Optimizing Communication, Multilingualism, and Networking in the EHL

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EUROHERIT (ERC Starting Grant, 2015–2020) explores EU heritage initiatives and heritage and identity politics. The EUROHERIT research team conducted broad field research at eleven EHL sites in ten countries in the autumn of 2017 and the beginning of 2018. The remarks and suggestions provided in this policy brief are based on the team members' observations and information gathered during the field research.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Efficient communication is important for the sustainability of cultural heritage schemes. Being a rather new action, the European Heritage Label (EHL) struggles with issues of visibility and wider recognition among European citizens, in part resulting from modest communication of the diverse actors within the action. To both increase the visibility of the EHL and promote efficient audience engagement, with an emphasis on multilingual representation of Europe's diverse cultural heritage, we recommend concrete measures to improve coordinated communication among the EHL actors. Our recommendations consist of three thematic areas: communication, multilingualism, and networking.

INTRODUCTION

The European Heritage Label (EHL) is a central cultural heritage action of the European Union (EU). The action encompasses clear political and educational objectives of strengthening intercultural dialogue and promoting a sense of belonging to the Union, especially among young people.

The decision (1194/2011/EU) establishing the EHL defines 'the promotion of and access to the sites as well as on the quality of the information and activities offered' as the focus of the action. The decision expects the sites to 'promot[e] multilingualism and facilitat[e] access to the site by using several languages of the Union'.

According to the decision, the European Commission (EC) and the EHL sites share responsibility for communication regarding the EHL. The EC's communication measures cover, for example, (i) maintenance of an official website of the EHL action, including different types of communication material, (ii) providing the labeled sites with a plaque with the EHL logo, and (iii) organizing an annual conference for EHL site managers and national coordinators. Furthermore, the heritage sites are part of an EHL network and are encouraged to develop cooperation and projects that promote their European significance.

A recent roadmap of the EHL envisions an extension of the label across the EU and its surroundings and inclusion of 100 heritage sites by 2030 (EC 2017). This kind of extension requires a robust communication and promotion strategy that emphasizes multilingual presentation of the EHL sites. This strategy should include both EU and national institutions and the EHL sites themselves and should be developed and implemented in close cooperation with other national, regional, and local stakeholders in tourism, education, culture, environmental planning, and civil society.

The EHL Panel Reports (2013–2017) have made numerous recommendations concerning the EHL network, including funding to develop cooperation projects and communication. Based on our extensive fieldwork, this policy brief

expands on previous recommendations by focusing on communication, multilingualism, and networking. We raise the following questions:

• How to increase the visibility of and raise awareness of and interest in the label among the European citizenry?

• How to support multilingualism at the EHL sites?

• How to improve the EHL network and strengthen pan-European promotional activities?

COMMUNICATION

The coverage of the EHL in national, regional, and local media is still low. The *Creative Europe Desks* in member states, regional authorities, and local tourist information centers very often lack basic knowledge and material about the label. Similarly, the public's awareness of the EHL and its logo and slogans is poor.

While a website of the EC provides information about the label and EHL sites, the information is neither frequently updated nor particularly attractive to the average EU citizen or the designated principal group of young people. The website also fails to enable interaction between the public and the sites. Other official websites connected with the EC, such as the website for the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, ignore the existence of the EHL, although it is the EU's flagship heritage action. The EC thereby misses an important opportunity to provide visibility to the EHL sites and to introduce the label to a broader audience.

INTERACTIVE WEBSITE

Social media and a web presence are very important means of directly communicating information and engaging with different groups of EU citizens and at the same time serve to strengthen the heritage sites' competitiveness. The visibility of the EHL would benefit from the creation of a new multilingual website with its own short address. The new website could function as a central platform for providing information about the EHL and specific events and include links to redirect visitors to diverse

EU and national institutions, regional tourist information centers, and the EHL sites' homepages. Similar to the website of the European Heritage Days, the EHL sites should be able to contribute to the content of the website. The introduction of an interactive map on the website would increase the label's public recognition by allowing visitors to get an overview of the locations of the EHL sites.

An active joint account on social media would allow interaction and help reach European citizens and attract attention to the EHL action.

MULTILINGUALISM

Multilingualism and respect for cultural diversity are substantial cornerstones of the shared political and civic European project and an integral part of cultural heritage (Nic Craith 2012, Delanty & Rumford 2005, European Charter of Fundamental Rights, Art. 22, Treaty on European Union, Art. 3). The European Council (2002), among other EU institutions, stresses the value of linguistic diversity and the promotion of linguistic proficiency in the EU. Providing websites and on-site information in multiple languages is an asset in global competition and of strategic interest for increasing the attractiveness of cultural tourism. Multilingualism plays an important role in intercultural dialogue and in enhancing the quality and effectiveness of communication (Minerva Plus 2006).

