

## Heritage education. The impact of European cultural policies on educational theory and on primary school curricula in Italy and Germany

### Educazione al patrimonio. L'impatto delle politiche culturali europee sulla teoria educativa e sui programmi della scuola primaria in Italia e Germania

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#### ABSTRACT

The contribution draws attention to heritage education, a major theme within European cultural policies. It is closely linked with the key competences of lifelong learning and the Agenda 2030. Recognising the value of heritage for European citizens, the Council of Europe's *Faro Convention* (2005) advocates the idea of citizen participation in the co-construction of knowledge about heritage (Del Gobbo *et alii*, 2018), emphasizing also the need for heritage education. Yet, different national contexts and debates influence the implementation of cultural policies and thus also the attention paid to cultural heritage. As Fontal *et alii* (2023) remark, the field of heritage education lacks a solid theoretical foundation and systematic practices in Europe. The present paper highlights the cases of Italy and Germany, drawing on European recommendations and guidelines, national policies, primary school curricula and the scientific production of the last decade.

Il contributo pone attenzione sull'educazione al patrimonio, uno dei temi principali delle politiche culturali europee, strettamente legato sia alle competenze chiave dell'apprendimento permanente sia all'Agenda 2030. Riconoscendo il valore del patrimonio per i cittadini europei, la *Convenzione di Faro* promossa dal Consiglio d'Europa (2005) sottolinea la necessità della partecipazione dei cittadini alla co-costruzione della conoscenza del patrimonio (Del Gobbo *et alii*, 2018), sottolineando dunque la centralità dell'educazione al patrimonio. Tuttavia, contesti e dibattiti nazionali diversi influenzano le politiche culturali e, di conseguenza, l'attenzione al tema dell'educazione al patrimonio. Come osservano Fontal *et alii* (2023), nel panorama europeo quest'ultima manca di una solida base teorica e di pratiche consolidate. Il presente lavoro analizza il caso dell'Italia e della Germania, mettendo in relazione raccomandazioni e linee guida europee, con le politiche nazionali, il curriculum della scuola primaria e la produzione scientifica dell'ultimo decennio.

**Keywords:** heritage education | european heritage policy | participation | primary school teaching | literature review

**Parole chiave:** educazione al patrimonio | politiche europee sul patrimonio | partecipazione | scuola primaria | literature review

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## Introduction: Heritage education an interdisciplinary field

The present contribution discusses the effects of European political frameworks on heritage education with respect to academic production in the educational fields of Italy and Germany as case studies. Different national approaches in cultural and educational policies make a comparison of the two countries interesting for research. To outline the reception of the European framework on heritage education in educational theories and practices, a short introduction to the field of heritage education and the corresponding policy frameworks in Europe is presented, followed by an exploratory literature review on academic production as well as a discussion and summary of the findings.

The concept of heritage education in Europe can be traced back in part to UNESCO's Conventions, especially the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (UNESCO, 1972) and the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO, 2003). The Council of Europe issued a first *Recommendation (98-5)* on heritage education in 1998. Heritage is here described as the tangible and intangible evidence of human activity in the natural environment. Heritage education, accordingly, is seen as a cross-cutting subject, put forward by different disciplines in formal and non-formal educational contexts. Alongside teachers, several expert communities – traditionally historians, art historians, museum educators and conservationists – are involved in this process. The ultimate aim of the *1998 Recommendation* is to raise awareness in the younger generations for heritage and its protection. Later on, the concept of “safeguarding” – i. e. actions for the implementation of contexts “favourable to the transmission and vitality of heritage that is living, negotiated, in the making” (Lapicirella Zingari, 2016, p. 432, own translation) – has also been adopted in European policies and put to the fore by the 2005 *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*, a. k. a. the *Faro Convention*. The convention points out that heritage is a constantly evolving expression of values, knowledge, traditions and the interaction between people and places, integrating therefore cultural and natural heritage. Such perspective necessarily involves the participation of local communities, alongside governments and experts.

By stressing the value of heritage for society, the *Faro Convention* made heritage education a key strategy area on the European level. The 2017 *Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century (CM/Rec (2017)1)* – in short *Strategy 21* – particularly emphasizes the relationship between heritage, education and research. In particular, the goal *K1 – Integrate heritage education more effectively into school curricula*, suggests multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches. However, the reception of these recommendations and their implementation in national laws differs significantly between Italy and Germany.

