

# The Local Cultural Heritage in the Alpine Regions as a Resource Providing New Knowledge and Skills

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## Abstract

*This work aims to illustrate the relationship between cultural tourism and local heritage education by presenting the results of the pilot project "PatriMOIne local - Classes en action", which involved around one hundred and fifty primary school students from two Alpine municipalities in the Canton of Valais in Switzerland. The project was conceived and implemented by the Institute of Tourism of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Western Switzerland (HES-SO), in close collaboration with the School of Pedagogy, the municipalities and the various endogenous territorial resources. This highly formative experience lasted eighteen months and allowed students to immerse themselves in the history and study of the local cultural heritage, in order to acquire new knowledge and skills. During "Heritage Days" students played the role of ambassadors in an authentic and innovative way, explaining to families, communities, and visitors the cultural beauties of their territories, with the support of drawings, videos, and multimedia presentations. By participating in the project, students dedicated their time to an experience of active citizenship, strengthening their sense of belonging to the territory.*

**Keywords:** *Heritage, Identity, Education, Key competences*

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**JEL Classification:** Z19, Z32

## 1. Introduction

The most attractive tourist destinations are those that are able to promote through an appropriate marketing strategy, their artistic and cultural heritage, and that value the special features of the sites offering visitors an authentic and sustainable experience. In the current scenario, culture is often identified as a driver of innovation for tourism, giving it a distinctive character, in an often-unified market.

In turn, tourism is perceived as a means of spreading culture to a wider audience. This synergy makes it possible to generate tourism products able to revive unexpressed potential, to promote socio-economic growth and to enhance and revitalize the territories. At the same time, the enhancement of cultural resources makes local communities aware of the importance and protection of their peculiarities. Many municipalities in the Alpine mountain regions, such as Switzerland, are faced with various problems related to rural exodus and the reduction of services in peripheral areas. These realities often contain testimonies of considerable historical, architectural, and artistic interest and are immersed, most often, in environments of great naturalistic and landscape value.

However, the tendency to abandon the villages for the cities has caused their gradual decline and depopulation. The importance of developing and realizing projects that favour a sustainable tourism able to enhance the peculiarities of these territories, can contribute to the diversification of traditional economic activities and encourage the local populations to stay, thus avoiding depopulation, but also the disappearance of traditions and intangible heritage.

The project "PatriMOIne Local -Classes en action" was born with the aim of stimulating the desire to engage residents in the culture of the place, raising awareness and involving new generations in the knowledge and discovery of local cultural resources. Students were the protagonists of an interactive learning experience involving families and local communities.

To achieve this goal, different stakeholders from different professional fields such as tourism, culture, and school, collaborated in order to promote a multidisciplinary exchange. The aim was to create a tourist-cultural experience, able to generate social cohesion and facilitate visitors' immersion in the culture and spirit of the place.

## 2. Literature Review

### *Cultural tourism*

In recent years, some authors have studied the didactic use of cultural heritage and landscape as elements generating knowledge and relationships (A. Bortolotti, M. Calidoni, S. Mascheroni, I. Mattozzi 2008), in order to raise awareness of the value of conservation, protection and transmission of the to future generations (DeVarine, 2005).

Cultural tourism has been the subject of various debates over the years to try to define its concept, scope, and consumption. Its very definition has passed through various interpretations. The Charter of Cultural Tourism of 1976, developed by ICOMOS, formalized this concept in 1985, stating that "Cultural tourism is the movement of persons for essential cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours, travel to festivals and other cultural events, visits to sites and monuments, travel to study nature, folklore and art, and pilgrimages".

