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Ours, Yours, Theirs, No One's? The Heritage of Multicultural Areas

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The introductory article examines the processes of creating, using, and interpreting heritage in diverse multicultural settings. Special attention is given to exploring the creative and performative power of heritage in minority, linguistically diverse, post-imperial, post-socialist, and other multicultural environments, where heritage functions as a dynamic field of negotiation, contestation, and connection.
▪ Keywords: heritage, heritagisation, multicultural areas, marginalised spaces, performativity of heritage, heritage negotiations

Uvodni članek obravnava procese ustvarjanja, rab in interpretacij dediščine v raznolikih večkulturnih okoljih. Poseben poudarek namenja preučevanju ustvarjalne in performativne moči dediščine v manjšinskih, jezikovno raznolikih, postimperialnih, postsocialističnih in drugih večkulturnih okoljih, kjer dediščina nastopa kot dinamično polje pogajanj, polemik in povezovanj.
▪ Ključne besede: dediščina, dediščinjenje, večkulturna območja, marginalizirani prostori, performativnost dediščine, pogajanja o dediščini

The present volume of *Traditiones* is dedicated to the complex and multilayered nature of heritage in multicultural areas, which is never merely a neutral legacy from the past. Rather, it is an active and dynamic arena of cultural politics, identity negotiation, and memory work (Smith, 2006). In areas marked by complex histories of migration, conquest, political reconfiguration, and economic transformation, the heritage landscape is often fragmented, overlapping, and contested (Ledinek Lozej, Pisk, 2025). The very question "whose heritage?" points to the competing claims and the social processes through which the past is interpreted in the present. In past decades, it has been increasingly recognised that heritage is not simply inherited but produced and re-produced, often as part of wider, especially identity-making projects (Ashworth et al., 2007). In contexts where multiple cultural and linguistic communities have coexisted – sometimes peacefully, sometimes in conflict – heritage emerges as a multi-vocal narrative space, particularly evident in border regions (see Ledinek Lozej, Rogelja Caf, 2025; Selvelli, 2025).

Contributions gathered in this issue explore these dynamics through various case studies where 20th-century political changes profoundly altered the composition and self-understanding of communities. Each one asks, in its own way: How is heritage

claimed, contested, or shared in multicultural regions? What is the role of historical turnpoints, trauma, silence, and memory in shaping present-day heritage discourses? To what extent can heritage become a space of reconciliation, and where does it remain a terrain of division? By analysing contexts ranging from post-Habsburg port cities to post-socialist borderlands, from ethnolinguistic regions marked by environmental disaster to migrant communities negotiating invisibility, the volume invites readers to consider heritage as a field of continuous negotiation.

Heritage in multicultural regions

Heritage in multicultural regions is not a neutral or static repository of the past, but rather a socially and politically mediated construct shaped through selective processes of evaluation, interpretation, and representation (Harvey, 2001; Smith, 2006). This conceptualisation challenges essentialist understandings of heritage as the unproblematic preservation of material traces, emphasising instead its discursive and political character (Smith, 2006). Heritage is thus more intimately connected to present needs and future aspirations than to any immutable past (Lowenthal, 1985; Harrison et al., 2020). The process of *heritagisation* – the transformation of particular pasts into recognised "heritage" – inherently involves selection, privileging certain histories while marginalising or erasing others (Harrison, 2013; Macdonald, 2013). In multicultural areas, this dynamic is particularly charged. Such regions function as sites of negotiation in which competing interpretations of history, belonging, and identity intersect. Heritage becomes both an arena of contestation and a tool for (re)constructing collective identities, determining who has the right to claim the past and how such claims are legitimised.

In practice, heritage in multicultural regions is frequently conflictual. Diverse social and ethnic groups often seek to assert the primacy of their own historical narratives, producing tensions between official and vernacular forms of memory (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996). Official heritage frameworks, such as those advanced by UNESCO or the European Union, tend to promote cultural diversity as a universal value (Macdonald, 2013). Yet, paradoxically, many historically multicultural regions have undergone processes of cultural homogenisation, frequently as a result of political upheavals, shifting state borders, and episodes of violent conflict (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1983; Anderson, 2006).

