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# European values through heritage: formatted participation in the Council of Europe[1]

**Yi-De Liu,** *National Taiwan Normal University (Taipei, Taiwan)*
E-mail: yideliu@ntnu.edu.tw
http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7633-876X

**Abstract**
This article examines how the Council of Europe makes European values participatory through heritage governance, thereby contributing to debates on European value-making, institutional legitimacy and cultural governance. Focusing on the *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* of 2005 (Faro Convention), European Heritage Days and Cultural Routes, the author develops the concept of formatted participation to analyse how participation becomes institutionally recognisable, transferable and governable. The article identifies three dimensions: community, which produces heritage actors; access, which enables public engagement; and mobility, which connects places, actors and narratives across borders. The author argues that democracy, cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and responsibility become actionable through heritage communities, annual themes, public events, networks and certification procedures. However, these formats are ambivalent: they widen participation, while filtering which actors, ideas and practices can become legible as European value-making. The article demonstrates that European values are not only represented in heritage initiatives, but they are institutionalised through participatory forms that organise recognition, access and transnational connection.
**Keywords:** European values, Council of Europe, formatted participation, participatory heritage, heritage governance, Faro Convention, European Heritage Days, Cultural Routes

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## Wartości europejskie poprzez dziedzictwo: formatowana partycypacja w Radzie Europy

**Streszczenie**

W artykule przeanalizowano, w jaki sposób Rada Europy nadaje europejskim wartościom partycypacyjny charakter poprzez zarządzanie dziedzictwem, przyczyniając się w ten sposób do debaty na temat europejskiego procesu tworzenia wartości, legitymizacji instytucjonalnej i zarządzania kulturą. Koncentrując się na *Konwencji ramowej Rady Europy o wartości dziedzictwa kulturowego dla społeczeństwa* z 2005 roku (znanej jako Konwencja z Faro), Europejskich Dniach Dziedzictwa i Szlakach Kulturowych, autor rozwija koncepcję formatowanej partycypacji,[2] aby przeanalizować, w jaki sposób partycypacja staje się instytucjonalnie rozpoznawalna i zarządzana. Artykuł identyfikuje trzy wymiary: społeczność, która kreuje podmioty dziedzictwa; dostępność, która zapewnia zaangażowanie publiczne; oraz mobilność, która łączy miejsca, podmioty i narracje ponad granicami. Autor argumentuje, że demokracja, różnorodność kulturowa, dialog międzykulturowy i odpowiedzialność stają się możliwe do realizacji poprzez społeczności dziedzictwa, coroczne tematyczne wydarzenia publiczne, sieci oraz procedury certyfikacji. Jednak formaty te są ambiwalentne: poszerzają one partycypację, jednocześnie filtrując, które podmioty, idee i praktyki mogą przyczynić się do europejskich procesów tworzenia wartości. Artykuł pokazuje, że wartości europejskie są nie tylko reprezentowane w inicjatywach dotyczących dziedzictwa, ale są instytucjonalizowane poprzez formy partycypacyjne, które zapewniają uznanie, dostęp i transnarodowe powiązania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wartości europejskie, Rada Europy, formatowana partycypacja, zarządzanie dziedzictwem, Konwencja z Faro, Europejskie Dni Dziedzictwa, Szlaki Kulturowe

European values have become a central language of legitimacy in European governance. They are invoked to describe not only legal or political commitments, but also the cultural and civic conditions, through which Europe is imagined, narrated and made meaningful in the public sphere. However, values do not become socially effective merely by being declared. They require institutional forms, through which they can be recognised, enacted and communicated. This article examines one such field: heritage governance. It addresses the question of how the Council of Europe makes values such as democracy, cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and responsibility participatory through heritage.

Participation has become one of the preferred languages of legitimacy in contemporary heritage governance. Since the critique of expert-led, monument-centred and state-dominated heritage regimes, heritage studies have increasingly foregrounded communities, publics, social value and use. Smith's critique of the authorised heritage discourse remains central, because it demonstrates how heritage institutions privilege expertise, materiality, monumentality and national narratives, while marginalising alternative forms of meaning-making (Smith 2006). Later work has likewise emphasised that heritage is not a stable inheritance, but a social and political process, through which

[2] Pojęcie *formatowana partycypacja* (ang. *formatted participation*) to termin z zakresu socjologii i politologii, który oznacza sytuację, kiedy proces włączania obywateli w procesy decyzyjne i społeczne zostaje z góry zarządzany, ograniczany i ustrukturyzowany przez odgórne reguły i procedury.

meanings, values and authorities are interacting (Harvey 2001; Harrison 2013). Further studies on community heritage and social values demonstrated that heritage value is produced through relationships, attachments and public recognition rather than residing intrinsically in objects or sites (Jones 2017; Waterton, Smith 2010).

However, the institutional success of participation creates a problem. Once participation becomes an official norm, it must be organised, authorised and made governable. The wider literature on participation has warned that inclusion is not automatically democratic, since invited or managed participation may reproduce existing asymmetries of power (Arnstein 1969; Cooke, Kothari 2001). Cornwall's work on participatory spaces is useful here, because it demonstrates that participation is shaped by people who create the space, who define its rules and who are recognised as entitled to speak (Cornwall 2002). Heritage studies point out a similar issue: community involvement may widen recognition, but it may also be shaped by institutional expectations, professional vocabularies and unequal capacities to participate (Chirikure et al. 2010; Crooke 2010). This article addresses that problem through the concept of formatted participation.

*Formatted participation* refers to the institutional production of participation as recognisable, transferable and governable. This concept does not imply that participation is false or merely symbolic. Rather, it captures a double movement: participation enables communities, publics and networks to enter heritage governance, but it does so through forms that define who can participate, what kinds of ideas are intelligible, and how participation becomes perceived as European. This approach moves beyond a simple opposition between top-down and bottom-up heritage. It asks how participation is mediated through institutional forms that democratise heritage, while also shaping the terms of democratic recognition.

