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PATHWAYS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE HERITAGE

~~Comprehensive Report on Minority~~ Religious Heritage in Europe:

Literature Review, Survey and Field Analysis

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Impressum

MIRETAGE (European Pathways to Minority Religious Heritage: Inclusive Heritage in Adult Education, 2023-26) is an Erasmus+ strategic partnership involving eight organisations in three countries: Storytelling Centre (NL), Moslim Archief (NL), La Xixa Teatre (ES), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ES), Mozaika (ES), KADOC-KU Leuven (BE), Future for Religious Heritage (BE) and the University of Groningen (NL), the latter as project coordinator.

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from research conducted as part of the European Pathways to Minority Religious Heritage (MIRETAGE) project, an Erasmus+ initiative that seeks to promote inclusive education and inclusive heritage practices across Europe. MIRETAGE develops methodologies for adult education that are centred around participatory practices such as “heritage labs” and “heritage trails.” In order to prepare for the pilot activities, the academic partners of this project at universities in Belgium, Spain and the Netherlands undertook both a review of the scientific literature on minority heritage and education, as well as social scientific research into the specific needs and experiences of partner organizations across Europe. This report presents the insights gained into the current practices, challenges, and needs of stakeholders working with minority religious heritage. Its aim is to provide as useful knowledge to heritage associations and adult education providers about how minority religious heritage is currently approached, represented, and integrated within cultural and educational frameworks.

At the same time, the report presents findings into the specific case of heritage trails, i.e. physical or digital routes that link together sites, memories, and histories are currently being used as tools for fostering public engagement with heritage. During the literature review, we surveyed existing research into heritage trails. In the questionnaire and qualitative interviews with members of heritage associations, with adult education institutions, and minority community organizations, we investigated whether they were familiar with the concept or “heritage trails” and explored their engagement with minority religious heritage. This inquiry highlighted areas where support is most needed and clarified the specific requirements of representatives from diverse backgrounds. Through this research, MIRETAGE built the foundation for its own development of innovative educational approaches that benefit adult learners, community members, and the institutions serving them. Through this report we share this knowledge with interested professionals.

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Introduction

European Pathways to Minority Religious Heritage: Inclusive Heritage in Adult Education (MIRETAGE) aims to enable adult learners of minority religious backgrounds to engage in inclusive heritage-making activities, through the development of new methods and guidelines for inclusive heritage education. Working with a range of local and national, professional and grassroots partners in four European countries, MIRETAGE brings together the various institutions involved in adult education around heritage in order to develop educators' competencies through the use of educational "heritage trails".

The aim of MIRETAGE is to foster civic education through cultural heritage via an innovative set of creative methodologies. The first methodological approach involves the formation of "heritage labs." These labs bring representatives of organisations working with heritage (museums, universities, municipalities, cultural centres, etc.) together with diverse local communities - including members of minority religious groups - to share and discuss personal and collective experiences and decide how they want to carry out the construction of the trails. The outcomes of these labs pave the way for heritage trails and co-creation activities in which lab participants, together with local religious minorities, create a cultural itinerary that links the heritage of these minority communities to the wider social and geographic space of their environment. The focus is not on the trail itself but in the process of creating it. This co-creation experience translates into learning tools and innovative teaching methods (storytelling, games, dialogue tools, movement tools, creation of digital maps, etc.) which will be tested and then compiled in handbooks.

This report details the preparatory research undertaken to help the partners of MIRETAGE situate their trails and guidelines. We present it here as a state-of-the-art guide to what is happening now in terms of minority religious heritage in Europe and with the future partners of the project. The document explores the literature, projects, and stakeholders who are or could be interested in using heritage trails to create a better society in which all religions could have a space.

The first section comprises an academic literature review of existing research into minority heritage. We begin by defining the key concepts of this field, before moving on to exploration of heritage work. Here we investigated past projects and initiatives and analysed their practices, drawing out best practices while also identifying the challenges and limits they face. We then moved on to examine how heritage has been used to develop new modes of adult education that account for issues of social representation, empowerment, democratisation of the heritage-making process and intercultural dialogue and inclusion.

The academic review of the state-of-the-art outlined a number of potential challenges to inclusive heritage work in Europe today. In order to flesh out these challenges, section 2 of the report summarizes the findings of a two-part survey with stakeholders, comprising select interviews and

a more extensive questionnaire. An analysis of sixteen interviews with heritage professionals and minority communities conducted in Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK during 2024 enlighten further the specificities of working with minority religious heritage in the contemporary cultural sphere. This was followed in 2025 by a report on an open questionnaire that was distributed to a wide network of partners in which awareness and engagement with minority heritage was measured amongst heritage professionals, religious communities and adult educators. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of this questionnaire are synthesised to better understand the needs of stakeholders and the means in which the MIRETAGE project can provide resources, expertise and assistance to further the valorisation of minority religious heritage through its methods. The text concludes with some concluding remarks on the trajectory of the MIRETAGE project, based on these observations.

PART 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is structured around three thematic domains. The first establishes the conceptual foundations of studies on minority religious heritage, outlining the key theoretical approaches that inform contemporary understandings of heritage. Particular attention is given to practice-based theories of heritage-making, including inclusive and shared heritage, questions of (co-)ownership, and the power relations that shape interactions between heritage communities and heritage institutions.

The second domain turns to the role of heritage as an instrument for inclusion and democratisation, a perspective especially relevant for the recognition and representation of minority religious communities. Within this field, the review considers how state and civil society actors negotiate the challenges of visibility, participation, and cultural rights.

The third domain focuses on heritage trails as tools for adult education. Here, the review draws on experience-based theories of meaning-making—examining the relationships between heritage and emotions, heritage and space, as well as intersectional perspectives that illuminate how diverse identities interact with heritage environments. This discussion highlights the pedagogical potential of trails to foster understanding, engagement, and dialogue across cultural and religious differences.

By bringing these domains together, the literature review situates the project within the prevailing scholarly debates on minority religious heritage and provides the conceptual and methodological grounding for the next steps of MIRETAGE.

1. Theoretical scholarship on religious minority heritage in contemporary Europe

The present chapter examines key scholarly debates relevant to the religious heritage of minority communities in contemporary Europe. It is organized into four sections. The first addresses the complex entanglements between religion, secularisation, and heritage, exploring how secular frameworks shape the visibility and interpretation of religious pasts. The second analyses dynamics of exclusion and inclusion within diverse religious heritage, with particular attention to inclusive heritage discourses and the normative framework established by the Faro Convention. The third turns to creative heritage and meaning making, considering how communities reinterpret

religious heritage in changing social contexts. The final section investigates questions of ownership and the role of migratory and increasingly secular places, highlighting how mobility and secularisation reshape claims to religious heritage across Europe. Together, these sections provide the conceptual foundation for understanding how minority religious heritage is constructed, negotiated, and contested in the present day.

Religion, Secularization, and Heritage

MIRETAGE addresses religious heritage in what is arguably the most politically secularised region in the globe. Whether the overall direction of recent European religious history can be described as "secularization" has been hotly contested for at least three decades. Nevertheless, statistics on overall declines in church participation provide one concrete measure of secularization as a clear historical trend across most of Europe. Church participation was suppressed under state socialism in Eastern and Southeastern Europe beginning in the late 1940s, and North-Western Europe registered a dramatic fall in church membership and attendance beginning in the 1960s. Despite regional counter currents of renewal after the fall of communism, the trend in the twenty-first century has become clear. A 2015 Eurobarometer survey found that in Great Britain, the Czech Republic, Sweden, and the Netherlands, a greater portion of the population identified with nonreligion than with the major churches.[1] Another example can be found in Flanders, where in 1967, over 50 percent of the population attended mass at least once a month.[2] The figure had dropped to less than 10 percent by 2004 and has since fallen even further. In Catalonia, Catholic church participation dropped from 33.8 percent of the population in 1980 to 18.7 percent by 2007.[3] By 2023 Catalonia was described as one of the most secularised societies in southern Europe: only 49% of the population identified as religious in 2022, 86% believed religion should have no influence on politics. Yet, despite the high degree of secularization, over 70% supported cooperation between public institutions and religious groups to promote dialogue and social cohesion.[4]

[1] "SMRE: Religious Affiliation," Data Output, Universität Luzern, accessed June 14, 2021, https://www.smre-data.ch/en/data_exploring/religious_affiliation#/mode/majority_religion/period/2010/dataset/1562/presentation/map; "Eurobarometer," European Union, accessed June 14, 2021, https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2077.

[2] Marc Hooghe, Ellen Quintelier, and Tim Reeskens, "Kerkpraktijk in Vlaanderen," *Ethische Perspectieven* 16, no. 2 (2006): 117.

[3] Marian Burchardt, *Regulating Difference: Religious Diversity and Nationhood in the Secular West* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 5.

[4] Miquel Calsina Buscà, "Secularització, (des)creença i pertinença: tres reflexions," em *Religiositat i gestió de la diversitat a Catalunya: Una aproximació a partir de les dades del Baròmetre sobre la religiositat i sobre la gestió de la seva diversitat 2023*, coord. A. Iglesias Sala (Generalitat de Catalunya: Departament de Justícia i Qualitat Democràtica, 2023), 21–36.

Coinciding with the decline in church attendance has been the rise of public attention to heritage. Since the 1970s, local activists, national agencies, and international heritage conventions have expanded the varieties of heritage worthy of protection, from nature reserves to folkloric customs, to shuttered factories.[5] In many countries, religious buildings form the single most important type of protected heritage, if measured by government spending or UNESCO world heritage appellations.[6] This raises a compelling question: what is the relationship between secularization and heritagization? Did the decline of church attendance allow for new attention to the architecture and art of religious buildings? This has been vigorously debated in the burgeoning field of heritage studies.[7] In their recent book *The Religious Heritage Complex*, editors Cyril Isnart and Nathalie Cerezales argue against the notion that secularization simply produced heritage, that is, that the holy "migrated" from religious practice to "secular" heritage. Instead, they describe a "complex" consisting of "the habitus of conservation of the past within religious traditions" and "a conscious policy regarding the care of the past."[8] This means that religious heritage is generated by the interaction of religious traditions and practices, on the one hand, and strategic interventions by political and economic forces, on the other.

Exclusion and Inclusion of Diverse Religious Heritage

If the rise of heritage was driven in part by the secularization of European society, it has also been shaped by Europe's growing religious diversity.[9] The dichotomy between secular and religious heritage was recurrently used to create differences between what is considered European and what is foreign. Before the 1990s, opponents of immigration generally mobilised the supposed cultural differences between "native" and "foreign" populations for their polemics. Since the 1990s, however, religion has increasingly become the chief marker of difference. The case against Turkish or North African migrants, for example, has centred on their Muslim identity.[10] An examination of recent anti-Islamic rhetoric makes apparent that opposition to these populations

[5] Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006), 5.

[6] Between 2009 and 2018, church buildings in the Netherlands received 44 percent of all government subsidies for monumental buildings. Marinde van der Breggen, "Een klein deel van de rijksmonumenten neemt een grote hap uit de subsidiepot: de kerken," *Trouw*, July 9, 2020, https://www.trouw.nl/religie-filosofie/een-klein-deel-van-de-rijksmonumenten-neemt-een-grote-hap-uit-de-subsidiepot-de-kerken~b321f308/.

[7] Oscar Salemink, Ineke Stengs, and Ernst van den Hemel, eds., *Managing Sacralities: Competing and Converging Claims of Religious Heritage*, *Explorations in Heritage Studies* 6 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2022).

[8] Cyril Isnart and Nathalie Cerezales, eds., *The Religious Heritage Complex: Legacy, Conservation, and Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 6.