The article claims that the reception and adoption of the European framework in Italy increasingly turns heritage education into a subdiscipline of educational discourses, while in Germany the European framework receives currently very little attention by the educational community. This is assumed to have an effect on the overall academic production in the field as well as on theory development. The paper aims to map the field of heritage education in Italy and Germany by assessing academic production in a literature review (Hart, 2018). In doing so, the article also aims at identifying shared perspectives on heritage education, which are currently lacking a theoretical foundation in Europe (Fontal *et alii*, 2023).

## 1. Research Methodology

The previous considerations suggest that there is a significant connection between European policies and academic production. This claim is operationalized by a literature review (Hart, 2018), namely, analysing the effect of European frameworks on national policies, primarily school curricula and academic educational production. The shared data pool from which the sample is drawn are references in academic databases to monographs, anthologies as well as articles on heritage education.

Despite the impossibility of consulting a common database in the two languages, the authors adopted a set of keywords in the two languages as shared search criteria. The following keywords were used:

- in Italian: “educazione al patrimonio” (heritage education), “scuola primaria” (primary school), “Europa”, “heritage education”;
- in German: “Erbe/Kulturerbe” (heritage/cultural heritage), “Kulturelle Bildung” (cultural education), “Europa”, “Grundschule/Primarstufe” (primary school), “heritage education”.

The different keywords result from the usage of terms in German and Italian academic discourses. “Kulturelle Bildung” is firmly established in German academic discourses and refers partly to what in Italian is designated by “educazione al patrimonio”. However, the German term has overarching cultural connotations and includes heritage among other cultural expressions. Similarly, the German “Grundschule” and “Primarstufe” are used interchangeably for the Italian “scuola primaria”.

The sampling process has been restricted to academic production since 2013, the year Italy signed the *Faro Convention*, which could serve as a reference for wider academic discourses in Italy. Since Germany is not signatory to the *Faro Convention*, the year 2013 is taken as a common reference point for the literature review.

## 2. Reporting of Findings in the Case of Italy and Their Interpretation

The review focuses on the literature of the last 11 years, even though a broader overview of literature shows that publications on heritage education date back to the late 1990s. The review is based on books by academic publishers and articles in academic journals. The vast number of texts on heritage education by government agencies and NGOs is not considered academic production and therefore excluded. Books and articles were selected through a search with the selected keywords on a general search engine (Google Scholar) as well as a search on the electronic database *Portale nazionale delle biblioteche* [the national portal of libraries]. This has been complemented by a manual search of relevant pedagogical journals (*Formazione & Insegnamento*, *Form@re*, *Didattica della Storia*, *Pedagogia Oggi*, *Il capitale culturale*, *Lifelong Lifewide Learning*, *Italiano Lingua Due*). The search yielded 84 publications within the field of pedagogy between the years 2013 and 2024. Among them were 14 monographs or anthologies and 70 articles, suggesting a strong topical interest in the field of research. Yet, it is not possible to sharply separate the literature related to the formal context of the school and the non-formal context of the museum.

As regarding interpretation of the findings, there seems a strong connection between the number and themes of academic production, Italy’s national policies and both the UNESCO and the European framework on heritage education. Italy ratified the 2003 *UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2007; the *Faro Convention* (2005) went into effect in 2020. Italy’s high number of World Heritage Sites (Fontal *et alii*, 2021) as well as a lively discourse on heritage in its different forms seems to promote a general reflection on heritage education. A long synergy – due to joint projects between the Istituto nazionale per la valutazione del sistema educativo di istruzione e di formazione (INVALSI) (National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System) and the Council of Europe – dates back to the *Recommendation (98-5)*, as Branchesi (2007) points out, initiatives promoted by both the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR) and the Ministry of Culture (MIC) have led to the emergence of an “Italian system”, made up of various educational institutions in Italy. In the context of heritage education, the local knowledge about heritage – f. e. as represented in the volunteer association “Italia Nostra” – is officially acknowledged and therefore softens the separation between formal and non-formal education contexts, i. e. between schools and their environment (Branchesi, Riggio, 2018).