The Council of Europe provides a revealing setting for this analysis, because its heritage work is embedded in values such as democracy, human rights, cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and responsibility. The *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* of 2005 (hereinafter: Faro Convention) defines cultural heritage through the meanings and values that people attach to inherited resources and introduces the "heritage community" as a subject of public action (Council of Europe 2005: art. 2). European Heritage Days translate heritage participation into public events, annual themes and local actors, making heritage accessible to the public (Council of Europe, European Commission 2024). Cultural Routes organise heritage through transnational networks, mobility and certification, linking places and actors through narratives of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue (Council of Europe 2010, 2023).

The focus on the Council of Europe does not imply that other European institutions lack heritage agendas. The Council of Europe is analytically distinctive, because it connects heritage explicitly to democracy, rights, intercultural dialogue and shared responsibility. This argument also speaks to debates on Normative Power Europe, which ask how European values acquire authority and are translated into practices (Manners 2002). However, the concept was developed primarily to analyse the European Union and should not be transferred uncritically to the Council of Europe.

In this study, normative power is treated as an adjacent debate rather than its principal framework: the author examines how a separate European organisation gives values practical force through participatory heritage formats.

The article addresses **three research questions**:

1) How are European values translated into participatory heritage formats within Council of Europe heritage governance?
2) Through which discursive mechanisms does participation become recognisable as a legitimate expression of those values?
3) What are the democratic limits of participation, when it is organised through conventions, events, themes, networks, routes and certification procedures?

The study argues that the Council of Europe makes European values participatory through **three dimensions**: community, access, and mobility. These dimensions are not treated as separate case-study compartments. Rather, they identify different discursive operations. Community is related to subject formation: how people and groups become recognisable as heritage actors. Access is related to scene formation: how heritage becomes publicly accessible through events, interpretation and use. Mobility is related to relational formation: how places, actors and narratives become connected across borders. The Faro Convention, European Heritage Days and Cultural Routes combine these dimensions, but with different institutional emphases.

The contribution of this article to scholarly literature is threefold. Firstly, the article contributes to European studies by demonstrating how European values are institutionalised through participatory heritage formats and by relating this process to, while distinguishing it from, debates on EU normative power. Secondly, it contributes to European heritage governance by specifying the Council of Europe's value grammar and its partial institutional overlap with EU heritage policy. Thirdly, it contributes to participatory heritage studies by showing that participation does not simply overcome authorised heritage discourse; it can generate new authorising forms. European values are analysed not as abstract principles or symbolic content, but as effects produced through categories, events, networks and procedures.

## The Council of Europe as a setting of value-based heritage governance

The Council of Europe's work in the field of heritage is distinctive, because it links cultural heritage to democracy, human rights, cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and the rule of law. In this approach, heritage is not framed only as conservation or representation, but as a field of public responsibility and civic participation. This is important for European studies, because it demonstrates how European values are not confined to legal declarations or political discourse, but are also institutionalised through cultural and heritage practices. Faro-related studies emphasised that this orientation represents a shift from heritage as protected object to heritage as social relation, right, responsibility and public resource (Dolff-Bonekämper 2009; Fairclough 2009). Schofield similarly perceives

the Faro Convention as an attempt to place people, ethics and public value at the centre of heritage practice (Schofield 2015).

The Faro Convention is central to this orientation. It defines cultural heritage as a group of inherited resources that people identify, independently of ownership, as reflecting their evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions (Council of Europe 2005: art. 2). This definition changes heritage from a fixed object to a social relation. It also introduces the "heritage community", defined as people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage and wish, within public action, to sustain and transmit them to future generations (Council of Europe 2005: art. 2). This language is important, because it defines participation not as an optional addition to heritage governance, but as part of how heritage itself is constituted.

However, the Faro Convention does not simply replace institutional authority with community autonomy. It links the right to benefit from cultural heritage with responsibilities towards heritage and society (Council of Europe 2005: art. 1, 4). This rights-responsibility pairing expands who may appear as a heritage actor, but it also frames participation through a moral and institutional vocabulary of public action, transmission and responsibility. The heritage community is treated as both enabling and institutionally mediated: it opens heritage governance to new actors, but recognition depends on legal, administrative and policy translation (Adell et al. 2015; Zagato 2015). Iaione et al. make a similar point from a participatory governance perspective: community involvement requires legal, policy and institutional infrastructures (Iaione et al. 2022).

European Heritage Days operate through a different institutional form. They are not a convention or certification regime, but an event-based thematic format. Their significance lies in the staging of public access. Through annual themes, local activities, guided visits, educational events and public storytelling, European Heritage Days make heritage accessible for broad publics. The 2024 theme, "Routes, Networks and Connections", invited organisers to connect local heritage to broader histories of movement, exchange and influence (Council of Europe, European Commission 2024). European Heritage Days are analytically important, not because they have the same institutional depth as Faro Convention, or Cultural Routes, but because they demonstrate how access is formatted through public events and thematic framing.

Cultural Routes add a network-certification format. The *Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes* presents them as instruments for cultural cooperation, diversity and intercultural dialogue (Council of Europe 2010). Under the current certification rules mentioned in Resolution CM/Res(2023)2, routes must demonstrate a theme representative of European values and common to at least three countries of Europe, transnational and multidisciplinary research, cultural and educational exchanges, contemporary cultural practice, and cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development (Council of Europe 2023). The resolution also requires applicant networks to demonstrate organisational viability, democratic operation, a multiannual programme and impact indicators, making certification itself a key format, through which participation becomes institutionally legible. Places and actors become part of European heritage governance, when they can be connected through coherent themes, networks and recognised procedures. Cultural

Routes are not merely paths, they are narrative and managerial devices that organise places, movement and meaning (Berti 2015; Timothy, Boyd 2015).