[9] For a fuller explanation of this connection, see Todd H. Weir, "Heritage Discourse and Religious Change in Contemporary Europe." In *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Heritage in Contemporary Europe*, edited by Todd Weir and Lieke Wijnia , 22–32. Bloomsbury Handbooks. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023.

[10] Herman L. Beck, "Beyond Living Together in Fragments: Muslims, Religious Diversity and Religious Identity in the Netherlands," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 33, no. 1 (2013): 111–27.

revolves around the tension between Christian *heritage* and Muslim *religion*. For example, during the 2019 elections to the European parliament, Marine Le Pen referenced the Duomo in Milan, Leonardo Da Vinci, and Jeanne d'Arc and stated, "We will never accept to be dispossessed of this material and immaterial patrimony."[11] In a similar vein, Hungary's prime minister Victor Orban called fellow right-winger Matteo Salvini his ally in the fight for the "preservation of European Christian heritage and against migration."[12] The heritage discourse has also helped form rhetorical alliances with non-Christians against Islam; Geert Wilders and Nigel Farage have spoken frequently of the heritage of "Judeo-Christian culture."[13] The early intellectual leader of Dutch anti-Islamism, Pim Fortuyn, extended this idea of a shared national-religious culture further when he spoke of the Netherlands as "a country based on Jewish, Christian and humanistic cultural sources".[14] This allowed Fortuyn and subsequently other Dutch conservatives to claim that tolerant, liberal attitudes toward homosexuality, for example, were ultimately achievements of a Christian culture.[15] Heritage has made possible the return of religion in secular form and has permitted the inclusion of secular values within the logic of religious antagonism.

Whether voiced by social democrats, liberals, or conservatives, the use of the terms "Christian," "Judeo-Christian," or "Judeo-Christian-Humanist heritage" is meant to create a front against certain ethnic, political, or religious populations; it nearly always signifies opposition to Muslim communities. As scholars of religion and politics have pointed out, separation policies and even secularism as a political ideology are not neutral in their treatment of religions.[16] According to Burchardt, heritage is a space in which political and religious actors seek to "regulate difference" between the religious and the secular, and between the majority and minority religions.[17]

Simultaneous to those exclusionary polemics of secularised and religious heritage, the heritage field itself is exploring possibilities for reconciliation between Christian and non-Christian, secular and religious heritage. It acknowledges that the experiences of Muslim and Jewish communities

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[11] France 24, "'Le jour de gloire' des patries 'est arrivé', lance à Milan Marine Le Pen," *France 24*, May 18, 2019, https://www.france24.com/fr/20190518-le-jour-gloire-patries-est-arrive-lance-a-milan-marine-le-pen.

[12] France 24, "Hungary's Orban Commiserates with 'Fellow Combatant' Salvini," *France 24*, August 29, 2019, https://www.france24.com/en/20190829-hungary-s-orban-commiserates-with-fellow-combatant-salvini.

[13] Dan Roberts, "Nigel Farage's Anti-Immigration Chant Strikes a Chord with US Republicans," *The Guardian*, February 27, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/feb/27/nigel-farage-charms-us-republicans-ukip.

[14] Pim Fortuyn, *Tegen de Islamisering van onze cultuur: Nederlandse identiteit als fundament* (Antwerpen: Karakter, 1996), 57.

15 "Geheim van tolerantie is verdraagzaamheid van God," *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, last modified November 15, 2020, https://www.rd.nl/artikel/596208-geheim-van-tolerantie-is-verdraagzaamheid-van-god.

16 Lori G. Beaman, "Battles Over Symbols: The 'Religion' of the Minority Versus the 'Culture' of the Majority," *Journal of Law and Religion* 28, no. 1 (2013): 67–104; Joan W. Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

17 Marian Burchardt, *Regulating Difference: Religious Diversity and Nationhood in the Secular West* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020).

in Europe offer a complex picture because they have to navigate their own unique relationship with heritage, religion, and spirituality. This is because their lifeworlds are not secularised: the mosque and the synagogue at once have an outspokenly spiritual, religious, and social identity, while community traditions are often intertwined with religious practices. Therefore, the current heritage paradigm hinders their material and immaterial culture from being recognised and celebrated in the heritage field. This is a double-edged sword, because the heritage field and the cultural sector find it equally difficult to connect to those diverse audiences, unsure about how to adapt their offer to their needs and wishes. Indeed, the heritage of Muslim, Jewish, and other contemporary diverse religious groups in Europe profoundly challenges the diptych of heritagization and secularization. If the heritage field wants to be inclusive and widen its scope, a paradigm shift is needed to re-imagine its current dynamics of heritage-making and valorisation.

Inclusive Heritage: The New Normative Framework of the Faro Convention

There are new heritage policy frameworks in Europe that have made that inclusion their new norm. In contrast to the premise of 'danger' and 'threat' of economic and social change to outstandingly valuable sites and objects which drove the 1972 UNESCO definition, in a meeting in Faro in 2005 the Council of Europe proposed a new framework for thinking about and working in heritage that placed people and their values at the centre. Here, cultural heritage is defined broadly as:

> "a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge, and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time."[18]

Fundamental to this approach to heritage is the Convention of Faro's grounding in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states, without qualification, that "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community".[19] 'Participation' is understood broadly by the Faro Convention, not only in terms of who participates (everyone!), but what participation means. Participation is not a matter of simply engaging with pre-existing authorised heritage sites, monuments and practices: rather, participation includes the active "identification, study, interpretation, protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural heritage" and

18 Council of Europe, *Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*, Faro, October 27, 2005, accessed April 28, 2025, article 2a, https://rm.coe.int/1680083746.

19 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," About Us, United Nations, accessed April 22, 2025, art. 27.1, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

"public reflection and debate on the opportunities and challenges which the cultural heritage represents."[20]

The FARO convention brought the concept of "heritage communities" into circulation to describe the main stakeholders in cultural heritage policies. Loosely defined as groups of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage and actively engage in its preservation, transmission, and enhancement, these communities rely on heritage, in one way or the other, for their identity, well-being, and/or sense of belonging. By putting these heritage communities at the centre of decision-making processes, the convention sought to enable policy making on cultural heritage "from the viewpoint of the living people who construct, use, celebrate, or oppose it."[21] Indeed, this approach acknowledges the impact, relevance, and importance of cultural heritage on contemporary communities. In the words of Laia Colomer, the inclusion of heritage communities in Faro makes heritage a "new instrument serving society. [...] it is 'the people', constituted as a community, who become the subjects of [heritage] action."[22] As a consequence of Faro, communities need to shape, design, and ratify heritage projects as participating actors.

Twenty years on, the implications of the Faro Convention for the shared ownership and authorship of heritage and its importance for dialogue and democracy in Europe are still being worked through.[23] Any idea that the Faro Convention is a panacea is quickly dispelled by tough questions on the ground. Do all heritage communities, for instance, have an equal say in heritage celebration and preservation or are power dynamics disrupting their participation? How exactly can difficult, contested, or obscure heritage be reconciled between opposing community claims and provide a "shared source of remembrance" as the Convention envisages?[24] Who is in control of the "inclusive" process: is it not the élite, once again, rather than the communities? What scale of inclusion are we talking about; are the boundaries local, regional, national, or European?[25]

In the next sections, key questions about the participation, ownership, and authorship of diverse religious heritage communities are briefly discussed. They are meant to present a general overview of the main discussions, strands of thought, and fields of action in today's heritage

20 Council of Europe, *Framework Convention*, art. 12a.

21 Simona Pinton, "The Faro Convention, the Legal European Environment and the Challenge of Commons in Cultural Heritage" *Cultural Heritage. Scenarios 2015-2017*, edited by Simona Pinton and Lauso Zagato, (Venice: University Ca' Foscari 2017), 315-333, p. 316.

22 Laia Colomer, "Exploring Participatory Heritage Governance after the EU Faro Convention," *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development* 13, no. 4 (2021): 859–60, https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-03-2021-0041.

23 "About Rebelah," REBELAH - Religion, Beliefs and Laicity in Cultural Heritage to Foster Social Inclusion in Adult Trainings, accessed June 17, 2025, https://www.rebelah.org/about-rebelah.

24 Council of Europe, *Framework Convention*, art. 3a.

25 Chiara Rabbiosi, "The Frictional Geography of Cultural Heritage: Grounding the Faro Convention into Urban Experience in Forlì, Italy," *Social & Cultural Geography* 23, no. 1 (2022): 140–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2019.1698760.

studies. First, the idea of meaning-making by diverse heritage communities is developed as a space for discussion and interaction; moving from static notions of preservation to dynamic heritage use by various stakeholders. Secondly, we explore what this dynamic approach to *traces of the past* means for the relation between historiographical 'objective' knowledge, community memory, and community heritage. Particularly for minoritised communities, it is important to note that these three facets of engaging with the past are not as synonymous as they might be for the majority communities that have long established the narrative. Thirdly, and connected to this last point, we critically engage with current day processes of heritagization (i.e. the process of making something into heritage) and the authors of these processes. The literature argues that the process of heritagization has long been rooted in secular policy practices, as discussed above, leading to the transformation and/or exclusion of minority heritage. To counter this, stakeholder communities should have more say in what is heritage - and what is not - just as they must be included in decisions on how heritage is *done*.

Creative Heritage and Meaning-Making

By emphasising the importance of living heritage communities, the Faro convention introduced a shift in what heritage is and what it can do. Once considered a static trace of the past considered worth preserving, heritage is now viewed as a social and cultural tool that answers to contemporary needs. And whereas heritage was once reserved for a few important sites of national importance, heritage can today be tied to a collection of narratives linked to various objects, places, and practices that form the foundation for personal and community identities. Living heritage demonstrates the presence of a community that interprets and reinterprets heritage to form their sense of belonging in a pluralist Europe, defining itself through diversity. Therefore, heritage is not static; it is continually being made and remade according to the needs of various communities.[26]

To work in heritage, then, is to be involved in that process of meaning-making. Heritage workers facilitate and democratise the process, yet they must also remain attentive to communities' interpretations, wishes, and meaning-making practices.[27] This requires careful consideration and dialogue with different stakeholders to prevent disenfranchisement and ensure that communities maintain agency over their heritage. This necessitates acknowledgement of salient (soft) power dynamics between social groups, as heritage is simultaneously shaped by both folk and elite perspectives, as well as bottom-up and top-down influences. For minoritised communities,

[26] Silvia Pinton, "The Role of Heritage Communities in Cultural Heritage Management: An International Law Perspective," in *The Oxford Handbook of Arts and Cultural Management*, online ed., ed. Youjin Jung, Neepa Vakharia, and Maurizio Vecco (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197621615.013.14.

[27] Pinton, "The Role of Heritage Communities."

heritage can only be a tool of democratisation if they are allowed to renegotiate it together with their identities and position within society.

The ideal of democratising heritage is reflected in the Faro Convention, which calls for all residents of Europe to be empowered to explore and celebrate their historical roots, both within their current societies and in their places of origin.[28] Heritage workers and community organisations can help marginalised groups find their voices, inspire them, and enter into dialogue with the established, often dominant heritage. This "authorised" heritage, typically presented as belonging to the nation, is shaped by expert authority and upheld by power structures. It often reinforces identity markers such as ethnicity, nationality, or religion. Challenging this normative heritage, fostered by this creative dialogue, is a step toward democratising heritage practices and recasting European heritage to be more inclusive. It renders heritage a space for dialogue, not only among minority communities but also between minoritised and “majority” communities.[29] Zagato argues that heritage, in a democratised model, navigates new spaces. It is no longer solely produced by experts and presented through authorised sites of transmission, but it emerges from shared meaning-making between teachers and students, scholars, and community activists, amongst others.[30] It is simultaneously broadened, no longer seemingly confined to cathedrals and museums but practised wherever and whenever individuals and communities come together to engage with historical perspectives.