This notion was later amplified in the 1999 International Charter of Cultural Tourism where the notion of sustainable tourism was also introduced. According to Atlas, (a research group specialising in cultural tourism), for example, cultural tourism is "the movement of people towards cultural attractions, away from their place of residence, with the intention of gathering new information or experiences. Apart of defining the field of application, some researchers have identified the different types of cultural tourists, (McKercher 2002; Richards 2006) classifying them according to different parameters, including cultural motivation and depth of experience. They highlight the change in the role of the cultural tourist over time. From a passive visitor to a subject interested in the essence of places, whose main motivation is to have an experience to satisfy their cultural needs (C. Origet de Cluzeau 2013). For a long time, tourism and culture have been valued as heterogeneous elements. Cultural resources were considered part of heritage and constituted cultural identity. "On the contrary, tourism was a leisure activity capable of diversifying local economies, but also able to make, through its infrastructure, profound changes, not always positive, to the cultural and natural environment. However, towards the end of the last century (OECD, 2009, p. 15) these ideas gradually changed, highlighting the interconnection and mutual benefits". Culture is, in fact, able to deseasonalise tourist flows, tourism, on the other hand, is able to promote cultural activities by making them visible to both local and international publics, collaborating to improve the tourist offer thanks to its expertise (Lehalle, 2015). Cultural tourism has become a growing trend and more and more trips are based on cultural motivations. According to recent studies, cultural tourists are increasing year on year and 37% of world tourism is culturally motivated. UNWTO estimates that four out of ten tourists choose their destination according to the cultural offer, attracted not only by monuments and cultural heritage, but also by intangible factors such as the atmosphere of a place, history, and traditions. The European Council states that Europe is the world's leading destination for cultural tourism and cultural tourism contributes 5% of GDP. The report of the project "Cultural Heritage County for Europe", which has mapped and analysed various studies in the world and in Europe, shows that this

type of tourism is more identified as a factor of positive value that can bring development to businesses and territories. Some institutions that often highlight the harmful effects of mass tourism consider cultural tourism as a distinct form of tourism that respects sites and populations (S. Cousin, 2006) that can attract visitors even out of season and can bring development to businesses and territories. Other studies argue that the scenario is different and that there is an increasing need to give impetus to new forms of cultural tourism capable of reconciling respect for the local population and places with the needs of tourists. Even UNESCO, aware of this phenomenon, with the Recommendation of the Scientific Council of ICOMOS in 2007, has been working to promote a cultural tourism not dissipative but capable of giving value to cultural identities, understood as plurality of identity and local values. This principle is recognized both in the Nara Document and by the Council of Europe.

### *Transmissibility to and for cultural heritage*

*Can cultural heritage be considered a tool to raise awareness of local knowledge among the younger generations and in doing so preserve it? Is it possible to offer different learning situations for students through cultural heritage?*

If the term cultural heritage is now widely used, its concept in the educational field is accompanied by a reflection on its transmission to future generations. In order to promote this knowledge worldwide, UNESCO has committed itself to promoting the protection and education of cultural heritage, considering them as two complementary aspects that can benefit from each other. According to some authors (Bernié-Boissard, Chastagner, Crozat & Fournier, 2011, pp. 7-11), heritage education encourages the construction of collective identities through the maintenance of cultural diversity and the establishment of local history and develops a sense of responsibility by helping to strengthen cultural identity (Bourret, 2008). For the new generations to become aware of its value and importance, they must be enabled to understand and assess it correctly, (Council of Europe 2005). The European guidelines over the last twenty years have stressed the need to promote active policies on education to and for heritage. The Council of Europe in its Recommendation N.R. (98)5 on heritage education has recognised the role of education, which is indispensable for establishing cultural identity, and has defined it as "an instrument which, on the one hand, is capable of disseminating fundamental values such as tolerance, democracy and respect for others, and on the other, supports the development of a collective identity and a sense of belonging, based on values such as historical memory and culture which can enrich learning processes". Similarly, the various international conventions recognise the fundamental role of heritage education. The 1972 Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO) defines heritage as a legacy of the past, to be passed on to future generations and distinguishes heritage as cultural and natural. In Article 27, it laid the foundations for the role that would be given to heritage education, stating that "the signatory States undertake by all appropriate means, in particular educational and information programmes, to strengthen appreciation and respect for their cultural and natural heritage". The 2003 Convention on the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO) in article 2 lists and defines protected assets as: "practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills - as well as the tools, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with them - that communities, groups and individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, passed down from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus helping to promote respect for cultural diversity and human creativity" (UNESCO, 2003). Article 14 refers to Education, awareness-raising and capacity building and states that "each State shall make every effort, by all appropriate means, to ensure the recognition, respect and enhancement of the intangible cultural heritage through education, awareness-raising and information programmes aimed at the general public and young people in particular". The Council of Europe's Framework Convention of 2005, known as the Faro Convention, also specifies the value of cultural heritage, its role for society and its importance as a means of economic development and thus underlining the interdisciplinary character of heritage education as part of a comprehensive and humanistic education. Among the objectives pursued, the knowledge and bottom up participation of the population, which is invited to play an active role in the recognition of cultural values (Branchesi, 2006). The signatory States are invited to promote a process of