Taken together, the Faro Convention, European Heritage Days and Cultural Routes demonstrate three different institutional formats: legal-normative, event-thematic and network-certification. Their value lies not in their sameness, but in their combined capacity to show how participation is formatted across different scales of Council of Europe heritage governance. The Faro Convention produces the responsible heritage subject; European Heritage Days stage the participating public; Cultural Routes organise the mobile network actor. These are the institutional forms, through which European values become participatory.

The Council of Europe and the European Union must nevertheless be kept institutionally distinct. The former grounds its heritage work in conventions, human rights and intergovernmental cooperation, whereas the EU acts through supporting competence, policy coordination, funding and programmes. Their membership overlaps, but their legal bases, decision-making structures and instruments are not interchangeable. The Council of Europe's Faro Convention, therefore, should not be treated as an EU instrument, even though its participatory principles have influenced wider European heritage policy.

The overlap is clearest in participatory governance. The Council of the European Union called for open, multilevel and society-driven heritage governance in its 2014 conclusions, and the European Commission's European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage adopted an integrated and participatory approach (Council of the European Union 2014; European Commission 2018). European Heritage Days are jointly organised by the Council of Europe and the European Commission, while the joint project *The Faro Way* explicitly promoted community participation and implementation of principles mentioned in Faro Convention (Council of Europe, European Commission 2021; 2024).

These connections indicate policy circulation rather than institutional convergence. The Council of Europe supplies a rights-based vocabulary of heritage community, access and responsibility; the EU helps mainstream related ideas through programmes, funding and cross-sectoral coordination. The article remains centred on the Council of Europe, because its purpose is to explain a distinctive institutional logic. The EU comparison clarifies how this logic travels and why European value-making is produced across, rather than by, a single European institution.

## Theoretical framework and methodology

This article theorises participatory heritage as a form of institutional mediation. Critical heritage studies have demonstrated that heritage is not a neutral inheritance but a field of power, in which particular actors, objects and narratives are authorised. Smith's critique of the authorised heritage discourse remains important, because it demonstrates how expertise, materiality and monumentality have historically structured what counts as legitimate heritage (Smith 2006). More broadly, heritage studies have demonstrated that heritage is continuously produced through temporal, spatial and political work: it

selects pasts, stabilises identities and authorises public meanings (Graham, Ashworth, Tunbridge 2000; Ashworth, Graham, Tunbridge 2007). Such an approach requires a critical imagination attentive to how heritage frames structure visibility, authority and public meaning (Waterton, Watson 2013).

Community heritage and social value studies develop this insight. Waterton and Smith demonstrate that "community" is often recognised unevenly, especially when institutions define in advance, which forms of community voice are legitimate (Waterton, Smith 2010). Crooke similarly argues that community heritage involves motivation and agency, but also authority and control (Crooke 2010). Jones treats social value as negotiated through situated practices, attachments and forms of recognition (Jones 2017), while Mydland and Grahn demonstrate how local communities identify heritage values through processes of meaning-making (Mydland, Grahn 2012). These arguments prevent participation from being treated as a simple democratic remedy.

Recent studies clarify this point. Rosetti et al. suggest that international heritage frameworks regulate participation through roles and expected forms of involvement (Rosetti et al. 2022). Colomer examines participatory governance after the Faro Convention and demonstrates that legal provisions may invite participation, while limiting citizens' influence over decisions (Colomer 2023, 2024). Rodenberg et al. (2023) emphasise how institutional design and relations among public authorities, professionals and communities shape participation, while Pastor Pérez and Colomer (2024) describe these limits as "authorised participation". Recent empirical studies further demonstrate that public interest and citizens' roles vary across local and institutional contexts (Croitoru et al. 2025; Mäkinen 2026). This literature supports the central claim that participation must be analysed as governance, not simply as inclusion.

Formatted participation specifies this governing process. It refers to institutional forms – heritage communities, public events, annual themes, cultural routes, networks and certification procedures – that make agency visible, transferable and actionable. These forms create opportunities for recognition and circulation while defining acceptable actors, vocabularies and procedures. Participation becomes effective through formatting, but formatting also establishes its limits.

This theoretical argument is informed by discourse analysis, but the article does not claim to offer a full critical discourse analysis. Policy language does not simply reflect institutional practice; it constructs actors, problems and legitimate forms of action. Fairclough states that discourse is productive of social relations and subject positions (Fairclough 1992; 1995). Bacchi argues that policy frames do not merely respond to problems, but represent problems in particular ways (Bacchi 2009). Yanow treats policy language as interpretive practice, through which meanings are constructed and stabilised (Yanow 2000). Jørgensen and Phillips further emphasise that discourse analysis examines how language structures social possibilities (Jørgensen, Phillips 2002). These perspectives are useful, because the article is concerned with how the Council of Europe's value vocabulary produces recognisable subjects of participation: heritage communities, publics, local organisers, route partners and network actors.

The article adopts a qualitative, critical discourse-informed analysis of Council of Europe heritage governance. Documents are treated not as neutral containers of information, but as governance texts that define problems, authorise actors and stabilise meanings (Bowen 2009; Prior 2003). The research design follows interpretive principles that prioritise meaning-making, situated categories and institutional language over variable-based measurement (Schwartz-Shea, Yanow 2012). The corpus includes one legal-normative framework, one event-thematic framework and one network-certification framework, summarised in *Table 1*. To distinguish institutional description from authorial interpretation, each analytical section first reconstructs the formal vocabulary, actor categories and procedures stated in the documents and then interprets their enabling and selective effects. Statements about what a framework officially requires are separated from claims about how those requirements structure recognition, access and mobility.