Heritage, the Past, and Memory

Necessarily, this means that one piece of heritage possibly has multiple meanings to multiple groups and, additionally, that these meanings evolve over time. Meanings can come to reinforce or contradict each other, foster inclusion or exclusion, bring groups closer or drive them apart. Furthermore, because heritage is reactive to the communities’ social and cultural needs, it is both a source for and a product of their relation to the past.

Does that mean that heritage meaning making is therefore fully disconnected from historiographical approaches, which regard heritage as a static relic of the past that can be contextualised and researched? Some authors would argue that yes, it is inherently dynamic, shaped by continuous processes of reinterpretation and re-use. Heritage is not merely a collection of preserved objects or sites but an active, ongoing practice that reflects contemporary societal needs and aspirations. This concept is especially important when considering the diverse ways

28 Lauso Zagato, “The Notion of ‘Heritage Community’ in the Council of Europe’s Faro Convention: Its Impact on the European Legal Framework,” in *Between Imagined Communities of Practice*, ed. Nicolas Adell, Regina F. Bendix, Chiara Bortolotto, and Markus Tauschek (Göttingen: Göttingen University Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10.4000/books.gup.220.

29 Pinton, “The Role of Heritage Communities.”

30 Zagato, “The Notion of ‘Heritage Community.’”

different communities across Europe, such as Muslim and Jewish populations, engage with heritage. For these groups, heritage can serve as not just a link to the past but also as a tool for shaping identity and asserting belonging in contexts where they have often felt exclusion.[31] In the study of these social and cultural processes, historical research -with its own standpoints and subjectivities- is of secondary importance.

Yet, while heritage studies sometimes emphasise "presentness," which privileges immediate relevance over deeper historical processes, it is crucial to recognise that heritage is also the product of long-standing cultural, social, and political forces. These historical influences shape how communities, including minority religious groups in Europe, interact with and interpret their heritage in the present. This dual perspective, the dynamic, evolving nature of heritage combined with its deep historical roots, allows projects like *MIRETAGE* to bridge past and present. By linking the memories and histories of Muslim and Jewish communities to broader European heritage narratives, *MIRETAGE* ensures their past is not only preserved but actively reinterpreted in ways that affirm their identity and belonging. This approach highlights the transformative potential of heritage as a medium for social inclusion, enabling these communities to navigate and express their experiences within European society amidst ongoing issues of migration, displacement, and integration.[32]

To operationalise that idea, we refer to Nora (1989) who highlights that memory plays a critical role in the relations that contemporary communities have with the past, first of all because it is performative.[33] Cultural memory, in this context, becomes an ongoing process of remembrance and forgetting, in equal measure. It is not simply about reminiscing about the past but rather about selecting, actively or passively, memories to work with and what pieces of the past to project them on. In other words, communities continuously reconfigure their relationship to their past, selectively remembering certain aspects while forgetting others and projecting the outcomes on heritage. Therefore, heritage can serve as a continuous (re)mediation between the past and present community needs through the mobilization of shared collective memory.[34]

Heritagization and Authorship

With the hopes of valorising a particular object or practice as heritage, during this process curators render it visible, fit it into a broader collection, explain it in a specific context, move it to a new

31 David Harvey, “Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: Temporality, Meaning and the Scope of Heritage Studies,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 7, no. 4 (2001): 319–38.

32 Harvey, “Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents,” 319–38.

33 Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” Representations, no. 26 (1989): 7–24, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520.

34 Veysel Apaydin, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage: Construction, Transformation, and Destruction* (London: UCL Press, 2020).

location, and/or retell its story to fit a larger narrative. As such, the piece of heritage is taken from its original context and re-presented in a new context. In this journey, not only our understanding of newly recognised heritage changes, but possibly also the meaning of the object or practise itself.[35] Most often, this changed meaning of objects or practices as heritage remains aligned with its original meaning and function, yet sometimes the process of heritagization creates dissonance between the original and the representation.

This dissonance exists, for instance, when through heritagization an artificial selection is made of what will, and what will not, be regarded as heritage and included in valorisation; a choice influenced by many variables. Klas Grinell notes that, for instance, many museums deliberately do not include imagery of the Prophet Muhammad in collections of Islamicate heritage, because they are wary of possible discomfort surrounding such images in some branches of Islam. In doing so, however, museums censor an important dimension of Islamic religiosities given that the veneration of the prophet is often central for many believers.[36] As such, considerations of reception and negative feedback limit the capability of displaying the full extent of

Nilsson argues that heritagization can also be a political strategy, wherein a piece or practice is framed in such a way that it loses its authentic meaning to better support the goals of (local) governments instead.[37]

Bowman and Sepp observe that the expectations and needs of the individual consumer also contribute to how something is reframed and understood as heritage. In their research on pilgrimages in Europe, they contend that the popularity of the Camino pilgrimage in Spain profoundly impacts how pilgrims understand and experience other routes and sites, whilst projecting the ideas, practices, and the material culture of Camino onto them.[38]

Such neglect for the importance of religious and spiritual experiences is, as Zohar Maor contends, a product of the highly secularised nature of Western heritage making processes. In his essay on Hasidic heritage-making in Europe, he unpacks how religious practices are reformulated to 'be replanted in a secular soil', and in the process lose their spiritual significance. As for the negative effects of these practices on the community, he argues that 'heritagization has sidelined essential

35 Olaia Fontal and Carmen Gómez-Redondo, "Heritage Education and Heritagization Processes: SHEO Methodology for Educational Programs Evaluation," *Interchange* 47, no. 1 (2016): 65–90, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10780-015-9269-z.

36 Klas Grinell, "Muhammad at the Museum: Or, Why the Prophet Is Not Present," *Religions* 10, no. 12 (2019): 665, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10120665.

37 Per Åke Nilsson, "Impact of Cultural Heritage on Tourists: The Heritagization Process," *Athens Journal of Tourism* 5, no. 1 (2018): 35–54, https://doi.org/10.30958/ajt.5.1.3.

38 Marion Bowman and Tiina Sepp, "Caminoisation and Cathedrals: Replication, the Heritagisation of Religion, and the Spiritualisation of Heritage," *Religion* 49, no. 1 (2019): 74–98, https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2018.1515325.

aspects of Hasidism and largely obstructed many Jews from establishing a vibrant religious relationship to Hasidic culture'.[39]

Even in instances where an object or practice is re-presented to support a narrative of religious pluralism, diversity, or inclusion, dissonance can come to exist. During a workshop on current heritage practices for minority communities, organised by Kayikci, Carpentier, and Dodds, interlocutors maintained that the authenticity of religious community heritage is often intricately interwoven with intragroup dynamics, and therefore loses its meaning outside of this context. Hence, if done without proper consultation of the communities, the use of minority heritage to evoke a narrative of inclusion can have converse and alienating effects.[40]

Ownership and Migratory/Secular Places

Evelien Campfens has referred to the "intangible value" an object of heritage can have for individual and collective conceptions of identity and notes the tensions that can exist from legal understandings of the "ownership" of heritage objects, possessed either by individuals or institutional and governmental bodies. While referring to much broader cases (such as legal issues over lost or private heritage), Campfens recognises that oftentimes the "source communities" of particular objects (or even intangible examples of heritage) do not possess "ownership" over them.[41] This can extend beyond merely legal ownership, and when (often shared) spatial dynamics are taken into account, this becomes even more complicated. Lieke Wijnia and Todd H. Weir cite the example of Christian churches in the Dutch province of Groningen that have been reconceptualised as sites of interaction between Muslim and Christian children in an interreligious or "postsecular" manner, and how this could potentially lead to mixed reactions from both strongly religious and secular parents alike.[42] Here one can look also to Tharik Hussain's analysis of the Everyday Muslim trails and the Shah Jahan Mosque specifically; the mosque began life as an "interreligious project" by a Jewish-born convert to Anglicanism, passed into the hands of the Ahmaddiya movement, and had more recently become popular with Sunni Muslims. These examples indicate both the dynamic way in which the ownership of heritage can

[39] Zohar Maor, "Hasidic Heritage in Europe and Israel, Past and Present," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Heritage in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Todd Weir and Lieke Wijnia (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350251410.

[40] Merve Reyhan Kayikci, Stijn Carpentier, and Luke Dodds, *Migrant? Minderheid? Moslim? Verwachtingen in Erfgoed* (Leuven: KADOC KU Leuven, 2023), https://kadoc.kuleuven.be/pdf/onderzoek/verslag-workshop-verwachtingen-in-erfgoed-20231114.pdf.

41 Evelien Campfens, "Whose Cultural Objects? Introducing Heritage Title for Cross-Border Cultural Property Claims," *Netherlands International Law Review* 67 (2020): 257–95, https://doi.org/10.1007/s40802-020-00174-3.

42 Todd Weir and Lieke Wijnia, "Religious Heritage between Scholarship and Practice," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Heritage in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Todd Weir and Lieke Wijnia (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 6, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350251410.

evolve over time, while providing evidence of the contestations that can arise as a result. A particularly famous example of this is the status of the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba in Spain, whose ownership, Mar Griera explains, has been contested between Muslim and Christian communities historically, with "secular and pluralistic narratives" gaining prominence in recent decades that present the building as either a public "people's building" or an emblem of the region's multireligious past respectively.[43]

Centralizing the concept of "ownership" into the co-creation of heritage trails with religious minorities is central to MIRETAGE's goal of empowering the communities with which it works, and in recognizing their place within and contributions to national and European histories. To do so, the methodologies that have been laid out so far can help elucidate how the meaning of certain elements of tangible or intangible heritage retain meaning among specific individuals through storytelling, or how through emotion networks communities can recognise and continue to relate to a building, place, object, word, or custom that has been repurposed or appropriated and (to an extent) reclaim it. An adjacent example, with less focus on religious heritage, comes from the Brussels-based organizations FMDO and Brukselbinnenstebuiten, which collaborated in March 2024 for the unique project "*Twee (T)huizen, één Gids,"* (Two Homes, One Guide) in which an existing museum exhibit was followed and re-interpreted by a guide of migrant background, interspersing the museum's own presentations of history or art with their personal stories and interpretations of the objects and plaques on display, combining storytelling methods with a sort of personal restructuring of the exhibit. The guide's decisions were independently made and not led by either the organizations or the museums.[44] The method of orienting oneself through an existing space (in this case a museum) with a fresh perspective on the surroundings is central to the conceptualisation of heritage trails. Essential in appraising (cultural) ownership is remaining cognizant of participants' agency and negotiation, alongside the concept of "inclusive heritage," which recognises the malleability and evolution that aspects of heritage can undergo. Spain's La Xixa Community Theatre, in challenging the "exclusivist" purity of Spanish gastronomic heritage as an example, cite pork and lard's prevalence in Spanish cooking and its historical addition to traditionally Jewish or Muslim dishes as a means of "conversion." Just as these dishes (and many aspects of heritage) can be reinterpreted for discriminatory goals, so can they be opened to adaptation in the other direction. An exclusionary emphasis on the composition and significance of certain dishes like the Christmas cakes *mantecado* and *polvorón*, for example, means that "whoever considers pork is not allowed, or does not celebrate Christmas, will be excluded from enjoying this social, festive, and community dessert." However, with lard-free alternative recipes for these desserts now available, La Xixa emphasises that an inclusionary approach challenges

43 Mar Griera, "Present Politics of a Multireligious Past: The Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba Case Study," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Heritage in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Todd Weir and Lieke Wijnia (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 45–49.

44 FMDO, "Twee (T)huizen, één Gids," accessed August 27, 2024, https://www.fmdo.be/projecten/twee-thuizen-een-gids/.

a static and "purist" conceptualisation "by looking at it from other perspectives," and as a result "the dish remains the same even though the ingredients change," becoming more accessible to the contemporary diverse communities of Spain.[45] When this inclusive heritage is adapted and incorporated as an aspect of MIRETAGE's heritage lab discussions or trail co-creation, ownership over culturally significant spaces and built heritage can also feasibly be shared and alternative conceptualisations of dual or no ownership can also be further elaborated.