Multilingual plaque in Carnuntum, Austria.

A contradiction exists in the context of the EHL between acknowledging the importance of multilingualism and operational practice at the heritage sites. The EHL sites commonly see the use of multiple languages as a positive asset that increases their appeal. However, the sites

frequently face the difficulty of being limited by both actual space for designing a multilingual exhibition and a desire not to overload the exhibitions with too much text in different languages. Additionally, some of the EHL sites experience that foreign visitors are not interested in using audio-guides during their visits. In particular, smaller EHL sites struggle to offer guided tours in multiple languages and multilingual print material for financial reasons and/or a lack of human resources with adequate language skills.

MULTIPLE LANGUAGES AT THE SITES

Based on our field research, EHL sites should be enabled to offer information at the sites and on the web in several languages, such as:

- national/official languages and minority languages
- English as an international *lingua franca*
- languages of neighboring countries
- if not yet included, the languages of the most numerous visitor groups
- plain language
- Braille

The practice of the House of European History and the Parlamentarium (Brussels) of providing visitors with an audio-visual device set to one of the 24 official EU languages could serve as an ideal example for the EHL action. Already now, some EHL sites employ a digital, multilingual approach to engaging with the audience without making the exhibitions too text-heavy. They apply the combined vision of a digital Europe in the 21st century with an emphasis on interactive connectivity by using multilingual touch screens, tablets, and other interactive tools in their exhibitions. This could also serve as a model for other sites.

Multilingual tablet in the House of European History.

NETWORKING

Networking and cooperation are important factors for promoting the EHL and improving the visibility of the label. However, networking usually comes on top of the regular operational tasks and functions at the various EHL sites. A shortage of human resources along with a lack of funding creates a serious problem for the efficiency of the EHL network. The EHL sites have applied for funding from the EC for networking and for establishing a coordinating office for joint EHL activities, but without success. As a result, previously very active EHL sites feel discouraged from investing deeper into the initiative.

Furthermore, precise guidance or assistance in developing the networking structures of the EHL sites is lacking. Smooth and close interaction between the sites and the national coordinator offices seems to depend strongly on the ability, personality, and interest of the respective national coordinators, despite their important task of raising more attention for the EHL.

THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL COORDINATORS AND CONTACT POINTS

Our field research has shown that the roles and practices of the national coordinators and contact points differ between the Member states. The roles and tasks of the coordinators should be clarified, as the sites currently have unequal access to support on the national level.

The EHL sites have stressed the significance of personal exchange and direct face-to-face communication and exchange in issues of mutual interest. The label would benefit from deeper cross-border exchanges between the national coordinators and contact points; EHL site managers, curators, and pedagogics; and other international, national, regional, and local stakeholders in tourism, education, culture, environmental planning, and civil society. This could introduce new strategic partnerships and increase the public visibility of the EHL action and individual sites, for example in conjunction with major cultural events.

CONCLUSIONS

Our fieldwork has indicated that improved communication, including an interactive online presence, multilingualism, and networking, could contribute to establishing the EHL as a high-quality label, comparable with other transnational initiatives, such as the UNESCO World Heritage List and the European Capitals of Culture. Sustainability is a priority in heritage policy and heritage tourism (Barthel-Bouchier 2013). The EHL's sustainability, as well as its public visibility and citizens' familiarity with it, would benefit from an increased engagement of different actors with sound EU-level funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve communication, multilingualism, and networking within the EHL action, we recommend:

● the EC to create a user-friendly, regularly updated, interactive website under its own short address, which could also serve as a platform for communication and exchange between EHL sites.

● the EC to establish a specific EHL fund with the explicit intention of increasing multilingualism and networking. The fund would allow raising the overall visibility of the label by financing joint projects and events of the EHL network and granting language-related investments at the EHL sites.

● the EHL action to develop a joint inclusive communication and promotion strategy resulting in better cooperation between different public, private, and civil society actors on European, national, regional, and local levels. The strategy should also take into consideration the development of practical communication tools and easy-to-integrate promotional materials and should share best practices.

● the national coordinators/contact points to improve their direct communication with the EHL sites, and the EC to extend the tasks of the national coordinators to include assisting the sites in issues of funding, cooperation, and branding.

● the EC to organize a yearly rotating chairmanship among the EHL sites, assisted by the respective national coordinator office, to develop pan-European projects of the EHL network on occasions such as the Europe Day, the EHL Week, the European Heritage Days, or other events.

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