**Table 1: Corpus and analytical focus.**

| Framework | Core document | Institutional format | Analytical focus |
|---|---|---|---|
| Faro Convention | *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* | Legal-normative | Heritage community, rights, responsibility, public action |
| European Heritage Days | *European Heritage Days 2024: Routes, Networks and Connections* | Event-thematic | Public access, annual theme, public engagement |
| Cultural Routes | *Resolution CM/Res (2010)53; Resolution CM/Res (2023)2* | Network-certification | Mobility, networks, certification criteria |

Source: the author's own elaboration.

The selection is justified by theoretical rather than statistical logic. The Faro Convention provides the strongest articulation of heritage participation as rights, responsibility and community. European Heritage Days provide an event-based format, through which public access is structured and thematised. Cultural Routes provide a networked format, through which mobility and transnational cooperation are certified. Together, they allow the article to compare how European values are made participatory across legal-normative, event-thematic and network-certification formats within the same institutional setting.

The analysis proceeded in three steps. First, it identified recurring value vocabularies, including democracy, cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, responsibility, access, community and cooperation. Second, it examined the subject positions created by these vocabularies, such as heritage communities, participating publics, local organisers and route partners. Third, it analysed the institutional effects of these subject positions by

asking how they make participation recognisable, transferable and governable. Three dimensions used in the analysis are: community as subject formation, access as scene formation, and mobility as relational formation.

The study does not evaluate implementation systematically across the Member States or claim to represent participant experience. These two implementation examples introduced below are documentary vignettes drawn from Council of Europe materials; they illustrate how formal grammars can be translated into practice, but they are not independent ethnographic case studies. The article's primary contribution remains institutional and conceptual.

## Community: Heritage communities and the formatting of responsibility

Community is the first dimension through which the Council of Europe makes European values participatory. However, community is not treated here as a natural, harmonious or pre-existing social unit. It is analysed as a discourse of subject formation: a way of naming people and groups as legitimate heritage actors. The question is not only whether communities are included, but how they are made recognisable, what responsibilities they are asked to assume, and which ideas become easier or harder to voice within this framework.

The Faro Convention is the central textual site for this dimension. It defines a "heritage community" as people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage and wish, within public action, to sustain and transmit them to future generations (Council of Europe 2005: art. 2). This formulation is democratising, because it shifts heritage away from ownership, expert designation and monumental status. Heritage becomes grounded in meaning, attachment and public value. This resonates with critical heritage studies, which has challenged authorised heritage discourse and demonstrated that heritage is produced through social relations and practices rather than simply inherited as a fixed object (Smith 2006; Harrison 2013).

However, the same definition also formats community participation. A group becomes recognisable as a heritage community, when it can appear as valuing, sustaining and transmitting heritage "within the framework of public action" (Council of Europe 2005: art. 2). The phrase is crucial. It means that community agency is not simply autonomous or spontaneous; it is made legible through public, responsible and future-oriented action. This produces a specific subject position: the responsible heritage actor. The community is authorised not merely because it has memory, grievance or attachment, but because it can translate these into publicly acceptable practices of care, transmission and social benefit.

This does not invalidate the democratic promise of the Faro Convention. The heritage community concept allows groups to claim heritage through meaning, use and responsibility rather than only ownership or professional designation (Adell et al. 2015; Zagato 2015). The Whole Village Project in Viscri provides a documented

illustration: restoration with local materials, craft training, small-scale tourism, ecological infrastructure and efforts to involve Roma residents and women converted local heritage into work, public action and community development (Council of Europe 2022; 2024d). The example demonstrates both sides of formatted participation. It broadens the range of heritage actors, but visibility depends on training, project organisation, external support and the ability to translate local life into recognised vocabularies of sustainability and social inclusion. Less organised, conflictual or politically uncomfortable ideas remain harder to institutionalise.

Community also appears in European Heritage Days, but in a more temporary and performative form. European Heritage Days do not define community through legal language. They produce communities of participation through local events, volunteers, schools, visitors, associations and public storytelling. The 2024 theme *Routes, Networks and Connections* invited local organisers to present heritage through histories of movement, exchange, routes, technologies, beliefs and cultural practices (Council of Europe, European Commission 2024). In these settings, participation becomes visible, when local actors can present their heritage as part of a shared narrative aligned with the annual theme. Community is produced not simply through belonging, but through the ability to translate local practices into publicly communicable and thematically coherent forms.

This event-based community has democratic value, because it opens heritage to non-specialist publics. However, it also privileges forms of community that can be publicly staged and thematically narrated. Local heritage becomes more visible, when it can be connected to the annual theme and presented as part of a wider European story. This may allow creative interpretation, but it may also filter out forms of belonging that are less celebratory, less communicable or less easily translated into dialogue and shared heritage. Community heritage studies repeatedly demonstrate that local participation involves not only inclusion, but authority, conflict and control over public meaning (Crooke 2010; Waterton, Smith 2010).

Cultural Routes produce community in another form: the networked community. The Council of Europe certification framework requires routes to involve transnational cooperation, a theme representative of European values and networks across several countries. It also requires research, educational exchanges and cultural activities that can sustain the route beyond isolated local initiatives (Council of Europe 2023). The community here is not only local. It is a community of route partners: municipalities, museums, associations, tourism bodies, universities and civic actors connected through a shared narrative and governance structure.

Concrete examples from the Cultural Routes programme illustrate this dynamic. The Saint James Way, the Iter Vitis Route and the European Route of Industrial Heritage all operate as certified Cultural Routes that connect local actors, sites and institutions through shared transnational themes (Council of Europe 2024a; 2024b; 2024c). In each case, local communities become visible as "European", when they can align with a transnational narrative, participate in joint activities and sustain institutional cooperation. This networked community can empower peripheral places by inserting them into

European circuits of visibility. It also makes community participation dependent on the capacity to partner, coordinate, narrate and comply with certification expectations.