[45] La Xixa Team, "Inclusive versus Exclusive Heritage: Theoretical Introduction," in *Inclusion, Religion and Heritage in Secular Adult Learning Environments* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 53–54.

Heritage as a Tool for inclusion and democratization

Working with minority religious communities to engage their heritage presents a range of challenges but also promises many potential outcomes with a wide variety of practical and social applications. The position of colonial ideas in traditional heritage institutions and self-reflexive interpretations have already emerged as a boon in the field of adult education. Darlene Clover, Lorraine Bell, Kathy Sanford, and Kay Johnson, in a special issue of *Studies in the Education of Adults,* have noted how traditional heritage institutions like museums and galleries "face pressure from professionals and scholars alike who challenge them to become places for critical thought and debate" and call for their pedagogical value to be further explored.[46] For instance, a critical consideration of a museum exhibit can raise questions and promote dialogue about its relevance, importance, and the authorities who designate its display. The special issue by Clover *et al.* features collaborative initiatives between Canadian museums and First Nation representatives to subvert colonial assumptions, or how confronting "disobedient objects" - collections that propagate colonialist, elitist, or patriarchal thinking - can spur "critical and creative learning."[47] These ideas can bolster the *MIRETAGE* project's stated goals: providing authorship in demarcating their own heritage, for example, can provide individuals from minority religious communities the opportunity to participate in democratic life, create common values and encourage civic engagement.

The potentials of engaging Minority Religious Heritage

Though it appears complex, thinking critically on what constitutes heritage and why, alongside considering an element of heritage's relationship with the wider landscape, can stimulate learning simply through participatory methods and co-creation, even among individuals who struggle with traditional pedagogical practices. For institutional and heritage actors too, playing a part in this process reveals and challenges biases held by both the institutions and the grassroots, fostering new and collaborative narratives on subjects such as secularism, belonging, lived reality, and heritage, the definitions and scope of which are often assumed. Furthermore, by actively engaging in the creation and conservation of heritage within participatory trail-making or heritage lab programs, individuals can feel empowered as they take on the role of heritage authority, building on their personal experiences and relationships with their community. In a social context in which religious minorities are poorly understood by their peers and each other, the practices of

[46] Darlene Clover et al., "Adult Education through Museums, Heritage and Exhibitory Practice," *Studies in the Education of Adults* 48, no. 2 (2016): 123–24.

[47] Darlene Clover and Kathy Sanford, "Contemporary Museums as Pedagogic Contact Zones: Potentials of Critical Cultural Adult Education," *Studies in the Education of Adults* 48, no. 1 (2016): 127–41.

MIRETAGE in engaging their heritage also plays an important role regarding inclusivity and intercultural dialogue. By laying the foundation of active engagement through leisurely educational activities such as heritage trails, these communities have the opportunity to present their histories to wider society on their own terms, elucidating their often long and significant presence in European urban spaces, dispelling stereotypes that result from a distinct lack of education and contact, and promoting a more active conception of citizenship and the democratisation of heritage-making.

Engaging minority religious heritage through heritage-trail–based educational initiatives empowers communities to present their own histories in public spaces, on their own terms. Such interventions help make visible the often long and significant presence of these communities in European urban landscapes; counteracting stereotypes rooted in limited education and social isolation. By embedding these narratives into leisurely and participatory formats, heritage trails support a more active and democratic form of citizenship. These initiatives foster intercultural dialogue, strengthen social inclusion, and encourage heritage-making as a shared, co-creative process.[48]

The importance of heritage for the representation of religious minorities

Representation, in the context of museums and heritage, refers to the ways in which cultures, histories, and identities are depicted, framed, and interpreted for public audiences. This involves choices about which narratives to present, how to present them, and who gets to decide the portrayal. Representation is not merely a factual recounting of history; it is a constructed narrative that reflects and influences cultural understandings, often shaped by political, social, and ideological factors. In European museums, representation has traditionally emphasised a collective heritage often leaning towards a homogenised European identity. This focus has sometimes resulted in narratives that prioritise certain histories while marginalising or overlooking others, particularly those of minority communities.

In recent years, efforts have emerged within European museums to address these imbalances, particularly in representations of Islamic art and culture. Historically, such exhibitions often focus on the grandeur of Islamic civilizations, portraying them as relics of the past, thus subtly suggesting that Islamic culture lacks a dynamic contemporary presence.[49] While these exhibitions

48 REBELAH Project, *REBELAH Project Toolkit: Religious Heritage in Secular Adult Learning* (REBELAH, 2023), https://rebelah.org/.

49 Mirjam Shatanawi, “Curating against Dissent: Museums and the Public Debate on Islam,” in *Political and Cultural Representations of Muslims*, ed. W. A. R. Shadid and P. S. van Koningsveld (Leiden: Brill, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004231030_013.

celebrate the contributions of Islamic societies, they can inadvertently reinforce stereotypes by presenting Muslim heritage as distant or exotic. Museums like the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and the Den Haag City Museum have experimented with more inclusive, agentive approaches that encourage critical engagement from audiences, fostering dialogue and interaction.[50] However, this shift has also raised new challenges, such as the risk of portraying “safe” or simplified versions of Muslim identity that align with Western expectations, rather than presenting the diversity and complexity of contemporary Muslim experiences.

This shift in museum practice reflects the broader movement towards "new museology," which advocates for museums to become spaces of social discourse and critical reflection. Exhibitions such as "Urban Islam" and "Longing for Mecca" have sought to present Islam in ways that speak to a broader spectrum of identities, aiming to bridge understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. Yet, these efforts often remain mediated by institutional and public expectations, limiting the extent to which authentic representations can be realised. Museums may strive to include marginalised voices, but this inclusion frequently remains filtered through a Western-centric perspective, which influences both the content and context of the displays.

Empowerment and Democratisation of minorities

The concepts of empowerment and democratisation are central to contemporary heritage work, particularly when engaging with minority communities whose histories and practices have historically been marginalised or misrepresented. There is growing consensus among heritage professionals that community-based heritage projects play a critical role in empowering such communities, especially those with Islamic heritage who often face negative stereotyping and whose belonging within national narratives is frequently questioned. Empowerment in this context is often framed by institutions as giving communities a voice, increasing their visibility, and acknowledging their cultural traditions within the broader framework of Flemish heritage. However, as both institutional actors and community members recognise, empowerment is not a fixed or universally understood concept. It is shaped by different motivations, expectations, and power dynamics.

Coghlan’s (2018) study of the power of one exhibition at the Museum of Australian Democracy provides important insights into how empowerment and democratisation can be operationalised through participatory heritage practices.[51] The exhibition invited visitors to share personal reflections on democracy, using a range of analogue and digital formats. While the institutional

[50] Shatanawi, “Curating against Dissent,” 15.

[51] Rachael Coghlan, “‘My Voice Counts Because I’m Handsome’: Democratising the Museum: The Power of Museum Participation,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24, no. 7 (2017): 795–809, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2017.1320772.

goal was to engage audiences and make the museum more socially inclusive, the actual experiences of visitors showed that empowerment did not result solely from being offered a platform to speak. Rather, it emerged from the ability to contribute meaningfully to a collective memory space, and to see one's voice as part of a broader dialogue with others, real or imagined, within and beyond the museum.

This process of participation, however, was not without limitations. While visitors generally valued the opportunity to express their views, internal museum practices revealed resistance to genuine power-sharing. Some visitor contributions were discredited based on staff assessments of their value or appropriateness, despite being within agreed terms of use. As Coghlan argues, such acts reflect the persistence of hierarchical and undemocratic structures within institutions, where the rhetoric of participation is not always matched by practice.[52] Empowerment, then, cannot be imposed from above. When it originates primarily from institutional discourse and is filtered down to communities or audiences, it risks becoming prescriptive rather than collaborative.

The same tension is observed in heritage projects involving minority religious communities, where institutional goals often emphasise empowerment and visibility, while community motivations are oriented toward memory, continuity, and cultural preservation. For many communities, participation is driven less by a desire to be recognised by the state or public institutions and more by a pressing need to safeguard intangible heritage that is perceived to be at risk of disappearing. The first generation of migrants, particularly from Turkey and Morocco, are aging or returning to their countries of origin, and with them may vanish lived experiences and embodied knowledge that are not yet part of formal heritage narratives.[53]

In this context, democratisation of heritage work requires more than public engagement or participatory exhibition formats. It involves a restructuring of institutional attitudes and practices to accommodate different forms of knowledge, motivations, and expectations. The Power of 1 case demonstrates that participation can be a powerful tool when it allows individuals to connect with others and to articulate their own positions in relation to wider social and political debates. Yet it also shows that without structural change, without a shift in who controls the terms of engagement and whose voices are treated as legitimate, participation risks becoming tokenistic.

True democratisation requires institutions to move beyond temporary outreach or symbolic inclusion and to engage in long-term processes of power-sharing. This includes recognising communities not only as participants but as co-curators and co-authors of heritage. Visibility, in this framework, is not just about representation but about epistemic recognition and decision-making authority. Empowerment, likewise, is not only about having a platform to speak, but about

[52] Coghlan, "Democratising the Museum," 795–809.

53 M. Reyhan Kayikci and Stijn Carpentier, *Negotiating Solidarity: The Shared History and Heritage of Belgian Civil Society and Postwar Muslim Migration*, Discussion Paper (Leuven: KADOC KU Leuven, 2023).

ensuring that the act of speaking has consequences for how heritage is interpreted, transmitted, and sustained.

Intercultural Contact and Inclusion

Intercultural contact and inclusion in the context of cultural heritage are often approached as matters of access or visibility within pre-existing institutional frameworks. However, these terms can be redefined when seen through the lens of narrative production and spatial experience. Inclusion, rather than integration into dominant heritage structures, involves a reconfiguration of those structures through the embodied knowledge and affective histories of marginalised communities. Intercultural contact, in turn, can be understood not as a moment of cultural exchange but as a process that unfolds through collaborative meaning-making tied to place and memory.

The chapter by Cesário, Acedo, Nunes, and Nisi "Promoting Social Inclusion Around Cultural Heritage Through Collaborative Digital Storytelling" presents the MEMEX project as an intervention that embodies this alternative understanding. The project developed mobile applications and participatory methodologies to enable marginalised groups, such as migrant women in Lisbon, residents of working-class neighbourhoods in Barcelona, and communities in Paris's Seine-Saint-Denis, to create digital stories about their everyday environments.[54] These stories are not abstract testimonies; they are spatially anchored and emotionally charged, mapping personal experiences onto the urban landscape. Through photos, audio recordings, and short texts, participants mark spaces such as street corners, local shops, places of worship, and homes as sites of cultural meaning.[55]

This approach to heritage-making shifts the focus from heritage as a fixed body of knowledge to heritage as a dynamic and relational process. The participants are not passive beneficiaries of inclusion initiatives; they are authors and interpreters of cultural meaning. Their stories foreground everyday life, migration, belonging, and marginalization, and in doing so, they open up new ways of understanding the cultural significance of spaces that might otherwise go unrecognised. The act of storytelling itself becomes a form of intercultural contact, as personal narratives are shared and exchanged within and beyond the communities from which they originate.

The project also demonstrates that inclusion must be built on trust and collaboration. Many participants face barriers to participation, including language, technological access, and

[54] Vanessa Cesário et al., "Promoting Social Inclusion Around Cultural Heritage Through Collaborative Digital Storytelling," in *ArtsIT, Interactivity and Game Creation*, ed. M. Wölfel, J. Bernhardt, and S. Thiel, Lecture Notes of the Institute for Computer Sciences, Social Informatics and Telecommunications Engineering 422 (Cham: Springer, 2022), 267–78, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-95531-1_17.