A *First National Plan for Cultural Heritage Education* was published by the Ministry of Culture in 2015. In 2021, a fourth, updated edition consolidated the alignment with the European reflections, referring explicitly to the *European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage* (European Union, 2019). The idea of culture as a driving force for sustainable development – and its three dimensions of economy, society and environment – recognises in heritage education a field that entails all places of education, promoting inclusion and dialogue, “confirming a participatory approach in line with the *Faro Convention*” (MIUR, 2021, own translation). With regard to the school context, the ministry of education, accordingly, recommends merging heritage education with the topics of participation and active citizenship, mainly at

the intersection of history, geography and the arts (MIUR, 2018). Moreover, heritage education is explicitly mentioned in “educazione civica” (citizenship education), a cross-curricular subject in the primary school curriculum (MIUR, 2020). This means that hours are allocated for the topic, but they have to be held within – and potentially in all – the various subjects.

Concerning the educational academic production, history, art and archaeology are the main fields committed to heritage education. This reflects that Italy is particularly rich in terms of cultural heritage. Each discipline – as well as each subject didactics in education – reflects its own research traditions as well as the approaches. These are not always fully aligned. Still, despite the different perspectives, the concept of “heritage” is widely understood to exceed the reference to “beni culturali” (cultural goods). It is used in its various meanings in art history, cultural history and natural heritage. Particular attention has been paid to historical-educational heritage. While the European framework is not always explicitly mentioned, the subjective dimension of heritage is generally recognised, stressing the centrality of subjects and the active role of society in the interpretation and safeguarding of heritage (Borghi, 2023).

Digital heritage and the development of tools to increase the accessibility of cultural heritage – ranging from gamification, serious games, augmented reality and virtual reality – is a dominant theme emerging from the literature review (Luigini, Panciroli, 2018). Specific attention is given to the aspect of storytelling, both in the form of digital storytelling and in the practice of bridging biographies with the exploration of local environments or “territori”, fostering experiences “in and with” the environment (De Marco, Fiore, 2022, p. 86, own translation) as “an extension of the classroom” (Nuzzaci, 2024, p. 49, own translation). Experiences outside school turn out to be the privileged vehicle for the practice of heritage education (Berti, Sebastiano, 2024; Borghi, 2017; 2023; Branchesi, 2007). The local aspects of heritage, be it a monument or an archaeological site, are the focus of several studies (Zuccoli, De Nicola, 2016).

Reflecting the continuity between formal and non-formal education contexts, as well as a degree of multidisciplinary research, the literature tends to deal with heritage education for both schools and museums (Panciroli, 2016; Poce, 2018). Moreover, the collaboration between educational and heritage institutions supports a strong multidisciplinary approach to the training of professionals in the field of heritage education (Borghi, 2023, p. 100). Consequently, heritage education and citizenship education are seen as closely related, as well as participation and active citizenship (Colazzo, 2021).

Tangible elements of cultural heritage traditionally receive great attention in Italy and it is only in the most recent years that a growing reception of intangible heritage as well as the connection to the topic of sustainability (Muscará, 2024; Galeotti, 2021) can be observed. The most recent literature also points out the potential of heritage education for intergenerational and intercultural encounters, suggesting the active participation of the subjects in a transformative process of culture (Bortolotti *et alii*, 2018). Accordingly, the reflection on heritage as a social practice within a community – considered itself as “a living and embodied heritage, dynamic and processual” (Colazzo, 2021, p. 6, own translation) – bridges the past, present and future. All such considerations bring to light the legacy of the *Faro Convention*. The latter serves equally as a strong reference point for the working group “Educazione al Patrimonio Culturale” (Education for Cultural Heritage) of the Italian Society of Pedagogy (SIPED), established in 2021: the working group promotes heritage education “as a channel for developing democratic participation and social responsibility, for improving the environment and quality of life, for enhancing cultural diversity and mutual understanding, and for promoting a greater awareness of the value of cultural heritage” (Muscará *et alii*, 2024, own translation).

### 3. Reporting of Findings in the Case of Germany and Their Interpretation

The search in Germany yielded 230 publications between the years 2013 and 2024. The search term “Europa” was excluded from the sample because of its inconclusiveness and its reduction of search results to 77 publications. The 230 publications were either monographs or anthologies; no journal articles were listed. The total of 230 publications included 146 doctoral theses, which accounts for more than half of publications. Except for six anthologies in the field of cultural education – partly in reference to museums and not explicitly to heritage – and one dissertation in the field of arts education, the titles of the listed publications were inconclusive for heritage education as an academic field of endeavour. Heritage seems

not to be considered as a topic in its own right in Germany, but as a setting in which other educational topics – such as inclusion, educational justice or Education for Sustainable Development – may unfold. This report includes the caveat that “heritage” – addressed as “traces of the past” or as “monuments in stone” – can be used in primary education on a local level both as a mandatory as well as an optional topic (f. e. Sächsisches Staatsministerium für Kultus, 2019). This context is not reflected by the literature in the sample. Additionally, the search term “world heritage education”, in reference to the 1972 *UNESCO World Heritage Convention*, resulted in five references in German language. Three publications by German authors in English – which thus fall outside of the methodological boundaries of this review – discuss theoretical foundations for World Heritage Education (Röll, Meyer, 2020; Grünberg, Zehbe, 2022; 2023).