Participation is conditional upon organisational capacity and narrative alignment. Communities that cannot mobilise partnerships, produce coherent thematic interpretations or engage in transnational cooperation are less likely to be recognised within the Cultural Routes framework. This is the critical ambivalence of community as formatted participation. It democratises heritage by recognising new actors, while making recognition conditional upon responsible, public and networkable forms of influence.

## Access: Public encounter and the formatting of openness

Access is the second dimension, through which the Council of Europe makes European values participatory. It should not be understood simply as physical entry to heritage sites. Access is a discourse of scene formation: it structures where, how and under what interpretive conditions publics encounter heritage. The critical question is not only whether heritage is opened, but what kind of public encounter is staged, and what kinds of heritage become publicly communicable.

European Heritage Days offer the clearest empirical site for this dimension. The 2024 theme *Routes, Networks and Connections* encouraged participating countries and local organisers to build programmes around the physical and symbolic paths that connect communities, places and histories. This theme invited activities around roads, paths, trade, religion, technological innovation and other forms of exchange, framing local heritage as part of wider patterns of movement and connection (Council of Europe 2024). In this sense, European Heritage Days do not simply give access to heritage; they give access through a specific theme.

In practice, this thematic framing is translated into programme formats such as open monuments, guided tours, heritage trails, exhibitions, storytelling sessions and school-based activities organised by local associations, municipalities and cultural institutions. These activities frequently invite participants to "discover", "explore" and "experience" heritage sites and practices, thereby structuring access as a guided and interpretive encounter rather than an unmediated form of engagement (Council of Europe, European Commission 2024; Waterton, Smith 2010). Public access is structured through curated encounters that combine visibility, interpretation and participation. This matters because theme-based access is never neutral. It makes heritage public by selecting the interpretive frame through which publics are invited to engage in it. A local building, route, craft, archive or neighbourhood becomes legible, when it can be narrated as part of "routes", "networks" or "connections". The democratic value is clear: such themes can help local organisers connect everyday heritage to wider European conversations. But the format also filters participation. Heritage that fits the theme becomes easier to stage, while heritage that is conflictual, painful or resistant to narratives of connection may require translation into a more acceptable vocabulary of dialogue and shared heritage. Policy

discourse is not only descriptive; it helps construct the terms through which public issues become intelligible (Fairclough 1992; Bacchi 2009).

The European Heritage Days format also constructs a particular public. The public is imagined as visitor, learner, participant, and cultural citizen. This position is inclusive but also pedagogical. Publics are invited to discover, learn, explore and connect. Such language makes participation accessible and non-threatening, but it may also reduce more confrontational forms of public engagement. Protest, refusal, counter-memory or unresolved grievance are not impossible within European Heritage Days, but they fit the format less easily than guided visits, exhibitions, storytelling and educational events. This reflects a broader problem in participatory heritage governance: inclusion often works by defining the acceptable forms in which participation can appear (Pastor Pérez, Colomer 2024; Rosetti et al. 2022).

Hôtel du Nord in Marseille provides a second documentary vignette. Created by eight heritage communities, the resident-controlled cooperative links accommodation, heritage walks, local products, online promotion and a school for hosts; residents retain a majority of voting rights (Council of Europe 2022; 2024e). Access is co-produced by residents rather than limited to opening sites for visitors. At the same time, participation becomes visible through cooperative membership, hosting skills, branded walks, digital platforms and the capacity to sustain a visitor economy. The format opens marginalised neighbourhoods to public engagement, but it may not equally accommodate residents or memories that cannot, or do not wish to, enter these organisational and representational forms.

The Faro Convention provides a more rights-based version of access. It affirms the right of everyone to benefit from cultural heritage and to contribute to its enrichment (Council of Europe 2005: Art. 4). This is a powerful move, because it expands access beyond passive visitation. Access becomes active: people do not merely receive heritage; they contribute to its meaning, use and future. This aligns with social value approaches that understand heritage through lived relationships and public recognition rather than intrinsic material significance (Jones 2017; Mydland, Grahn 2012).

The Faro Convention also links access to responsibility. The right to heritage is linked to duties towards heritage and society, and participation is framed through public action and transmission (Council of Europe 2005: art. 1, 4). The result is a responsible public. Access is not simply freedom to use, reinterpret or contest heritage; it is access shaped by expectations of care, contribution and social benefit. Participation becomes legitimate, when it is aligned with stewardship, sustainability and intergenerational responsibility. The Faro framework, therefore, democratises access, but it also moralises access: the public is invited to participate as a responsible heritage actor, not merely as a consumer, critic or dissenter.

Cultural Routes structurise access through itinerary and network. Their certification criteria require routes to promote cultural and educational exchanges, contemporary cultural practice and cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development (Council of Europe 2023). Access here is not the opening of a single site. It is the production of

a route, through which publics can access the dispersed places as part of a coherent European story. The route form makes heritage accessible by connecting places that would otherwise remain separate, peripheral or locally bounded. Trails and routes organise visitor's experience through narrative, sequence, movement and management (Murray, Graham 1997; Timothy, Boyd 2015).

Certified Cultural Routes such as pilgrimage, industrial or wine-related routes structure access through mapped itineraries, interpretive signage, coordinated exhibitions and digital platforms that guide visitors across multiple sites. Access is mediated through narrative sequencing and institutional coordination, enabling dispersed heritage to be experienced as a coherent transnational journey (Berti 2015; Council of Europe 2023). This is democratically useful, because it can give visibility to smaller places and local actors. It can also encourage publics to engage in heritage relationally rather than nationally.