[55] Cesário et al., "Promoting Social Inclusion," 267–78.

scepticism about institutional engagement. The project responds to these challenges by adopting co-design methodologies, flexible technological solutions, and sustained local partnerships. This ensures that the form and content of the digital stories are shaped by the participants' perspectives rather than institutional priorities.

In this model, intercultural contact is not limited to the interaction between cultural communities but also extends to the relationship between communities and institutions. The stories created through MEMEX function not only as forms of cultural expression but as bridges between personal memory and public space, allowing for forms of contact that are affective, embodied, and situated. The visibility of these narratives in digital platforms creates openings for intercultural awareness, not by collapsing difference into sameness, but by acknowledging complexity and specificity. Intercultural contact, then, is not simply a matter of exchange between discrete cultures, but a mode of being together in shared, contested, and emotionally resonant spaces.

Challenges and Limitations

To conclude this section, several challenges to contemporary heritage practice deserve to be mentioned.

External Animosity toward Minoritised Communities

Engaging with minority religious communities to promote their heritage presents also a range of challenges and limitations. In the current European political context, religious minorities are often targeted by far right and extremist political groups. Specially, Muslim communities especially suffer Islamophobic attacks, which are often translated into tags and degradations of worship places. Jewish communities are also exposed to similar attacks driven by an antisemitic rhetoric. In this context, exposing the heritage of these communities and the location of their worship places could imply a threat to them. As some authors have shown, invisibility has been an active strategy historically and currently adopted by (some) minority groups to deal with these threats. Thus, making visible the heritage of religious communities implies to consider this context, and recognise the agency of these groups to decide which elements they want to expose.

Touristification and Over-occupation of Spaces.

Heritagization has been identified by scholarship on urban studies as a source of gentrification and over-tourism.[56] Particularly for MIRETAGE, a project which seeks to gather groups and guide them from point A to point B through the city or other popular spots, this is something to keep in

56 Nichole C. Hugo, "Overtourism at Heritage and Cultural Sites," in *Overtourism: Causes, Implications and Solutions*, ed. Hugues Séraphin, Tatiana Gladkikh, and Tan Vo Thanh (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 169–185.

mind. In cities where tourism and overcrowding are already criticised, it might be better to look toward less harmful trails. Audio tours to be run by small groups and individuals or storytelling guides which focus on lesser-known city spaces might be a good way to disperse the negative impacts of tourism and overcrowding.

Heritage as a Priority?

It is a valid choice for MIRETAGE to attribute its focus to diverse religious heritage and all political, social, cultural, and religious connotations that go with it. The research and interviews above confirm that heritage work can be very fruitful if done well, whether it is for community remembrance, encouraging senses of belonging, provoking participation, or even for empowerment and participation. It is, however, equally important to realise that heritage work is only one tool in a larger toolbox toward these goals. It can (and should) go hand in hand with efforts for socioeconomic stability, education, democratisation, anti-racism, and so forth. Miretage can challenge itself to engage with and learn from these fields of action, building bridges between heritage work, social work, and activisms.

In a similar vein, one must keep in mind that the possibility to invest time and resources into heritage is by itself a form of privilege for both heritage workers and audiences. Therefore, it might be enriching to think about accessibility and faciliatory measures for underprivileged stakeholders and audiences.

2. Participative Heritage Trails as a Method in Adult Education

At its core, the MIRETAGE project seeks to engage with religious minority communities via co-creative methods that foster its goals of inclusive education and heritage. The project's potential lies in this active approach that directly incorporates the input of these communities in the heritage-making process and, by extension, adult learning environment. By reflecting on the output of previous projects with similar goals and confronted by the same possible challenges, MIRETAGE can better define its priorities. To facilitate this co-creation of heritage, the past work of the project's partners and similar initiatives found in literature can serve as inspiration to develop methods that centralise the key concerns of democratizing heritage spaces alongside fostering social inclusion and minority empowerment. Consolidating the position of the target communities within the national social and cultural landscapes of the Netherlands, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Spain, can then serve as a stepping stone towards further initiatives across Europe at large.

Participation and co-creation as education tools

It is essential to note certain difficulties that can arise from the implementations of participatory methods and the resulting choices that have to be made. The 2019 Swedish Research Foundation project *Museological Framings of Islam* found that the "framing" of Islamic cultural heritage in museums was "to a large extent self-enclosed and object-centered," noting that the religion is presented largely in relation to its artistic or aesthetic output and historical "Golden Age," and as a result, "few socially concerned museum studies have tried to address Islam and Muslims."[57] Kayicki *et al.,* identifying the presence of minority religious heritage (particularly relating to Islam) in various Western and Eastern European contexts, remain adamant that more active engagement should be pursued with an eye to social inclusion, as "museums are not only spaces for representation but also for education, critique and discussion."[58] "Participatory methods," including co-creation and a greater dialogue with underrepresented heritage communities, is essential for this more active engagement to take place and have an impact. For instance, Macdonald *et al.,* in their 2021 book chapter exploring the adoption of participatory methods by museum projects in Amsterdam and Berlin, have highlighted how certain projects "[positioning] Muslims or refugees as the authorities" via direct consultation can challenge wider negative stereotypes of Islam. A similar earlier example can be seen via the 2003 *Urban Islam* exhibition in Amsterdam's Tropenmuseum, curated by Mirjam Shatanawi and Deniz Ünsal, which challenged essentialization of the Netherlands' Islamic communities by directly dialoguing with a diverse group of actors. Their input provided varied understandings of what it meant to be Muslim, drawn from personal experiences. However, this participatory model presented challenges of its own: the highly individualised contributions led some of the participants to believe this approach "failed to express 'true Islam'," yet the curators saw the conceptualisation of a singular Islamic "truth" as "problematic." By choosing to follow the "multiperspectival" presentation and ultimately leaving this concern unaddressed, the exhibit's curators "compromised the shift or sharing of authority to which they had aspired."[59] The authors suggest that bringing awareness to these issues is an important step in addressing potential pitfalls related to participatory methods.

To defend against this potential issue, one method of encouraging participation is the "emotion networking" model developed by Hester Dibbits (Erasmus University) and Marloes Willemsen (Imagine IC Foundation), through their collaboration at Reinwardt Academy in the Netherlands.

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[57] Klas Grinell, Magnus Berg, and Göran Larsson, "Museological Framings of Islam in Europe," *Material Religion* 15, no. 3 (2019): 370, https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2019.1572359.

[58] Merve Reyhan Kayikci et al., "Society Exhibited: Museums, Religions and Representation," in *Religious Diversity in Europe: Mediating the Past to the Young*, ed. Riho Altnurme, Elena Arigita, and Patrick Pasture (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 88.

[59] Sharon Macdonald et al., "Reframing Islam? Potentials and Challenges of Participatory Initiatives in Museums and Heritage," in *Islam and Heritage in Europe: Pasts, Presents and Future Possibilities*, ed. Katarzyna Puzon, Sharon Macdonald, and Mirjam Shatanawi (London: Routledge, 2021), 202–20.

Emotion networking involves bringing participants together in dialogue to engage their emotional responses and interests when thinking critically about heritage items and aspects. Questions are proposed regarding how an object or subject of heritage makes participants feel or react, and they are allowed to share their responses openly in a group setting which provides space for responses, challenges, and reflection. Alongside this, an “emotion scheme” can be drawn - a circle diagram with the object of discussion placed at the centre, and with scaling responses (strong – mild, pleasant – unpleasant) at the extremes. Participants can visually track their responses by placing points or orienting themselves physically via proximity to certain words on the diagram, which can be presented either on a piece of paper or as a large scheme drawn on the ground (See Figure 1).[60]

Figure 1. An example of an emotion networking ‘scheme’ at a MIRETAGE heritage lab (Antwerp, Belgium, May 2025. © KADOC)

Dibbits provides an example of how the method can elicit dynamic responses to heritage. In a workshop surrounding the 150th anniversary of abolition in the Netherlands, a participant chose to perform Maya Angelou’s “Still I Rise” and Billie Holliday’s “Strange Fruit” when asked which songs could commemorate slavery. By linking the songs to the historical subject in question, some participants were moved to tears, showing via emotional responses the resonant qualities that

[60] Reinwardt Academie and Imagine IC, *Emotienetwerken: Erfgoed als werkwoord* (Amsterdam: Reinwardt Academie, 2023), 2–7.

historical context can possess. In the 2017 workshop “City Feeling” Dibbits and Willemsen asked participants how “national” the Dutch “National Monument to the History of Slavery” truly is. The journalist Marvin Hokstam commented - despite his Afro-Caribbean heritage - that he had never visited the monument and does not celebrate the *Keti Koti* (“Broken Chains”) emancipation festival, comparing the commemorations to “celebrating a bicycle thief on the date he gave you your bike back. He committed a crime and is rewarded if he does it.”[61]

Hokstam’s response makes clear that a monument assumed to represent, in this case, the Netherlands’ Afro-Caribbean community and their history - even one sculpted by a Surinamese artist - does not necessarily elicit expected or “black and white” reactions from individuals in its apparent target audience. Dibbits and Willemsen’s method provides critical insight into the dynamic interpretations that community members can have of heritage and how bringing them into participatory dialogue with the academic sphere, through heritage labs, can nuance and problematise assumptions on the emotional impacts history and memory can possess. These outcomes can also be elicited through storytelling methods, which Arjen Barel has shown can help challenge or nuance “master narratives” in the heritage-making process. In pursuing the goal of minority empowerment and social inclusion, MIRETAGE can encourage storytelling to bring out the “positive and resilient identities” among minority participants, who may view the current heritage offering as inaccessible or not representative of their personal beliefs and experiences. An example of this is the KADOC exhibition “*Woordreizigers*” (Word Travellers), in which seven women of migrant background living in eastern Belgium articulated their own experiences through spoken-word poetry, anchored in the subjects of “migration,” “identity,” and “home,” combined with visual artistic expression to illustrate their stories. The participants formulated the exhibition themselves, which was opened to a wide audience for three months.[62] Reactions to a certain piece or place of heritage through emotion networking can be more deeply understood when accompanied by this personal storytelling method which fuses individual experience with shared heritage, eliciting “alternative narratives” about aspects of heritage - and through heritage labs, can formulate these narratives into concrete projects, in order to be conveyed to wider audiences.[63] Employing such methods also leads to questions regarding the intertwined “ownership” of heritage, identity and experiences, and allows minorities to stake their claim to historical significance.

61 Cajune Calmez, “Emotienetwerken – wat, hoe en waarom? Een interview met de bedenkers Marloes Willemsen en Hester Dibbits,” Imagine IC, August 14, 2017, 6–7, https://imagineic.nl/nieuws/emotienetwerken-wat-hoe-en-waarom-een-interview-met-de-bedenkers-marloes-willemsen-en-hester-dibbits/.

62 KADOC-KU Leuven, *Woordreizigers: Erfgoed en Spoken Word*, exhibition from April 21 to July 28, 2024, accessed August 27, 2024, https://kadoc.kuleuven.be/3_onderzoek/33_onzeonderzoeksoutput/tentoonstellingen/2024/tt_2024_03woordreizigers.

63 Arjen Barel, “The Importance of the Contribution of Individual Stories to Collective Heritage,” in *Inclusion, Religion and Heritage in Secular Adult Learning Environments: A Train-the-Trainer Handbook* (Erasmus+/REBELAH, 2022), 46–47.