participatory valorisation, moving from a purely national to a social and community conception. These conventions are the result of a long process of extending not only the concept of heritage but also the way it is perceived and passed on to future generations.

### *The initiatives*

On this line, various contributions and initiatives have been made to strengthen the active participation of young people in the enhancement and education of cultural heritage. In line with the many acts and recommendations that recognise heritage as a means of enriching and promoting knowledge. In 1994 Unesco launched the programme entitled "The participation of young people in the preservation and promotion of the world heritage". The aim was to raise awareness of the need to know and protect the cultural and natural heritage and to indicate how to integrate it into study programmes. In 1998, it developed the World Heritage in Young Hands Educational Resource where a kit was developed to help teachers raise awareness of the importance of preserving local, national and world heritage. ICCROM has established programmes since 1990 to raise young people's awareness of the fragility and conservation of local heritage; Through the European Heritage Days initiative launched in 1985 by the Council of Europe and in 1999 it became a joint action in cooperation with the European Union. Its aim is to awaken and raise awareness of the interest in cultural heritage and its preservation among an ever-widening public.

- European Heritage Classes 1989 school exchange groups with the aim of discovering cultural heritage.
- The EU-10/2008 Social Agenda for Children and Youth or Youth Investing and Empowering 11. Following the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, the European Commission has launched several long-term projects, focusing on 10 themes, linked to the principles of participation, sustainability, protection, and innovation. Such as "cultural heritage at school" aimed at enhancing the value of Erasmus+ cultural heritage projects. Stimulating new initiatives, such as "eTwinning Learning from the past, planning our future" or "Youth for Cultural Heritage" "Discover EU", which offered for the first time 18-year-olds the opportunity to discover Europe's cultural heritage. All these programmes and projects have provided an opportunity to assess the educational potential of cultural heritage and the possibility for students to participate in educational experiences, which have enabled them to acquire permanent skills. Heritage education provides the perfect cultural context to promote active citizenship, as it emphasises the rights and responsibilities of people at local and national level in society to preserve heritage.

### *In Switzerland*

Alpine mountain regions such as Switzerland face considerable problems. In particular, peripheral areas and side valleys suffer from structural disadvantages due to their topographical conditions, difficult access, and rural exodus. They are subject to a decline in services, with the consequent emptying of space and loss of identity. Conscious of this, the Federal Council has formulated the lines of action in its strategy, all of which are closely linked to sustainable development.

They are designed to integrate culture and seize the opportunity to accelerate the process towards a more sustainable world. Over the years, Switzerland has always recognised the primary role of culture as a catalyst for integration and as a driver of territorial development. In line with these ideas, the country has ratified the various International Conventions with coordination at national and cantonal level and has included various sites of both cultural and natural value on the World Heritage List.

The first to be mentioned in 1983 in a list of around 185 countries were the medieval old town of Bern, the Abbey of St. Gallen and the Benedictine Monastery of St. John in Müsair. The Confederation has also chosen to adhere to the UNESCO Convention, which entered effect in 2006, about intangible assets.

To this end, the Department of the Interior has entrusted a commission of experts with the task of drawing up an indicative list of the heritage of the various regions of Switzerland. With the adoption of the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030, the United Nations and the Swiss Commission for UNESCO

intend to contribute to the implementation of the "Education 2030" agenda by declaring their support for global cooperation in international and national action.

To achieve this goal, the organisation has developed the Education Framework for Action with the help of a wide range of stakeholders. To this end, the "Education Platform 2030" was organised and the Confederation is committed to raising awareness of the challenges of education among Swiss actors. It recognises the important role of education as a key vehicle for ensuring universal and equal access to quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities.