However, route-based access is selective. Heritage must be narratable, visitable, partnerable and often touristic. Visibility is valuable, but it also depends on institutional recognition and network readiness. Sites that lack infrastructure, interpretive capacity or institutional partnerships are less likely to be integrated into routes, even when they hold significant local meaning. As a result, access is shaped not only by openness but by the ability to meet the narrative, organisational and logistical requirements of route-based heritage governance (Council of Europe 2023; Timothy, Boyd 2015).

Access operates across the three frameworks as a governed scene of engagement. European Heritage Days organise access through events and themes; the Faro Convention's framework accesses through rights and responsibilities; Cultural Routes organise access through itineraries and networks. These formats make European values public. Democracy becomes visible, when publics are invited into heritage spaces; cultural diversity becomes visible through plural stories; intercultural dialogue becomes visible through public engagement; responsibility becomes visible through participation in care and transmission. The critical point is that access does not simply remove barriers. It produces the scene in which participation becomes recognisable. It defines the public as visitor, learner, responsible participant or mobile route user. Access is therefore not only a democratic opening; it is a governed technology of openness.

## Mobility: Routes, networks and the formatting of connection

Mobility is the third dimension, through which the Council of Europe makes European values participatory. It should not be reduced to travel or tourism. Mobility is a discourse of relational formation: it connects places, actors and narratives in ways that make local heritage legible as European. The analytical question is not simply how people move, but how movement is narrated, authorised and institutionalised as cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and shared heritage.

Cultural Routes provide the strongest empirical material for this dimension. The Enlarged Partial Agreement presents the programme as a framework for cultural coopera-

tion and intercultural dialogue across borders (Council of Europe 2010). The certification criteria specify how this mobility must be organised: a route must involve a theme representative of European values and common to at least three countries of Europe; it must be supported by transnational, multidisciplinary research; and it must enhance European memory, history and heritage, while contributing to interpretation of Europe's diversity (Council of Europe 2023). These are not merely administrative requirements. They define the conditions under which mobility becomes recognisable as European.

Mobility is not simply discovered. It is produced through certification. A route becomes European, when it can demonstrate thematic coherence, transnational partnership, research grounding, public activities and organisational capacity. This makes mobility institutionally legible, but also selective. Places and actors that can connect, narrate and sustain cooperation become visible; those that cannot fit the theme, partnership or certification requirements remain less likely to enter the European heritage frame. Cultural Routes management literature similarly stresses that routes require interpretation, governance, coordination and network capacity, not simply historical continuity or spatial linkage (Berti 2015).

This is the governing power of the route form. It converts local or regional heritage into a relational European narrative. A craft, pilgrimage, architectural style, landscape, historical figure or memory becomes European, when it can be connected across borders and organised as an itinerary. The route does not merely link pre-existing heritage sites. It creates a grammar of connection in which sites become nodes, actors become partners and histories become mobile narratives. This corresponds to wider heritage studies that understand heritage as spatially produced and politically organised rather than passively inherited (Graham, Ashworth, Tunbridge 2000; Macdonald 2013).

For example, Cultural Routes in fields such as pilgrimage, industrial heritage and wine culture structure mobility through mapped itineraries, coordinated interpretation and shared branding across multiple countries. These routes rely on signage systems, joint exhibitions, educational exchanges and digital platforms that guide visitors through a sequence of sites, transforming geographically dispersed locations into a coherent experiential and narrative pathway (Council of Europe 2023; Timothy, Boyd 2015). Mobility is mediated through narrative sequencing and institutional coordination rather than simply physical movement.

The democratic promise of this format is substantial. Cultural Routes can make peripheral places visible, support cooperation among local authorities and civil society actors, and broaden heritage beyond national or monumental frameworks. They allow participation through networks rather than only through state designation. However, the same format can also privilege actors with administrative capacity, tourism infrastructure, language skills and access to transnational partnerships. Mobility may therefore redistribute visibility without fully equalising participation. Participation in Cultural Routes often requires formal partnerships, project management capacity and the ability to engage in international collaboration, which can disadvantage smaller or less resourced communities, even when they possess significant heritage assets (Berti 2015; Timothy, Boyd 2015).

European Heritage Days offer a more symbolic form of mobility. The 2024 theme explicitly foregrounded routes, networks and connections, asking participants to explore not only physical roads and paths but also the movement of ideas, technologies, religions, styles and cultural influences (Council of Europe, European Commission 2024). In practice, this invites local organisers to reinterpret heritage through narratives of exchange: linking local crafts to historical trade networks, connecting religious sites to pilgrimage movements or presenting industrial heritage through technological diffusion. Symbolic mobility is operationalised through narrative reframing rather than physical movement alone.

This symbolic mobility is significant, because it allows local heritage to be imagined as part of a wider European web. It can reveal historical interdependence and challenge closed national narratives. It also encourages local specificity to be translated into a vocabulary of connection. This may soften histories marked by domination, exclusion or unequal mobility. Trade routes, colonial routes, migration routes and religious routes may all be framed as "connections", but the political asymmetries within those connections can easily be underplayed if the dominant vocabulary is exchange, dialogue and shared heritage. A critical discourse-informed perspective is useful here, because it asks what the language of connection makes visible and what it makes less articulated (Fairclough 1995; Wodak, Meyer 2015).

The Faro Convention contributes to mobility in a less obvious but important way. By defining heritage through meanings, values and responsibilities rather than ownership or fixed material status, Faro Convention makes heritage conceptually mobile (Council of Europe 2005: art. 2). Heritage claims can circulate through public action, civic initiatives and heritage communities. They are not limited to expert designation or state ownership. However, this mobility also requires translation into Faro's vocabulary of community, responsibility and transmission. The heritage community concept opens participation, while requiring forms of recognition (Zagato 2015). In this sense, mobility is not only spatial but also institutional: heritage claims become institutionally mobile, when they can be reformulated in terms that are recognisable as responsibility, sustainability and public value (Harrison 2013; Zagato 2015).