Heritage and Adult Education

Adult education is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone for addressing societal challenges in contemporary Europe, from enhancing social inclusion to fostering active citizenship and cultural understanding. In a diverse Europe, adult education can serve as a vital tool for empowering marginalised communities, promoting democratic values, and equipping learners with the critical skills needed to navigate complex cultural landscapes. By bridging formal and non-formal learning environments, adult education fosters opportunities for personal growth, professional development, and social cohesion, making it an essential component of sustainable development and intercultural dialogue.

Adult education within heritage contexts is increasingly recognised not merely as a means of transmitting knowledge but as a critical, dialogical, and transformative practice. Recent scholarship has highlighted that adult learners approach heritage sites with intentional and deeply personal learning goals, whether related to identity, community memory, or broader social understanding.[64] Such goals challenge heritage institutions to move beyond viewing adult learning as incidental or informal, instead recognising it as structured non-formal education that requires pedagogical framing and responsiveness to learners' lived experiences.

This perspective aligns with Clover et al.'s (2016) conceptualisation of museums and galleries as pedagogical contact zones with the potential to facilitate critical reflection and social transformation.[65] They argue that heritage spaces, traditionally embedded within dominant cultural narratives, can become sites where adults engage critically with hegemonic representations, opening possibilities for reimagining collective memory and fostering civic agency. Similarly, Benavot et al. (2022) propose a vision of adult education as holistic and humanistic, integrating indigenous knowledge systems and minority epistemologies to build more just and sustainable futures.[66] Their concept of Education with a capital E emphasises that adult learning must move beyond instrumental skills to encompass critical consciousness and intercultural dialogue.

Franzenburg (2017) extends this argument by underscoring the role of memory and biographical learning in fostering sustainable adult education.[67] He suggests that engaging with heritage allows

64 Simon P. Atkinson, "Recoding Heritage Sites as Non-Formal Learning Institutions: Enabling the Self-Directed Adult Learner" (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2019).

65 Darlene Clover, Kathy Sanford, and Lorraine Bell, eds., *Adult Education, Museums and Art Galleries: Animating Social, Cultural and Institutional Change* (Cham: Springer, 2016).

66 Aaron Benavot et al., "Reimagining Adult Education and Lifelong Learning for All: Historical and Critical Perspectives," *International Review of Education* 68, no. 2 (2022): 165–194.

67 Geert Franzenburg, "Learning from the Past for the Future: How to Make Adult Education Sustainable," *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education* 8, no. 2 (2017): 57–66.

adult learners to connect personal and collective histories, facilitating transformative learning that promotes reconciliation, empathy, and resilience. This resonates with Baker's (2013) proposal of integrating information literacy, critical thinking, and heritage education into a unified model for lifelong learning, particularly in an era where digital media often shapes, distorts, or erases cultural narratives.[68]

Taken together, these perspectives highlight that adult education within heritage settings is not simply about accessing information or experiencing culture. It is a process of constructing meaning, questioning dominant narratives, and integrating personal, communal, and historical identities. For minority religious communities in particular, such educational approaches can provide spaces for recognition, epistemic justice, and empowerment, supporting their agency in heritage-making while fostering broader societal understanding and cohesion.

Heritage Trails

The concept of "heritage trails" has grown in popularity over recent years and has been expertly utilised by members of religious minority communities to highlight their often subtle, but longstanding, presence within the cultural landscape of various European countries. Local and grassroots initiatives have engendered significant success in identifying and valorising especially built heritage and places of memory to provide these communities with a "purchase on the symbolic past" of their cities and countries, illuminating the importance certain sites can provide to histories of migration, multiculturalism, and religious pluralism that are often overlooked by the majority populations who pass by these sites daily unaware of their significance.[69] By selecting some examples previously pursued by MIRETAGE partners, common good practices can be enlightened for future trail-making.

There exist valuable studies and projects that are centralised around spatial dynamics and methods in heritage work and research, but that do not explicitly employ the language of "heritage trails." Humayun Ansari, in the 2007 article "'Burying the dead': making Muslim space in Britain," ties the theory of place-making into Islamic funereal practices in Britain as a means in which their place within wider society and contributions to British history can be more broadly considered and in supporting the formation of Muslim British identity, through "laying claim" to their embeddedness in longer narratives of British (particularly military) history.[70] Ansari's article highlights the importance of recognising distinct spaces in the formation of identity and, more

68 Kim Baker, *Information Literacy and Cultural Heritage: Developing a Model for Lifelong Learning* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2013).

69 Wijnia and Weir, "Religious Heritage between Scholarship and Practice," 5.

70 Humayun Ansari, "'Burying the Dead': Making Muslim Space in Britain," *Historical Research* 80, no. 210 (2007): 545–66.

broadly, heritage for religious communities, and how these past traces can influence present self-understandings. The 2020-22 Erasmus+ project 'People Places Stories,' formulated by a network of diverse national and European academic and social partners, highlights "communities of place" as one way of conceptualising and identifying heritage communities, which is essential in developing heritage projects that engage community members and provide space for participatory methods. Though it also identifies "communities of interest" and "communities of practice" as equally valid starting points in its methodology, the project notes the spatial context as a fruitful way of identifying relevant heritage and mapping it, as well as selecting project stakeholders.[71] This framework is useful for the goals of the MIRETAGE project, as it allows communities to dialogue with their wider surrounding societies through identifying their heritage spatially, which is key for the development of heritage trails - a concept explained through various examples below.

Notable examples of heritage trails from Tharik Hussain in the United Kingdom were the two developed by the "Everyday Muslim Archive and Heritage Initiative" (EMAHI; "Everyday Muslim"), the "Woking Trail" and "Muslim Cemetery Trail" in Southeast England. Inspired by the self-guided Highgate Cemetery Walk in London, Everyday Muslim assembled a team of British Muslim experts, researchers, and volunteers to construct two walking routes that interlinked the Shah Jahan Mosque (the first dedicated mosque in Great Britain) and the "Muhammadan" and "Woking War Cemeteries," Britain's oldest Muslim graveyard and its only burial ground for Muslim soldiers respectively. Over the course of a year, the project engaged focus groups from the local Islamic community and with heritage experts and academics from the area, combined with archival research to elucidate the context of these sites.[72]

The trail-making project's development was marked by the dynamic nature of these heritage sites and certain contestations that resulted. For instance, Shah Jahan Mosque was a central meeting place for the Sunni community of Woking, but its earliest attendees and custodians were drawn from the distinct (and sometimes oppositional) Ahmadiyya movement. As tensions exist between these two branches of Islam, Everyday Muslim had to negotiate its inclusion in the trail through developing sensitivity and trust with both communities and through direct dialogue and assurances that the trail would prioritise historical accuracy and transparency, while avoiding potential biases or implicit sectarianism. By directly and carefully engaging with the communities to whom this heritage is most important, Everyday Muslim was able to observe not only the rich history of Islam within Woking, but also the historical diversity of faith within Britain's Islamic community. Ultimately the trail was a success, publicised in various British national and Muslim-

71 People Places Stories, *Heritage Community Capacity Building Guidelines*, 2022, 15, accessed August 19, 2025, https://pps-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/PPS-Guidelines-EN.pdf.

72 Tharik Hussain, "Muslim Heritage Trails: Making Visible Britain's Muslim Past," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Heritage in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Lieke Wijnia and Todd H. Weir (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), 55.

oriented media outlets, receiving over two thousand visitors by 2019, including representatives from Oxford University.[73] Building trails around these local instances of built heritage, in direct consultation with the community, provided Everyday Muslim with national recognition and brought their grassroots heritage to the attention of the United Kingdom's most authoritative educational institution.

Similar initiatives have been developed by local and grassroots organizations in other European countries. Barcelona's AUDIR and La Caixa cultural foundations, with support from the city government, have collaborated to organise an annual 'Night of Religions' (*Nit de les religions*) since 2015, in which representatives from over 50 different houses of worship - Christian, Jewish, Islamic and others - gather every September to 'offer talks, workshops, concerts, performances and guided tours' amongst other activities that are open to the public with an educative and intercultural dialogue intention. This event has spread to four other Catalonian cities in recent years.[74] The Mozaika foundation, also based in Barcelona, promotes Jewish culture through a range of initiatives such as traditional music, theatre, and intercultural dialogue with Catalonia's Muslim community, and have developed four guided tours resembling the heritage trail method chronicling the centuries-old presence of Judaism in northeastern Spain. Through collaboration with the Cathedral of Barcelona, for instance, Mozaika provides an interactive exhibition of Jewish documents in the Church's archive with an aim to highlight the historical co-existence of the city's Jews and Christians. In both Barcelona and Girona, Mozaika also offers tours of each city's traditional Jewish Quarter, in partnership with local Jewish history museums. The Barcelona tour offers attendees the opportunity to meet with a neighbourhood Jewish poet and merchant as well as a rabbi, which intertwines the historical spaces of Mozaika's initiative with enactments of the daily life of Jews in Barcelona.[75]

In the Netherlands, the Everyday Muslim project served to inspire the REBELAH project ("Religion, Beliefs and Laïcity in Cultural Heritage to foster Social Inclusion in Adult Trainings") to develop a Muslim walking trail in the East Amsterdam neighbourhoods. This trail, spearheaded by the organization Storytelling Centre Amsterdam, sought a "pluralisation [of the heritage landscape] from below" by consulting the local Muslim community in the co-creation of a trail which highlighted everyday heritage sites like mosques and Muslim-owned shops, incorporating a digital method for following the trail via an audio guide featuring interviews and personal stories played by the app.[76] Another recent example, developed by the KADOC Archive and

73 Hussain, "Muslim Heritage Trails," 56-8. Hussain also worked the trail motif into his travel book: *Minarets in the Mountains: A Journey into Muslim Europe*, London: Bradt Travel Guides, 2021.

74 AUDIR, "La Nit de les Religions: Conviccions i Creences en Diàleg," 2025, accessed August 22, 2025, https://audir.org/lanitdelesreligions/.

75 Mozaika, "The Jewish Stories That Need to Be Told," Toldot Barcelona, accessed August 27, 2024, https://www.toldotbarcelona.com/tours/.

76 Future for Religious Heritage, "Interview with Todd H. Weir, Director of the Centre for Religion and Heritage (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen) on the REBELAH Project," accessed August 27, 2024, https://www.frh-

Documentation Centre in Leuven, Belgium, originated as part of the project "*Hilāl*" (Crescent Moon) celebrating fifty years of Islam's recognition in Flanders. The guided walking tour "Traces of Islam" fused sites of Christian-Muslim contact from previous eras with contemporary reflections on Islam in the city of Leuven and in Flanders more generally. The trail's route passes by areas of historical encounter between the city's university and the Muslim world, as well as the city's first mosque (located within a residence) and a selection of businesses run by Leuven's Muslim minority, such as a Moroccan grocery and traditional teahouse. The trail invited participants to visit these places, sample the products and discuss their histories with the proprietors, and was available both as a limited-time guided tour and as a self-guided digital trail via the Flemish "ErfgoedApp," which offers interactive heritage activities across the country.[77] The Amsterdam and Leuven trails indicate the different potential forms that trails can take: alongside walking tours, a trail can be followed via a smartphone or device. This has potential for walking routes, but also in museum exhibits or even from home by means of a virtual trail, emphasizing the flexibility of this methodology.

A common aspect of all of these initiatives was the direct involvement that minority communities themselves played in the consultation, if not the outright co-creation, of the trails. Co-creation refers to the active participation and agency of communities in all stages of heritage-making projects, from conceptualisation to production and outcomes, and was identified in interviews conducted by MIRETAGE partners with various community representatives and heritage professionals, as a desirable goal that should be further centralised and authentically implemented in future trail-making projects (see section 4 of this text). Identifying which sites and stories were suitable for inclusion, and more importantly uncovering their hidden significance or historical connections to religious pluralism and consultation, would not be possible without engaging and supporting these communities as equal partners. Such practices not only facilitate understanding of this heritage but further give religious minorities input and agency in the creation of new heritage methods, while also opening their histories to a broader audience through the easy accessibility and (self-)guided potential of trails. In order to promote these participatory methods for the processes of trail-making, various practices will be explored by MIRETAGE to foreground the project's goal of inclusive trail co-creation.

europe.org/interview-with-todd-weir-director-of-the-centre-for-religion-and-heritage-on-the-rebelah-project/; for further information on the REBELAH project, see the project website, https://www.rebelah.org/.