As regarding interpretation of the findings, the concept “Kulturerbebildung” [education for cultural heritage] as the closest approximation in German language and educational discourses to heritage education, appears to have very little significance in German academic production as represented by the sample. This is suggested by the comparatively low count of publications with reference to cultural heritage. This may be due in part to Germany’s decentralized, federal structure as well as the federal states’ authority in all cultural matters *vis à vis* the federal government. This ranges from policies in the arts, culture and education to teacher training and school curricula. The German Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF) [federal ministry for education and research] uses time-based projects to identify best practices and to promote research. In doing so, the constitutional domains of the federal government and of the federal states are respected. Major programme lines of the federal ministry in the domain of education are Education for Sustainable Development, which is coordinated by the ministry since 2015 (BMBF, 2024a), as well as “Kulturelle Bildung” (BMBF, 2024b). Heritage education can intersect with both programme lines, however heritage education is considered belonging to the cultural domain – among other cultural expressions such as the arts. Heritage education therefore is mainly addressed in contexts of arts education, frequently with the aim to enhance social inclusion and participation. Current activities of the federal ministry focus on two research funding lines which are reflected by corresponding publications in the sample: strengthening of cultural offers in rural areas as well as digitalization in the field of cultural education (BMBF, 2024c). Germany’s constitutional disjunction between the federal government and the federal states in the cultural and educational domain appears thus to affect European heritage policy integration on the level of Germany’s federal states. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that Germany has not signed the *Faro Convention* until this date.

Concerning academic production, no references to the *Faro Convention* or European policy frameworks became evident in the sample. The academic educational community, as represented by professional associations, such as the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft (DGfE) [German Educational Research Association], currently doesn’t consider heritage education as a field of focused academic activity or research. By comparison, the field of Education for Sustainable Development is recognized since 2003 as a subdivision of DGfE (2024). Heritage education in Germany as outlined by the European framework must be summarily considered an academically underrepresented or newly emergent field.

#### 4. Discussion

The European framework for action in the field of cultural heritage (2019) calls for a European action plan for cultural heritage, linking the European *Faro Convention* and the *European Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century* as well as UN’s Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. However, such supranational frameworks appear to be sometimes selectively integrated in national policies. This, in turn, has an impact on the national development of policies, theories and practices in heritage education.

Comparing the numbers, types and the themes of publications on heritage education in Italy and Germany, marked differences become observable between the two countries. These differences have been in part attributed to national differences in the adoption of legal frameworks. These frameworks seem to guide academic discourses. It appears that the field of heritage education in Italy benefits from political decisions which adopted the European framework on heritage education, manifesting in a topical academic discussion in heritage education-related journal articles. The prevalence of monographs or anthologies in the German sample suggests on the other hand, that the German field currently tends towards establishing

theoretical or practical foundations, a claim that can be supported by the relatively big proportion of 146 doctoral theses in the publication sample. Due to the exploratory nature of this initial mapping of the field heritage education in Italy and Germany, more research and a deeper analysis is needed to outline possible theoretical foundations of heritage education. Frequently, the political framework – drawing on either UNESCO’s conventions or the *Faro Convention* – is used to justify academic approaches or to suggest best practices. Here further analysis is required to identify common themes or theoretical perspectives for heritage education.

## 5. Limitations

Researching the academic fields of heritage education in Italy and Germany, fundamental differences in research infrastructure became apparent. Research databases can both privilege or restrict access of researchers as well as reveal and conceal the field by offering access to relevant information or by highlighting particular perspectives through the chosen and indexed keywords. This is further complicated by the discursive meanings of search terms as well as the status and reach of the Italian and German language in the academic field. The used keywords define the construction of the sample of the literature review and have therefore a major influence on the findings, potentially biasing the research. This has been controlled by refining and adapting search terms. Being an exploratory study, the research parameters will need to be refined for further analysis of the field.

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