### *The Canton of Valais*

The Valais promotes the development of culture through the knowledge of its material and immaterial heritage. The valorisation of cultural heritage passes through its link with tourism, which on the one hand

is able to promote and implement the socio-economic value of the territories, and on the other hand is a facilitator to make known the identity and values of others, promoting intercultural understanding and social development. With the adoption of Agenda 21 in 2008 and along the lines outlined by regional policy (NPR, Nouvelle politique regional), the canton has committed itself to supporting concrete actions and measures for the development of culture, tourism, and heritage. Convinced that "cultural diversity, including its historical dimension, is an important factor for sustainable development" and the transmission and knowledge of tangible and intangible assets contribute to forming a common identity. The priority aspect of the new regional policy is to strengthen the creation of added value through the transfer of knowledge and the improvement of competitiveness. To develop and stimulate among young people a generalized and shared awareness of the history and culture of the territory in order to contribute to the formation of local and national identity. There are many cultural initiatives that involve the new generations in the discovery of cultural resources, such as the "Cultural Heritage Day", which aims to promote and enhance the Valais heritage.

### *Case study: PatriMOIne local- Classes en actions.*

This study illustrates the results of the pilot project "PatriMOIne local- Classes en actions". The project, born in the context of the European Year for the Promotion of Culture 2018, embraces the guidelines of the new strategy of the Valais Regional Policy (NPR). It encourages new generations to discover and study heritage and to participate in cultural life in a cascading process involving families and communities. The right to participate in cultural life is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, taken up by the Faro Convention, which emphasises the potential of cultural heritage and its value as a means of inclusion and appreciation of diversity and social integration. It is also capable, if properly known, of becoming a resource for sustainable development, putting the needs of communities at the forefront, and strengthening their sense of belonging. Patrimoine-local Classes en action, has promoted collaboration on several levels, involving in a collaborative dialogue between all the protagonists of the project (teachers, municipal authorities, tourism offices etc.) and inviting visitors to immerse themselves in the spirit of the places and understand their culture.

### *The territorial context*

The pilot project saw the participation of two alpine mountain communities in the Valais canton in Switzerland, Evolène and Orsières. Evolène in the Val d'Hérens municipality has a rich and vast cultural heritage characterized by a strong vernacular architecture and important historical buildings, classified by the ISOS (Federal Inventory of Swiss Settlements to be Protected of National Importance) well preserved which testify to the roots and traditions of this Alpine community. The materials used, stone and wood, give the buildings a natural appearance that integrates them perfectly into the landscape. While wood

dominates in the composition of the old farm buildings, some private houses in the heart of the villages have decorated or frescoed facades, using the "sgraffite" technique, which makes them resemble coloured canvases and contribute to make Evolène a unique place. Orsières Pays du St Bernard is a village at the foot of the Alps, which over the centuries has become the permanent passage of the emblematic cultural route of the "Via Francigena". It was an obligatory stage on the itinerary on the ancient Celtic and then Roman road that led to Rome via Mount Jovis, Mont-Joux, to the Great St Bernard Pass. Orsières appears in 10th century writings. Even today, pilgrims still cross the barrier of the Alps, on the furrow traced by diary of Sigeric Archbishop of Canterbury, more than a thousand years ago, on the road that connects Canterbury to Rome. Through participation in the project, it has been possible for the two territories to revive the local culture, by exploiting the potential, and experimenting unexplored opportunities. Moreover, strengthening the link with the territory through the study of the local cultural heritage in the new generations, making them aware of the protection, safeguard, and fragility of their own identity values.