[77] KADOC-KU Leuven, "Sporen van Islam in Leuven," ErfgoedApp, accessed August 27, 2024, https://erfgoed.app/tourid/?id=2337.

Museums are another area in which experimentation with trails is taken place. The British Museum offers special routes, for example, a route to visit LGBTQ+-related objects (https://www.britishmuseum.org/visit/object-trails). Minority heritage trails have also been created. In a printed guide, heritage author Rebecca Abrams created a virtual tour of Jewish history in the permanent collection of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. *The Jewish Journey: 4,000 Years in 22 Objects* "takes the reader on two journeys: a physical journey through the galleries of the Ashmolean Museum, and a metaphorical journey, which traces the steps of the Jewish people through time and space."[78]

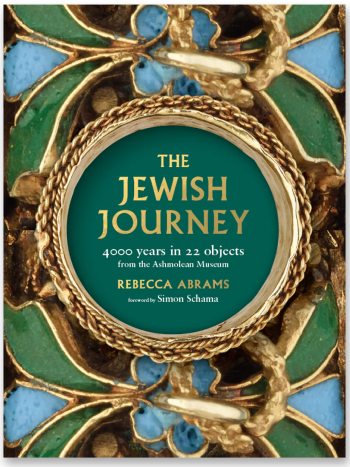

Figure 2. Cover of the book The Jewish Journey: 4,000 Years in 22 Objects by Rebecca Abrams (Ashmolean Museum, 2017).

Methods for the Management and Preservation of Trails

Good practices for the logistical questions of accessibility, promotion, management and preservation are also essential considerations of the participatory heritage co-creation process. Here past projects can also serve as a good inspiration. For the accessibility of trails, engaging in multiple formats, perhaps even simultaneously, are a worthwhile endeavour: the guided and self-guided walking routes in cities allow for (built) heritage to be seen and experienced "up-close" but possess physical barriers including but not limited to the need for travel, physical ability for walking long distances, and even weather. Museums provide one possible alternative space of engagement, as seen in the Tropenmuseum and FMDO examples mentioned above. The Storytelling Centre and KADOC trails also displayed the potential for a combined walking tour with a virtual guide, and this starting point could be further developed into a "fully virtual" trail that could be followed from home or even from abroad.

Promotion and management are also significant aspects, and here academic or heritage institutions can work together with minority community stakeholders to reach the broadest possible networks for invitees by combining their existing contacts. Hussain's account of Everyday Muslim's trails outlines the importance of a strong launch campaign: carefully choosing an appropriate launch date, building rapport with press contacts, inviting relevant guest speakers for an inaugural event and ensuring all collaborators are well-represented are common sense, but are nonetheless important choices to make and could serve as a potential subject of deliberation during the heritage labs.[79] Preserving the trail after launch also demands consideration: in the

78 Rebecca Abrams, *The Jewish Journey: 4,000 Years in 22 Objects* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2017).

79 Hussain, "Muslim Heritage Trails," 56.

case of the Muslim Cemetery trails, the cemetery authority embraced the project and offered to produce trail maps for free, but this may have been influenced by the media excitement that occurred after its successful launch. For trails preserved through digital apps such as in Leuven and Amsterdam, the managing stakeholders should periodically review the trail route for any changes such as restorations, removals, or obstructions, and update their trails accordingly. Finally, collecting these steps into a printed or digital brochure that is distributed amongst the participants can serve as a guide for the future independent creation of trails with different trajectories or participants in the future.

PART 2: FIELD ANALYSIS OF MINORITY RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

MIRETAGE was designed to better serve the needs of adult educators who work with or in minority community groups, heritage associations and adult education institutions. In order to better assess these needs, we executed a two-part survey of stakeholders from these groups. We began with sixteen in-depth interviews with heritage professionals and minority communities in Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK. This was followed in 2025 by an open questionnaire that was distributed to a wide network of partners in which awareness and engagement with minority heritage was assessed. In the following sections, we discuss the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the interviews and questionnaires.

1. Stakeholder interviews

For this exercise, we identified sixteen partners and stakeholders, whom we wanted to engage with during the MIRETAGE project. Among them were professionals engaged in museums, heritage institutions and community organizations, as well as grassroots activists and cultural entrepreneurs. They were active in Spain, the UK, the Netherlands, and Belgium. In semi-structured interviews, we invited them to reflect on different facets of working with religious heritage, minority heritage communities, and heritage project management. These five questions served as guidelines:

1. Has your organization considered working with the heritage of religious minorities? If so, what initiated this conversation, and what goals were predefined? If not, why?
2. (If heritage org/GLAM): Have you collaborated with minority communities on past projects? If yes, was religion a salient aspect? (If minority org): Have you collaborated with heritage organizations, like museums, galleries, archives, or libraries before?
3. What would you consider a “good practice” in those collaborative projects? What aspects do you think would deserve special attention in this work?
4. What challenges or obstacles would you expect to face in those projects?
5. How can Miretage, with its focus on collaborations between minority communities, universities and heritage institutions help you and your work on the topic of minority religious heritage?

It is important to note that those questions were indeed merely guidelines, because we preferred an open and natural conversation with our interlocutors. So, now we have gathered sixteen rich

and varied exchanges, each with its own emphasis and omissions, each flowing in a direction of its own. Nevertheless, four overarching themes organically surfaced in our conversations.

First, to set the stage, our interlocutors explained their take on the relation between heritage and religion. Some deemed both to be intrinsically and inevitably connected, while others emphasised the need for them to be handled with care or even separated. In the first section, the summary explores the reasonings of both sides, using (and reflecting on) concepts from the literature. Second, the notion of heritage as a facilitator of intercultural dialogue appeared organically. This section offers an experience-based account of what such dialogue might look like, what its drivers and pitfalls are, and where there is still room for improvement. Entering the realm of heritage practices and practicalities, a third theme that appeared ubiquitously was the need for constructive participation and co-creation. Both established heritage institutions and minority organizations and communities stressed that projects stand or fall with good communication, clearly defined goals, fairly divided means, and with an eye for the future. All accounts together provide a well-rounded list of good and bad practices to keep in mind while setting up new partnerships on minority heritage. Finally, the fourth recurring theme deals with project management. From staffing and funding to event planning and targeted communication, there is a lot going on backstage. Just as before, this section reflects on current practices and lists dos and don’ts.

Minority Heritage and Religion

For many of our interlocutors, the first question on their experience with minority heritage projects prompted a compelling reflection. They quickly went beyond definitions of heritage and rather talked about what it can do. Multiple partners argued that it can render history and memory more democratic, while empowering communities and helping them establish their position in society. Other interlocutors saw heritage’s added value in social spheres, since it can kick-start conversations between grandparents, parents, and children, fostering intergenerational exchanges which are otherwise deemed difficult in families with a migration past. Taking the dynamic of knowledge transfer to a higher echelon, heritage can be the starting point for exchanges between peoples and cultures and even serve as an educational tool to teach about migration, multicultural society, and superdiversity. Indeed, our interlocutors spontaneously confirmed many of the various strongpoints of heritage listed in the FARO-convention. Yet some interviewees felt that heritage did not necessarily have to live up to these large expectations. In their most simple form, material and immaterial traces of the past move us with a story, whether it is enjoyable or confronting, recognizable or surprising, soothing or shocking.

Before any of those effects can come to fruition, however, the traces of the past must first be recognised and valued. For the heritage of minorities, however, this recognition is far from self-evident. Almost without exception, our interlocutors mentioned hindrances in the recognition of Jewish and Muslim heritage in Europe. According to them, it is first and foremost the established

heritage field which has long prevented the heritage of minority communities from blossoming. Regarding the heritage of Muslim migration to Western Europe, for example, several interviewees recall difficult exchanges with established museums and cultural centres over what is and is not heritage. Muslim audiences, particularly, are being told that the recent history of labour migration falls outside of the category. One government-funded regional heritage facilitator confirmed as much in another interview, noting that they do not regard the material and immaterial traces of the Moroccan and Turkish presence in the Flemish mining regions as heritage, on accounts of it being too recent history. Their heritage projects go back way further in time, looking at "late-medieval and modern history to reconstruct a regional identity."

Similar dynamics echo in our interviews with Jewish community organizations, despite the presence of Jewish peoples in Europe for over six centuries. In three different conversations, our interlocutors poignantly remarked that cathedrals are regarded as heritage by definition, while a synagogue is not. Elaborating on this, one interlocutor argued that is because cathedrals can be framed as displays of architecture, fine arts and culture, while their religious meaning can be downplayed as a past phenomenon. So, cathedrals do not upset the expectations of modern secularised heritage. Synagogues and mosques, however, are active places of worship, closely related to present religious practice. Therefore, they do not neatly fit the current paradigm of heritage, placing all kinds of conditionalities on them before they can be recognised and valorised as such. Similarly, one multivocal organization mentions that it is easy for them to facilitate Christian celebrations, while the veneration of Islamic holy days is met with distrust and cynicism from local politicians. With those examples, our interlocutors put Elayne Oliphant's theorem of the banality of Christianity into practice.[80] Because it belongs to the collective past of the majority, the spiritual and religious nature of the cathedral and Christian festivities are taken for granted so that they can be celebrated. Non-Christian heritage does not enjoy this privilege.

This is not to say that Muslim and Jewish heritage can never exist in Western Europe. Rather, it means that religious objects and practices are subjected to negotiations and compromise before they can claim their status as recognised (as in acknowledged or valorised in some capacity) heritage. Our interlocutors testify to this, noting that processes of alteration, selection, and even censorship are often considered necessary by heritage institutions and governments before the heritage of Muslim and Jewish communities can be celebrated. Here, again, the role of religion seems to be the limiting factor. As Klas Grinell and others noted, established institutions are generally reluctant to work on religion, fearing a backlash if their collection were to be understood

[80] Oliphant defines "banality" as the unmarked character of Christianity in the European context (specifically Catholicism in France in Oliphant's work), a phenomenon which allows "Catholic material forms [to be] accepted as cultural, historical, heritage, and even secular," giving it a place and even a privileged position within the nominally secular state in comparison to minority religions like Islam that attract greater visibility. See Elayne Oliphant, *The Privilege of Being Banal: Art, Secularism, and Catholicism in Paris* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

as divisive, exclusionary, or polarizing.[81] So, they evaluate projects on religion as if they were doing a risk assessment. Our partners add to this idea, noting that even when a museum decides to proceed there are still external influences out of anyone's control. From terrorist attacks and world politics to negative public sentiment and a sudden change of heart in the municipality council, many factors can suddenly alter, hinder, or even stop a running project on religious heritage.

The role of religion in minority heritage projects therefore feels complicated. Should religion be an integral part of the celebration of minority heritage or can it be sidelined in favour of sociocultural facets, much like the cathedral is stripped of its religious connotations? That dilemma echoed in many of our conversations and prompted a wide range of answers and approaches. On the one hand, some interlocutors follow suit and downplay the role of religion in their work, pushing social and cultural dynamics to the main stage instead. The reasons for that are manifold. First, organizations might feel discouraged from working on religion as a distinct topic because of national and regional legislation and funding. In Belgium, for instance, the funding conditions of cultural community projects were altered in 2019 to exclude projects that relied too much on one ethnicity, religion, or culture. The reasoning was that they would prove exclusionary and isolating and, therefore, against the grain of the Flemish diversity and integration efforts behind the cultural policy.[82] Even though that policy has since been judged unlawful, the feeling persists that it is difficult to get funded on projects that outwardly centralise religion.[83] Second, community organizations might shy away from projects on Islam or Judaism in fear of being perceived as representatives of a whole religion. One interlocutor noted that in their projects:

> '[Religion] cannot be immediately present, and as an association we have to be sure that we do not act out of a religious context. Even as a socio-cultural worker in the field, with a certain background, you are easily perceived as a spokesperson for a whole religious group. […] We try to be careful with that.

