and professionals – can result in a more conscious approach to safeguarding and management of heritage, which considers the multiple perspectives and connections characterizing contemporary culture-based local development. Establishing relationships between various heritage categories, and between these and the embedded values, can foster innovative solutions and strategies. Moreover, the engagement of the local community positively contributes to the recognition of previously unknown heritage, leading to new understandings of heritage itself. When designing and planning culture-based development projects, it is vital to consider the most comprehensive set of values shared by the local and scientific community and address social and educational challenges through heritage promotion. This process can introduce new interpretative perspectives and community visions that can attribute “new”, but not impulsive or extemporaneous, meanings to established heritage.

The prominence of functional and social values highlights a tendency to explore new uses of cultural heritage and focus on socio-economic development

paths that prioritize the quality of life, social cohesion, and sustainability. This underlines the importance of involving multidisciplinary expertise in cultural heritage promotion, bringing together professionals specialized in cultural heritage protection and heritage history, economics and management, education, and sociology. Effective culture-based projects require considering a network of values that encompasses not only physical actions, like maintenance and restoration, but also activities that have social impacts, engage various stakeholders, and contribute to the local economy. In many cases, local heritage sites are perceived as non-significant components of the local endowment compared to major cultural and historical-artistic goods. In non-urban areas especially, an interdisciplinary approach is required to build adequate knowledge and give valid meanings to heritage to also facilitate the collaboration between the cultural and economic agents.

This study is explorative and shows that there is potential for further research to apply the identification of values in cultural heritage management, especially examining the interplay between social and functional values.

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