Across Cultural Routes, European Heritage Days and Faro Convention, mobility operates as both connection and regulation. It allows European values to travel through routes, themes, networks and communities. Cultural diversity becomes visible through multiple connected narratives; intercultural dialogue – through public engagement and exchange; responsibility – through the transmission of heritage across places and generations. However, mobility also filters participation. It favours actors and practices that can be connected, narrated, certified, visited or thematically framed.

This is why mobility is not simply the opposite of peripherality. It can make peripheral places visible, but often by turning them into nodes within a European grammar of connectivity. That can be empowering, but it can also reorganise local heritage according to external standards of coherence, mobility and recognisability. Mobility, therefore, functions as the third dimension of formatted participation: it expands heritage beyond

bounded places, while defining which forms of movement and connection can count as European value-making.

## Discussion: Participatory European values and the limits of formatted governance

The analysis of community, access and mobility demonstrates that the Council of Europe does not simply promote participation as an added policy objective. It formats participation as a way of making European values visible, practical and governable. This is significant for European studies, because it shifts attention from values as official declarations to values as institutional practices. Democracy, cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and responsibility do not remain abstract principles. They become actionable through recognisable forms: the heritage community, the public event, the annual theme, the cultural route, the transnational network and the certification procedure. As *Table 2* demonstrates, formatted participation operates by attaching European values to recognisable actors, scenes and connections. It is precisely this attachment that makes values governable, but also selective.

**Table 2: Formatted participation and European value governance**

| Dimension | Institutional form | Value made actionable | Participatory subject | Critical limit |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Community | Heritage community; local association; route partnership | Responsibility; democracy; public action | Responsible heritage actor | Recognition depends on institutional language, organisational capacity and public-oriented ideas |
| Access | Public event; annual theme; guided encounter; itinerary | Cultural diversity; openness; civic participation | Visitor, learner, participant, cultural citizen | Access is organised through curated themes and interpretive formats |
| Mobility | Cultural route; transnational network; certification procedure | Intercultural dialogue; cooperation; connected European memory | Route partner, mobile public, network actor | Visibility depends on connectivity, narrative alignment and certification readiness |

Source: the author's own elaboration.

These forms enable participation, but they also shape the conditions, under which participation can be recognised as legitimate. Recurrent policy vocabularies define participation through categories such as "heritage community", "routes" and "connections";

position actors as responsible participants, learners or network partners; and filter out forms of engagement that cannot be articulated within these terms. In this sense, the Council of Europe's heritage governance offers a useful case for analysing how European values are institutionalised beyond law and formal politics, through cultural formats that organise public recognition, civic access and transnational connection.

This is the central ambivalence of participatory heritage governance. On the one hand, the Council of Europe widens the democratic reach of heritage. The Faro Convention weakens the monopoly of experts, owners and state authorities by recognising people's attachments, values and responsibilities as constitutive of heritage (Council of Europe 2005). European Heritage Days open heritage to publics through local events and shared themes, making participation visible through engagement and interpretation (Council of Europe, European Commission 2024). Cultural Routes extend heritage across borders by linking local actors to transnational networks of cooperation and exchange (Council of Europe 2010, 2023). Taken together, these formats make heritage less exclusively national, monumental and expert-led, as reflected in the expansion of participating actors, from local associations and volunteers in European Heritage Days programmes to civic initiatives in Faro contexts and institutional partnerships in Cultural Routes networks.

On the other hand, this widening is never unconditional. Participation becomes institutionally legible only when it can be translated into acceptable forms of community, access and mobility. Community must appear as responsible and publicly oriented; access must enable learning or shared experience; mobility must be organised through routes, themes, networks or partnerships. This confirms a wider insight in critical heritage studies: participation does not automatically escape authorised heritage discourse, because institutions continue to shape which actors, ideas and meanings can be recognised (Smith 2006; Waterton, Smith 2010). The Council of Europe's participatory heritage agenda does not abolish authorisation, but redistributes it, shifting authority from expert designation towards the structuring of legitimate forms of participation.

Formatted participation avoids two inadequate readings: that participation is automatically democratic, because more actors are included, or that institutional participation is merely symbolic. The Council of Europe case demonstrates that participation is real and productive, but it becomes effective through forms that stabilise and circulate it. The concept extends "authorised participation" by emphasising not only who is recognised, but how participatory forms become transferable across programmes, places and governance settings (Colomer 2024; Pastor Pérez, Colomer 2024). Therefore, it is important, how participation is enabled and governed at the same time.

This has implications for European values. Values are often treated as official principles or normative declarations, especially in European institutional discourse. The analysis here suggests that values become politically effective only when attached to practices, actors and formats. Democracy becomes visible when communities and publics are invited to act; cultural diversity – when local meanings are displayed, narrated and connected; intercultural dialogue – when encounters are staged through events, routes and exchanges; and responsibility – when participation is framed through care, transmission and public

action. European values are, therefore, not merely represented by heritage initiatives, but enacted and stabilised through participatory formats, shifting the analysis from symbolic representation to institutional operation (Macdonald 2013; Lähdesmäki 2017).

A critical discourse-informed perspective also shows who and what may remain outside these formats. Community language advantages actors able to demonstrate continuity, public benefit and organisational responsibility; access advantages heritage that can be opened, interpreted or digitised; mobility advantages places with partnership, language, tourism and project-management capacities. Informal groups, poorly resourced communities and ideas expressed through protest, refusal, unresolved grievance or difficult histories may be less legible. Colonial, migration or conflict routes can be admitted as "connections", while their unequal power relations are softened. The category of "European values" is politically ambivalent: it enables common standards of democracy and dialogue, but it can also privilege consensual and institutionally translatable versions of Europe. Policy discourse includes by producing the terms, on which inclusion becomes intelligible (Bacchi 2009; Jørgensen, Phillips 2002).

