



*Dwelling on space*  
 representation and safeguarding  
 of its tangible and intangible heritage



# 20th

## Anniversary 2003-2023

# Intangible Cultural Heritage

In occasion of the twentieth anniversary of UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Carmine Gambardella  
Maria Natale  
Rosaria Parente

Dwelling on Space  
*Representation and safeguarding of its tangible and intangible heritage*  
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## **Dwelling on Space**

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17 October 2023

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**Peer review**

Scholars has been invited to submit researches on theoretical and methodological aspects related to Smart Design, Planning and Technologies, and show real applications and experiences carried out on this themes. Based on blind peer review, abstracts has been accepted, conditionally accepted, or rejected. Authors of accepted and conditionally accepted papers has been invited to submit full papers. These has been again peerreviewed and selected for the oral session and publication, or only for the publication in the conference proceedings.

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# International Conference

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## Nour Zreika, Daniele Fanzini Minor Cultural Heritage, an Approach towards Sustainable Urban Development

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### Abstract

This contribution acknowledges minor cultural heritage as a living heritage and proposes its valorization as a means to ensure the sustainable development of cities and territories. It also considers co-design as a tool through which communities and stakeholders can be involved in addressing the challenges of their urban environment. Moreover, this contribution will refer to the "Safely-connected" project, an initiative directly involving the authors, as an on-field application of this approach.

**Keywords:** Minor cultural heritage; living heritage; sustainable urban development; community participation; co-design.

### 1. Establishing Minor Cultural Heritage as Living Heritage

In the last decade, communities have become more aware of their living heritage. In fact, this intangible cultural heritage has become a driver of cultural diversity, and its safeguarding for future generations has become a universal concern. For living heritage, the active participation of local communities is crucial for the creation, preservation, promotion, sustenance, and recreation of these cultural practices, a concept reinforced by *the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* [10]. Moreover, in its definition, living heritage is considered community-based; it includes cultural practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills that must be recognized by individuals or groups as part of their heritage [9]. This aligns well with the idea of minor cultural heritage, which is not as widely recognized as major cultural elements but holds intrinsic significance and value to the communities to which it belongs [7], thus firmly establishing itself as living heritage. In this context, minor cultural heritage not only refers to rural heritage areas, small archaeological sites, historic routes and trails, small museums and collections, and sacred shrines, but also cultural expressions in the form of events, festivals, traditional crafts, etc.

### 2. The Significance of Minor Cultural Heritage in Sustainable Urban Development

As previously mentioned, minor cultural heritage is established as an integral component of living heritage. Similarly, it plays a significant role in supporting efforts for sustainable urban development, a consideration also highlighted in *the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* [10]. As featured in Goal 11 of the UN *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG), living heritage is considered as an enabler of social, economic, and environmental dimensions of a city [12]. This concept is later reinforced in *the New Urban Agenda* (NUA), where the role of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is highlighted in the rehabilitation and revitalization of urban areas, as well as in the enhancement of social engagement and strengthening of civic participation [11].

Thus, the valorization of minor cultural heritage is essential for realizing a sustainable and more inclusive urban environment. It has the potential to strengthen cultural identity, foster a sense of belonging, improve social cohesion, and encourage community engagement [4], while contributing to economic growth, revitalizing urban spaces, and supporting environmental sustainability [3], all of which are integral to the broader goals of sustainable urban development.

### 3. Co-Design as a tool for the Valorization of Minor Cultural Heritage

Acknowledging that local communities have the ability to identify their own needs and opportunities is a step closer to sustainable urban development. Therefore, it is necessary to facilitate community involvement in the preservation and governance of their intangible heritage. We refer to the *Historic Urban Landscape* (HUL) approach, which not only advocates for the valorization of living heritage in urban transformation but also recognizes the active involvement of communities in these endeavors – a concept that has gained prominence at both European and international levels [8].

Hence, we will consider co-design as a tool for the valorization of minor cultural heritage. Described as a user-centric approach, co-design can be utilized to address urban challenges by involving communities and stakeholders in the design process [5]. When applied to the valorization of minor cultural heritage, co-design activities empower communities to take part in preserving, promoting, and utilizing this living heritage [7]. Thus, involving individuals and groups in the decision-making ensures the integration of these enhancement efforts in the development strategies of cities and territories. This process can be further developed through the utilization of digital tools and ICT technologies [7].

### 4. From Theory to Practice: The Case of the “Safely-connected” Project

In this section, we will refer to the “Safely-connected” project, a research endeavor that involved a multidisciplinary research group from Politecnico di Milano, which includes the authors of this contribution. Saint-Germain-en-Laye (SGL) is a small town in Île-de-France, renowned for its historic city center and vibrant commercial district, attracting visitors from surrounding towns. Funded by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), the “Safely-connected” project aims to enhance the city center, helping the recovery of its small businesses adversely affected by the COVID pandemic [6].

The “Safely Connected” project suggests the formation of an open-air urban market. By adopting a **co-design approach**, this project takes into consideration the issues of local citizens and business owners and transforms them into a project for reviving the social life of the city center and the relaunching its commercial activity, facilitated by the use of digital technologies [1]. Thus, the active participation of local citizens and small business owners was encouraged in the development, implementation, assessment, and improvement of the solutions for the urban space and common infrastructure [2]. **Interviews** with various actors, including the city mayor, counselors, and municipal staff, local residents, and shopkeepers, allowed the research group to gain insight into the needs and requirements of the city of SGL. Actors were also involved in **discussions, workshops, and events. Surveys** were conducted to evaluate the project’s success in achieving its main goals and to demonstrate the effectiveness of its implementation in generating social, economic, and environmental benefits for SGL.

### 5. Conclusion

As a result of the experimentation conducted for the “Safely-connected” project, the effectiveness of co-design as a tool for the valorization of minor cultural heritage can be evaluated, and consequently, its influence on sustainable urban development can be understood. By performing on-field applications, the research group evaluated the effective and collaborative techniques for engaging local citizens and stakeholders. This project yielded a set of methodologies and tools for transforming cities and their historic public spaces into more habitable, healthier, and secure cultural environments.

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