Such disruptions have often led to situations in which the tangible and intangible remnants of multicultural life exist without the original communities that sustained them – a phenomenon Macdonald (2013) terms "heritage without communities". These traces, while materially enduring, are subject to highly selective remembering and forgetting (Connerton, 2008). In post-transition contexts, heritage narratives are often reframed to reinforce dominant national identities, marginalising or silencing displaced,

expelled, or otherwise absent groups (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996; Hrobat Virloget, 2017). A salient example can be found in Central and Eastern Europe, where post-World War II forced migrations of German populations and state-led resettlement policies fundamentally transformed the demographic and cultural landscapes of once-plural towns (Douglas, 2012; Ther, 2014). Similar dynamics can be observed after the First World War in Anatolia, where the population exchange between Greece and Turkey (1923) erased centuries of shared cultural coexistence (Hirschon, 2003; Clark, 2006); in the Middle East, where Jewish communities left behind synagogues, cemeteries, and schools following mid-20th-century exoduses (Fischbach, 2008; Bashkin, 2017); and in North America, where the displacement of Indigenous peoples has resulted in enduring yet decontextualised traces of their cultural landscapes (Deloria, 1998; Clifford, 2013), to name only a few examples.

Following Smith's (2006) argument that heritage is not a fixed entity but a cultural process, formerly multicultural regions pose unique challenges for heritage research. In these settings, absence is as central to heritage-making as presence. The erasure of certain ethnic groups leaves behind physical, spatial, and narrative voids, prompting the question of how these absences are acknowledged, ignored, or reinterpreted (Hrobat Virloget et al., 2016). Therefore, it is important to illuminate the varied ways in which local populations relate – or deliberately choose not to relate – to the material and symbolic remnants of multicultural pasts (Ilić, 2024). Acts of avoidance or denial can be as revealing as overt commemorations, offering insights into the politics of memory, the shaping of collective identities, and the long-term legacies of nation-building projects.

Within these complex and often contested contexts, heritage in multicultural regions can be more productively understood through a lens that emphasises its emergent, dynamic, and interconnected nature (Silverman, 2011). Rather than conceiving heritage as a static assemblage of objects or sites, this approach foregrounds its ongoing constitution through performative, discursive, and materially grounded practices, in which meanings are constantly negotiated, reshaped, and reenacted; often in response to shifting political priorities and social relations. This processual perspective draws attention to the ways heritage both reflects and shapes the power asymmetries, exclusions, and ideological agendas embedded within its making.

At the same time, recognising heritage as embedded within dense networks of relationships linking human and non-human actors, social institutions, and material environments, underscores its fundamentally relational character. The relational dimension reveals that heritage emerges through continuous interactions between people, places, and material forms, and cannot be separated from the ecological and socio-political contexts in which it exists. Taken together, these processual and relational understandings allow us to conceptualise heritage in multicultural areas as an immanent, open-ended, and co-constituted process, shaped through ongoing negotiations, reciprocal influences, and shared acts of meaning-making across diverse communities

(see also Mozzafari, Harvey, 2025). Such a perspective enables a more nuanced engagement with the layered, contested, and evolving character of multicultural heritage, while resisting static or monolithic interpretations.

An important phenomenon within multicultural heritage contexts is the persistence of hidden heritage, which arises from selective processes of heritagisation. This selective visibility amplifies certain memories and narratives while excluding others, thereby shaping public consciousness in ways that privilege dominant cultural groups (Macdonald, 2010; Bartulović, 2022). Minority heritages are often confined to private or community spaces due to political marginalisation, economic neglect, or societal prejudice. This marginalisation can be reinforced through exoticised or "orientalised" representations that reduce minority cultures to stylised or stereotypical images (Muzaini, 2012; Tyner, 2018).

In many cases, the absence of official recognition means such heritage is constructed and practised within families or communities through oral traditions, rituals, and everyday practices and usually acknowledged as "living heritage". Despite structural exclusion, the long-term suppression of minority heritage often generates countervailing pressures for recognition (Strahilov, Karakusheva, 2025). Marginalised communities may actively seek to reinsert their narratives into the public heritage sphere, advocating for inclusion in official histories and cultural programming. Such movements can range from grassroots initiatives, such as local festivals, commemorative projects, or digital archives, to formal campaigns for state or UNESCO recognition.

These efforts reveal a dual dynamic: while heritage can be instrumentalised as a means of exclusion, it can equally serve as a powerful medium for reclaiming visibility and fostering intercultural dialogue. In recognising both the conflicts and the creative possibilities inherent in multicultural heritage, ethnological research can contribute to more nuanced interpretations that resist static categorisations and foster inclusive narratives. By engaging critically with hidden and marginalised heritage, and by foregrounding the agency of diverse communities, scholarship can help reframe multicultural regions not as sites of lost plurality, but as dynamic spaces of ongoing cultural negotiation and renewal.

Whose heritage? Ours, yours, theirs, no one's?