This does not mean that the Council of Europe's participatory heritage agenda should be understood primarily as a mechanism of domination. Such a conclusion would be too simple. The democratic significance of the Faro Convention, European Heritage Days and Cultural Routes lies precisely in their capacity to open heritage beyond narrow expert, national and monumental frameworks. They provide real opportunities for recognition, cooperation and public engagement. However, their democratic effect depends on institutional mediation. Heritage communities require legal and administrative recognition; public access requires themes, events and interpretive frames; transnational mobility requires routes, networks and certification. Participation is formatted, and this is precisely why participation should be understood not as the opposite of governance, but as one of its primary modalities.

The findings also refine the relationship with *Normative Power Europe* (NPE). The studies on NPE address the question of how the EU's identity and principles shape its conduct and the diffusion of norms (Manners 2002). The Council of Europe case reveals an earlier, infrastructural moment of normativity: values gain practical force when translated into actor categories, events, partnerships and certification procedures. This is not evidence that the Council of Europe is an EU normative actor. Rather, the overlap in participatory heritage policy between the EU and the Council of Europe demonstrates that European normativity is co-produced across institutions (Council of the European Union 2014; European Commission 2018). Formatted participation identifies one mechanism, through which that normativity becomes publicly actionable and administratively governable.

## Conclusions

This article has examined how the Council of Europe makes European values participatory through heritage. Rather than asking whether its heritage initiatives are participatory

in a general or normative sense, it has asked how participation becomes institutionally recognisable, transferable and governable. The argument has been that Council of Europe heritage governance operates through formatted participation: the organisation of participation into forms that enable communities, publics and networks to act, while also defining the terms, under which their action becomes legible as European value-making.

The article developed this argument through three dimensions. Community makes European values participatory by recognising people and groups as heritage actors. Through the Faro Convention, the "heritage community" expands heritage beyond ownership, expertise and monumental designation, but it also frames participation through responsibility, transmission and public action (Council of Europe 2005). Access makes European values participatory by staging heritage as public encounter. Through European Heritage Days, heritage becomes visible through events, themes and interpretive formats that connect local practices to broader narratives of cultural diversity and shared responsibility (Council of Europe, European Commission 2024). Mobility makes European values participatory by linking actors, places and narratives across borders. Through Cultural Routes, heritage becomes networked, certifiable and transnationally communicable (Council of Europe 2010; 2023).

These dimensions demonstrate that European values do not operate only as abstract principles or official declarations. Democracy, cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and responsibility become practical through the institutional organisation of participation. They are enacted when communities are recognised, publics are invited, events are organised, routes are certified and networks are sustained. In this sense, Council of Europe heritage frameworks do not merely represent European values. They produce the participatory conditions, through which those values can become public, actionable and governable.

The article has also demonstrated that this process is ambivalent. Participation widens the democratic reach of heritage, but it does not escape institutional power. Community, access and mobility are enabling dimensions, yet they are also selective institutional forms. They privilege actors who can speak the language of responsibility, practices that can be made public and interpretable, and connections that can be narrated through dialogue, diversity and cooperation. This confirms a central insight of critical heritage studies: participation does not simply replace authorised heritage discourse; it may reproduce new forms of authorisation through the very formats that make inclusion possible (Smith 2006; Pastor Pérez, Colomer 2024).

The concept of formatted participation is the article's main theoretical contribution. It moves beyond the opposition between top-down and bottom-up heritage by demonstrating that participation is always mediated through institutional forms. It also moves beyond a purely symbolic reading of European values by demonstrating how values become practical through categories, procedures, events and networks. Participation is neither an automatic democratic good nor a mere institutional façade. It is a governed practice that produces real opportunities for recognition and engagement, while also shaping what recognition and engagement can mean.

For European studies, the broader implication is that European values should be analysed not only as legal principles, political declarations or external projections, but also as institutionalised practices. The Council of Europe case demonstrates how values acquire public force when attached to recognisable actors, scenes and connections. Its partial overlap with EU participatory heritage policy demonstrates that value-making circulates across European institutions without erasing their distinct mandates. Heritage governance is one of the cultural fields, through which Europe is made actionable as a value-based order.

The article has clear limitations. It focuses on institutional texts and documentary vignettes rather than fieldwork on local implementation or participant experience. The examples cannot establish how representative outcomes are across the Member States. Future research could examine how local actors appropriate, resist or reinterpret value vocabularies; how difficult or conflictual heritage is negotiated; and how inequalities of time, income, language, digital access, organisational capacity and mobility affect participation.

Despite these limits, the article clarifies the distinctive contribution of the Council of Europe to European heritage governance. Its heritage initiatives are important, not only because they promote democracy, cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and responsibility, but because they provide institutional forms, through which these values can be enacted. The Council of Europe makes heritage participatory by formatting it through communities, publics and networks. This is both its democratic strength and its critical limitation: European values become visible through participation, but participation becomes visible only when organised into governable forms.

**Yi-De Liu** – Professor and Vice President for International Affairs, National Taiwan Normal University (Taipei, Taiwan). Research interests: European cultural policy, European heritage governance, European Capitals of Culture, EU external cultural relations and cultural diplomacy.

**Yi-De Liu** – profesor i wiceprezes ds. międzynarodowych, National Taiwan Normal University (Tajpej, Tajwan). Zainteresowania badawcze: europejska polityka kulturalna, zarządzanie dziedzictwem europejskim, Europejskie Stolice Kultury, zewnętrzne stosunki kulturalne UE i dyplomacja kulturalna.

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