### **3. Empirical Methodology**

#### *Multidisciplinary and methodology (Per)*

One of the main objectives pursued by the project was to integrate cultural heritage elements with school subjects. The PER (study plan for study plan for Western Switzerland) is set in the context of the Federal Constitution and determines an overall plan for the education of the student. It describes what students must learn during obligatory schooling. Transferable skills have been promoted and work has been done on subjects such as the visual arts, as heritage often consists of representations, images, sculptures that seek to express life scenes, beliefs, significant events, geography as a subject to understand the location of a work, and the organization of space, history, a discipline through which pupils were introduced to the events of the past and their evolution over time. All the proposed work was based on methodological pathways and didactic models of cooperation and acquisition of new knowledge on specific themes related to artistic and cultural heritage. The activities were aimed at learning through a typical collaborative approach based on active participation adopting a language suitable for the different age groups involved in the project. Learning to learn and to collaborate in order to achieve a common goal summarises the approach adopted for the project. The lines of work drawn were composed of five phases:

-Selection and choice of identity elements:

Exploration of the selected elements of the heritage with the help of documents, testimonies, experimentations:

-Production:

Processing of the messages based on exploration (recipients, context, etc.). Formatting of messages (writings, audio, images, etc.) and translations into the languages spoken in the classroom:

-Organization and communication:

Organisation of PatriMOIne days (invitations, distribution of positions and roles, etc.). Preparing students to take on their role (reception, guidance, speaker, etc.).

-Reception for families and tourists and guided tour.

-Valorisation:

Use of the material created as a support to enrich thematic itineraries or for the creation game

#### *General training and transversal skills*

The project made it possible to work on the three dimensions of the Studies Plan romand (PER): disciplinary aspects, general training, and transversal skills. The teachers, through their participation in the project, offered the students an interactive and real-life experience that allowed them to explore their cultural environment. Different research methodologies were used: a more formal one, based on historical sources, and archival material from mediatheques and archives, alternating it with training outside the classroom, with surveys and interviews in the field that also involved the elderly, the historical memory of the territories.

This process was designed to foster active citizenship by encouraging them to take conscious attitudes towards the protection, preservation, and enhancement of their identity elements.

In close collaboration with the School of Pedagogy, pedagogical notebooks, have been created for teachers to provide pre-training not only on the selected identity element, but to guide them in the introduction of material and immaterial cultural heritage. The schools involved were able to use multidisciplinary resources skills and tools.

#### **4. Results**

The project involved about 150 students, from different school levels. The intrinsic value of the Classes in Action project has been to communicate the work done and the results achieved so that the commitment, objectives and goals related to growth, awareness and respect for the common cultural heritage are extended to an increasingly wider audience.

A virtuous system of social and cultural relations has been created, enabling young students to actively participate in the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage and to develop their sense of belonging to their own territory. The project has allowed an experience of active participation where young people felt like protagonists and bearers of knowledge towards their families and social community. They became co-creators of the cultural experience and not only consumers and users. Thanks to their creative flair, several "animated" educational paths were created during the "PatriMOIne days" organized in the heart of the two villages

With the help of texts, power point, video presentations and installations, the students revealed the local cultural heritage, leading their families and the community and visitors on a journey of discovery of the local heritage peculiarities. The "PatriMOIne days" saw the strong participation of visitors and tourists who poured into the streets of the two villages, using smartphones and video cameras they captured the essence of the event and the enthusiasm of the children to welcome and tell their cultural heritage.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The project PatriMOIne local- Classes en actions was aimed at obtaining an active participation in cultural life, through the direct involvement of the new generations. The classes shared the discovery and study of the peculiarities related to the local cultural heritage. Through their creativity, the students realized during the PatriMOIne Days, presentations and set up, under the expert guidance of teachers, in collaboration with cultural and tourist institutions, "animated" educational paths, becoming not only users and consumers of culture but co-creators. The itineraries were generated from below, and promoted through interactive channels (also digital) in collaboration with the municipalities and tourist offices involved.

The Municipality of Evolène and the tourist office are working on a card game that will probably be realized during the next year, taking back the material realized by the students. It should be noted that last summer the tourist office organized with the municipality, schools and volunteers a second day of discovery of heritage, following the example of the pilot project. The municipality of Orsières, instead, has prepared with the material collected a route already planned by the municipality, with stops along the Via Francigena, then around the Church of San Nicola. Already during the summer, in the Church, the

panels with explanatory texts taken directly from the students' work on its construction and polychrome stained-glass windows were displayed. The municipality in collaboration with the tourism office is working on the finalization of the itinerary, which will then be and promoted through interactive channels also digital.

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