A number of participants in the conference Ours, Yours, Theirs, No One's? The Heritage of Multicultural Areas contributed the peer-reviewed articles collected in this special issue. Others contributed chiefly through thought-provoking discussions that significantly deepened the exchange of ideas. While these latter contributors are not listed among the authors here, their names appear in the official conference booklet *Ours, Yours, Theirs, No One's? The Heritage of Multicultural Areas* (Moric, Pisk, 2025).

The conference adopted an inclusive understanding of heritage – as the diverse ways in which communities and individuals interpret, value, employ, and attribute meaning to the past. Central to its inquiry was the question of how heritage processes are shaped by political and historical contexts: shifting state borders (notably in the aftermath of the First and Second World War), the emergence of populist politics, demographic transformations (including population displacements), and tensions between competing historical narratives and memories. At the same time, the symposium served as a forum for reflecting on epistemological and methodological approaches to studying heritage in regions marked by longstanding cultural diversity. In doing so, it sought to broaden the conception of heritage as an evolving process, unfolding through the intertwined practices of remembering, management, and identity formation. The contributions published in this thematic issue therefore offer diverse perspectives and approaches to the mosaic of heritage studies.

Angela Ilić (2025) explores how the Late Habsburg past of Rijeka/Fiume/Reka and Maribor/Marburg is remembered today and whether genuinely shared cultures of remembrance can be achieved. Both cities, once regional centres of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with rich ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, have navigated multiple sovereignties and now grapple with competing interpretations of their heritage. The study situates them in broader European debates on multicultural urban heritage, particularly through their roles as European Capitals of Culture (Maribor 2012; Rijeka 2020–2021). Ilić contrasts inclusive heritage initiatives, such as the Kozala cemetery in Rijeka where different Christian confessions and Jews have been buried side by side since the 19th century, with nationalist readings that claim heritage for a single group. She emphasises the value of "bridge-builders" like Rudolf Gustav Puff and Antonín Chráska, who crossed ethnic and religious divides, as focal points for representing shared heritage. Historically, historiography often prioritised one dominant group, sidelining the complex multi-ethnic realities of these cities; however, recent scholarship has embraced multiperspectival approaches. Today, remembrance practices range from material heritage, such as cemeteries and public buildings, to immaterial symbols, persons, and narratives tied to particular communities. Some heritage sites, once built for a single group, have evolved into shared spaces, while other cultural-linguistic traditions – such as Italian or Hungarian initiatives in Rijeka – remain oriented toward their own constituencies. Examples like Rijeka's industrial heritage illustrate how diverse historical assets can be embraced as collective heritage, benefiting all residents. Multilingual street signs, introduced for the 2020 Capital of Culture year, visibly acknowledge the city's layered cultural past while revealing the politics of naming. Simultaneously, national indifference, a historical feature of both cities, has been largely overlooked in nationalist narratives that resist more inclusive memory work. Ilić concludes that the heritage of the Late Habsburg period in Rijeka and Maribor is both shared and divided, with ongoing tensions but also emerging opportunities for inclusive reinterpretation.

Neža Čebron Lipovec (2025) examines the role of heritage dissonance in architectural conservation, linking it to critical heritage studies' shift from expert-led approaches toward values-led and people-centred frameworks. Her case study focuses on the Venetian Gothic house Benečanka in Piran/Pirano, whose façade restoration in 2015–2016 sparked public controversy. The building's red cement façade from 1959, part of a post-war modernist urban design for the Slovenian coast, was replaced with a pink lime-based finish, intended as a reconstruction of its earlier appearance. Drawing on the concept of heritage as an "ongoing narrative" (Walter, 2020) and Tunbridge and Ashworth's (1996) categories of dissonance, she analyses competing interpretations of authenticity, place attachment, and identity. The first dissonance emerged between the authorised heritage discourse seeking to enhance historical authenticity and large segments of local residents – mostly post-war Slovenian-speaking newcomers – who felt excluded from decision-making and experienced "solastalgia" over the loss of a beloved feature. A second, opposing view came from members of the Italian community, who saw the restored pink façade as affirming their historical connection to the site, while the red façade symbolised its erasure. Although the two community narratives diverged, they were not fully antagonistic and aligned with professional support for the pink façade. The third dissonance concerned tourism: both colour choices were justified as enhancing the town's appeal, either through recognisability or through evoking Venetian Gothic ambience. Čebron Lipovec argues that these overlapping consonances and dissonances reflect the complex heritage values embedded in multicultural, post-conflict settings like Istria. She concludes that heritage dissonance is itself part of a site's heritage value. Addressing it constructively requires early and inclusive stakeholder engagement, framing dissonance as a potential space for dialogue and mutual recognition (Kisić, 2017).

Katja Hrobat Virloget and Martina Tonet (2025) investigate how intergenerational trauma and memories are transmitted in the Slovenian-Italian borderland, a region still shaped by the legacies of fascism, anti-Slavic racism, the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus, and post-war divisions. Through qualitative research with young people from both Slovenian and Italian minorities, they identify patterns of silence, avoidance, and selective disclosure in family narratives. This "conspiracy of silence" emerges both as a coping mechanism and as a form of controlling the narrative about a traumatic past. The study reveals how competing victimhood discourses and contested public memories have profoundly influenced identity formation in these communities. While earlier generations often upheld rigid national narratives, the third generation – those who did not directly experience the major traumatic events – shows a growing desire to overcome inherited divisions. Participants in the focus groups described the burden of conflicting public histories, which sustain painful memories and hinder reconciliation. Yet, they also expressed an aspiration to live beyond such narratives, seeking healing through dialogue, mutual recognition, and shared heritage framing. The authors note

that cross-community encounters can challenge monolithic national ideologies that reduce borderland residents to singular identities and foster hostility toward neighbours. By openly confronting painful histories, young people can reclaim agency over their identities and reframe relationships with the national majority and with each other. The focus groups demonstrated that voicing and acknowledging trauma may help dismantle silence and foster more inclusive understandings of the "Other". This shift represents an important move toward transforming the borderland's contested past into a platform for coexistence. Ultimately, the study positions the younger generation as potential bridge-builders, capable of reshaping inherited memories into narratives that support reconciliation and multicultural belonging.

Oksana Mykytenko (2025) examines Polesia as a paradigmatic ethnocultural borderland, where the cultural geographies of Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Poland, and Lithuania intersect. The article traces both the history and the present state of research into this complex region, with particular emphasis on Ukrainian Polesia. It underscores the significance of systematic, long-term interdisciplinary studies that have positioned Polesia as one of the Slavic cultural-historical "archaic zones". The study outlines the historical and ethnographic boundaries of Polesia, its internal differentiation, and the distinctive features of its traditional culture. Polesia is presented as a contact and transitional area of linguistic, cultural, and ethnic entanglements, where intercultural interactions have shaped a diffuse and shifting ethnocultural field. This fluidity engenders dynamic exchanges of language and culture, while simultaneously complicating questions of identity. The research employs a combination of dialectological, areal, and structural-typological methods in analyzing folklore and traditional practices. Ethnolinguistics provides the central methodological framework, aiming to reconstruct invariant cultural forms through comparative study of local variations and the interpretation of semiotic codes embedded in tradition. The creation of the *Polesian Ethnolinguistic Atlas* epitomizes such integrative work, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage amid sociopolitical ruptures and ecological catastrophe. In this context, the article also reflects on the post-Chernobyl heritage loss, where entire dialectal micro-continua vanished. By integrating linguistic, ethnographic, and folkloristic evidence, the study demonstrates the analytical potential of Polesia for broader debates on cultural continuity, variability, and the interplay of local and translocal traditions in the Slavic world.

Bartulović and Bejtullahu (2025) explore migrant heritage through the case of the Albanian diaspora in Slovenia, with a particular focus on heritagisation processes and the Slovenia's contemporary cultural landscape. They note that expressions such as traditional Albanian music are largely absent from national post-Yugoslav heritage frameworks, making them doubly marginalised: both invisible to the majority population and contested within the community itself. Drawing on ethnographic research, the authors foreground migrants as active (or in-active) agents in heritage-making, thereby challenging static, nation-bound conceptions of heritage. Fieldwork in Ljubljana

(the country's capital and a multicultural hub) and in Kočevje (a multicultural yet socio-oeconomically marginalised area) highlights how local environments and community contexts shape Albanians' self-understanding, daily practices, identities, and reflections on their past and future. Cultural associations play a central role in heritage valorisation but also serve as arenas for disagreement due to divergent interpretations of heritage. In Ljubljana, Albanian social and cultural life is vibrant, while Kočevje presents a much quieter and less dynamic scene. This contrast, though not representative of all contexts, illustrates how sociocultural, political, and spatial factors affect the visibility and preservation of minority heritage. The findings challenge the notion that minority heritage is equally recognised across national settings, exposing disparities in cultural visibility and institutional support. The authors emphasise music heritage not only as a tool for fostering inclusion and reshaping public attitudes toward minority communities, but also as sites of identity negotiation, learning, creativity, social bonding, and political engagement within those communities.

The articles presented, while regionally and thematically diverse, converge on several analytical points. Firstly, they collectively reject the idea of heritage as a fixed, objective set of assets. Instead, heritage emerges as a negotiated construct, contingent upon the perspectives of stakeholders, institutional frameworks, and broader political contexts (Harrison, 2013). Secondly, silence – whether deliberate or structural – plays a critical role in shaping heritage. As Hrobat Virloget and Tonet show, what is not transmitted can be as formative as what is. Similar dynamics are implicit in Ilić's discussion of selective commemoration and in the migrant heritage examined by Bartulović and Bejtullahu. Thirdly, the interdependence of material and intangible heritage is evident across all cases. Built heritage gains meaning through narratives, rituals, and identity work, as seen in the Kozala cemetery, the Venetian House, and the village landscapes of Polesia. Finally, several contributions point to the possibility, though not inevitability, of reframing contested heritage as shared heritage. This requires not only institutional openness but also grassroots engagement and recognition of multiple pasts.

The title of this article, *Ours, Yours, Theirs, No One's?* encapsulates the paradox of heritage in multicultural areas. Heritage is rarely unclaimed, yet the claims can be overlapping, conflicting, or strategically downplayed. In multilingual, multi-ethnic settings, heritage becomes a mirror of social relations: it can serve as a bridge for dialogue or as a tool for exclusion. By juxtaposing cases from different historical, political, and cultural contexts, this volume highlights both the specificity of local heritage debates and their resonance across regions. It invites scholars, heritage practitioners, and policymakers to embrace multiperspectivity – not as a dilution of truth, but as a necessary recognition of the complexity of the past. Doing so may not resolve all conflicts, but it can open space for shared custodianship and mutual recognition.

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Naša, vaša, njihova, nikogaršnja? Dediščina večkulturnih območij

Pričujoča številka revije *Traditiones* se posveča večplastni in pogosto sporni naravi dediščine v večkulturnih prostorih. Dediščina v teh okoljih ni nevtralna zapuščina preteklosti, temveč dinamično polje kulturnih in dediščinskih politik, pogajanj o identiteti in spominjanju. V regijah, zaznamovanih z migracijami, političnimi preobrazbami in konfliktnimi zgodovinami, je dediščina pogosto fragmentirana in izpodbijana. Vprašanje »Čigava dediščina?« opozarja na tekmiške interpretacije in družbene procese, ki oblikujejo razumevanje preteklosti v sedanjosti.

Študije v tej številki raziskujejo, kako se dediščino na večkulturnih območjih vzpostavlja, oblikuje, deli ali zavrača. Obravnavajo vpliv zgodovinskih prelomnic,

tišine in travm ter možnosti, da dediščina postane prostor sprave ali pa ostane področje delitev. Posebno pozornost namenjajo primerom z območij nekdanje Avstro-Ogrske, postsocialističnih meja in diaspornih skupnosti.

Prispevki se lotevajo dediščine kot procesa, ne kot fiksne entitete. Poudarjajo selektivnost v procesih dediščinjenja, kjer so nekatere zgodovine poveličevane, druge pa izbrisane. Opozarjajo na pojav »dediščine brez skupnosti«, kjer materialni ostanki večkulturne preteklosti obstajajo brez skupnosti, ki so jih ustvarile. Pogosto so manjšinske dediščine potisnjene v zasebne sfere ali pa eksotično predstavljene.

Angela Ilić analizira, kako se danes spominjajo habsburške preteklosti Reke in Maribora ter možnosti za skupno kulturo spominjanja. Neža Čebron Lipovec obravnava »dediščinsko disonanco« na primeru prenove hiše Benečanka v Piranu, kjer so se mnenja lokalnih skupnosti in stroke razhajala. Katja Hrobat Virloget in Martina Tonet proučujeta prenos travmatičnih spominov v slovensko-italijanski obmejni regiji in opozarjata na tišino kot obliko dediščinskega delovanja. Oksana Mykytenko predstavi Polesje kot etnokulturno območje, kjer se prepletajo ukrajinska, beloruska, ruska in poljska dediščina. Alenka Bartulović in Alma Bejtullahu raziskujeta dediščino albanske diaspore v Sloveniji, s poudarkom na vlogi tradicionalne glasbe v procesu priznavanja in vključevanja.

Ti prispevki skupaj ponujajo multiperspektivni pogled na dediščino v večkulturnih kontekstih. Poudarjajo, da je dediščina lahko orodje izključevanja ali pa prostor za vključevanje in dialog. Z naslovom »Naša, vaša, njihova, nikogaršnja?« številka zajema paradoks dediščinjenja v večkulturnih okoljih, ki je pogosto prekrivajoče se, medsebojno nasprotujoče ali pa strateško potisnjeno v ozadje.