The measure in which religion is downplayed varies. Some interlocutors are strict in their approach, arguing that it is pragmatic to focus exclusively on the cultural heritage of minority

[81] Klas Grinell, "Muhammad at the Museum: Or, Why the Prophet Is Not Present," *Religions* 10, no. 12 (2019): 672, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10120665.

[82] VRT NWS, "Geen subsidies meer voor 'etnische' verenigingen: 'Dat geldt ook voor Vlaamse organisaties,' zegt minister Bart Somers," November 22, 2019, https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2019/11/22/daf/; Hanne Geukens, "Minister Somers' gebrek aan erkenning is pijnlijk," *De Standaard*, December 19, 2022, https://www.defederatie.org/files/images/Minister-Somers%E2%80%99-gebrek-aan-erkenning-is-pijnlijk-_-De-Standaard.pdf.

[83] De Federatie, "Grondwettelijk Hof vernietigt omstreden subsidievoorwaarde in het Decreet Sociaal-Cultureel Werk," September 19, 2024, https://www.defederatie.org/nieuws/grondwettelijk-hof-vernietigt-omstreden-subsidievoorwaarde-in-het-decreet-sociaal-cultureel-werk.

communities, split from religion. Others rather subjugate religion to a smaller subtopic as a subtle and implicit puzzle piece of a larger social and cultural reality:

> [...], we do have a large group of our audience with an Islamic background, even though we are not an Islamic organization. We do not avoid religion in our projects, but rather approach it as a one piece …, one topic to address […] to accommodate for all that forms one's identity.'

On the other side of the discussion, some partners expressed their unease with that split between religion and culture, arguing that the divide is artificial and does more harm than good. In their experience, there is a tendency in larger museums to remove religious connotations from exhibitions and collections on minority communities. That leads, according to them, to collections that are missing coherence because a major aspect in the lives of these communities is absent. This does not only lower the quality of the exposition, but it is possibly harmful. Elaborating on this, one interlocutor evokes the idea of a vicious cycle in which museums and other cultural spaces shy away from religion, enforcing the idea that it is a sensitive, polarizing, and dangerous topic. If even the cultural sector, known as a catalyst of reflection and open dialogue, avoids religion then the result will be an ever-growing taboo on religion and the alienation of believers. To counteract this, our partners stress that religion and spirituality are always needed, at least in some capacity, to explain the culture and heritage of minority communities. It should not be avoided but, like other aspects of heritage, be part of the larger narrative on minority communities. Moreover, there is something to be said for the inclusion of Judaism and Islam in the national histories of Western European countries, as they come to terms with the patchwork of many social and cultural realities.

Our partners had varying reactions and feelings about working with minority heritage and religion and so there cannot be one rule of thumb for future projects. Instead, as will be discussed further on, it is necessary to foster open and respectful discussion between partners about how they envision the role and saliency of religion in a project.

Heritage and Intercultural Dialogue

As organizations working with minority communities, our partners almost unequivocally confirmed that they believe that heritage projects can do more to foster intercultural dialogue. A true intercultural conversation, several partners argued, is only feasible when both sides have at least some understanding of who they are speaking with. That cultural sensibility and knowledge is, unfortunately, not sufficiently taught in classrooms, nor is it present in many museum collections. When occasionally minority communities do get the attention, their stories are *ex cursus* or tucked away in limited exhibitions, reinforcing the idea that this is the heritage of the *other*. There is a lot of ground to be won here by integrating the past of minority communities into the larger narrative,

while imbuing projects with educational tools to encourage a better understanding of Jewish and Muslim religion and culture. To strengthen this point one of our partners argued that heritage is only worth as much as its dominant narrative; mutual understanding and inclusion should be that narrative going forward.

At first glance, intercultural dialogue evokes images of connections between majority and minority communities. Indeed, community organizations and heritage institutions alike recognise that heritage can be a tool and driver of constructive and educational dialogue, combating taboos and dismantling prejudices and xenophobia. Moreover, it can help move beyond stereotypes and can ease societal tensions by fostering mutual understanding and, possibly but not necessarily, agreement. Several interlocutors add that those dynamics are also very valuable to bridge the gap between minoritised groups. Shared heritage and shared experiences can foster dialogue between Muslim and Jewish communities, for example, just as it can be a first connection to other religious or non-religious groups. Finally, some of our partners want to explore the possibility of reaching out to other communities, social movements, and activisms through heritage. Collaborations with refugee centres, LGBTQ+ organizations, feminist groups, and eco-groups for instance, could provoke interesting and socially relevant encounters for both sides. Likewise, co-creative projects on common themes could help move beyond the us-them dichotomy and focus on shared human experiences. Successful projects with this approach have, for instance, looked at the socio-psychological effects of cancer, at cultures of grief, at notions of welcoming and saying goodbye, or even at something so seemingly mundane as taking a bath. In these heritage projects, recognition and surprise go hand in hand to foster cultural sensibility.

Last, but certainly not least comes the notion that intra-cultural dialogue is perhaps more important than inter-cultural dialogue. Several interlocutors stressed that heritage projects may no longer present all Muslims or Jews as one big monolithic group, but should acknowledge that social, cultural, and religious differences between groups exist. It is remarkable that our partners often framed this as a challenge or a risk, currently not tackled by museums and heritage institutions. Indeed, one interviewee argued that '[museums] must dare to recognise that communities are varied and that within one community many differences exist. [...] They must then show those differences, without judgment.' Part of what makes that so challenging is the idea that intra-community differences are tension-laden traps, waiting to spark controversy. The theological divisions between Sunni and Shi'a branches in Islam, for example, or the differences between Haredi and reformist Judaism are considered too complex and sensitive and therefore often absent in projects. Our partners do not mean to negate those difficulties and tensions but rather argue that heritage can be a tool to overcome them and foster understanding within the community, just as between communities. Moreover, they note that simply silencing the differences creates an oversimplified and perhaps essentialist sketch of a whole group, again alienating the audience.

In short, the emphasis in this section lies on heritage as a way to meet the other, foster education, and encourage respect for differences. Heritage does not need to dissolve tensions or promote compromise to be relevant but should provide a safe space for open exchanges. Similarly, heritage projects should trust their audience to engage respectfully with the materials to realise this dialogue. Here, one last sentiment deserves to be mentioned. One of our partners pleaded for heritage to simply be beautiful, free from the expectation to provoke dialogue and defuse tension.

Participation and Co-creation

To strike the right balance and approach in projects on minority heritage, it is without any doubt necessary to include the communities themselves. In past projects, however, our partners sometimes experienced that even if they were involved in the project, hindrances to true co-creation could still pop-up. Some testify to feeling tokenised, with larger established institutions involving them merely to fulfil diversity requirements or to reach their audience. Others mention that they have not been taken seriously as a partner or that their needs and hopes have gone unanswered in the blueprints of projects. Problems equally arise when community heritage organizations are taking the initiative, only to then be faced with administrative difficulties in securing funding, lacklustre support from heritage institutions, or municipalities seeking to limit their autonomy and authorship. For future projects, our partners hope such situations can be avoided by a mindful attitude toward true co-creation: a cooperative process which has been designed from start to finish (and beyond) based on the needs, wishes, and ideas of all partners. This section sheds light on several good practices that go a long way to render co-creation a reality.

Intrinsic Motivation

A recurring sentiment of our interviewees is that for a heritage project to be successful, all partners have to be motivated and interested in the project's approach, contents, and goals. As soon as one of the partners is presented with an idea that they do not fully back, they will often find themselves sidelined in the project, leading to a difficult cooperation for all.

Our interlocutors stress that this motivation above all grows during the project planning phase. Good communication, a clear division of tasks, well-defined goals that suit all partners' needs, and thorough discussions on the contents and outputs of a project; all these good practices make all partners feel equally involved and foster a constructive and engaging work environment.

It deserves mentioning that several (semi-government) heritage facilitators stress the need for 'intrinsic' motivation within the community to work on particular topics or, indeed, on heritage at all. When this motivation is absent within the community organization or their audience, these

bodies are more reluctant to start or facilitate new projects. In fact, because of difficult collaborations in the past, one facilitator wonders if communities in their region currently feel the need to work around heritage at all. While it is, indeed, important to look for the right partners around the table, another interlocutor independently countered this idea of ‘intrinsic’, pre-existing motivation as a must-have. According to them, it reinforces the prejudice that minority communities would be less well-versed in culture, just as it is all too easy to blame the failure of a project on the idea that the audience was never really interested. Instead, they argue, past heritage projects have often missed the mark exactly because of such paternalist attitudes, sticking to modes and formulas which are familiar to majority audiences, but do not answer to the heritage community’s wishes and needs.

That sentiment is widely supported by community partners and many of them spontaneously offered new ideas for alternative heritage approaches in working with their audience. The most prominent idea was that static exhibitions in museums or cultural centres have a limited reach, while active and engaging heritage events often lead to more interest and participation. Similarly, when working with immaterial living heritage the focus should be on the social experience and the cohesion it creates within the community, rather than on a heritage perspective per se. That sentiment of heritage activities, whether it be in games, workshops, debates, experiences, or trails, ran as a red thread through our interviews.

Respectful Cooperation

On top of the abovementioned general good practices of cooperation, projects with Jewish and Muslim community partners have several extra facets to keep in mind. First and foremost, as mentioned before, it is important to acknowledge and respect diversity and differences without passing judgment. Likewise, there must be room to discuss cultural and religious sensitivities and their potential impact on the project. Whenever a heritage community voices their hesitancy or unease with certain objects or notions being either present or absent, that should be discussed respectfully and in full acknowledgement of their sentiment.

That does not mean, however, that any one partner can dictate the contents or outcome of a heritage project. One of our partners noted that, particularly for projects with many different community voices around the table, “the heritage worker should always be open and listening, but [the input of] community actors cannot always be deciding.” Additionally, a crucial part of the project coordination is to “balance the diverse sentiments within communities and uphold ethical standards, even as individuals may try to influence the narrative to suit their own perspectives." The key to managing different opinions within the project is to discuss them with all partners, trying to reach consensus within the project. If that proves impossible, it is helpful to have a division of tasks, agreed upon at the beginning of the project, to define who has the final responsibility over such decisions.

Communication and Safe Spaces

In the previous sections, there has been a recurring focus on clear communication and constructive discussions, yet this can be a difficult practice to establish and maintain throughout the project. Above all, our partners stressed the need for fair cooperative relations, respective for each party's need and wishes, but also cognizant of everyone's autonomy, authorship, and expertise. Thanks to these good working relations, it is then easier to maintain a positive feedback culture in which issues and concerns can openly be discussed with all partners.

In light of this, the particular usefulness of so-called 'bridge figures' (or gatekeepers) is underlined. Ideally, a bridge figure is familiar with the workings of both heritage institutions and community organizations, so that they can serve as a mediator to establish common ground. They are well positioned to close the gap and gradually build trust between hierarchical and bureaucratic institutions and community stakeholders, because they have a good grasp of both sides' perspectives. Similarly, our partners judge it an invaluable asset to have a good storyteller on board to foster enthusiasm and have the project resonate with many different audiences.

A third factor in creating a safe space for cooperation may seem trivial at first, but time and time again our interviewees stressed its importance. The welcoming and connecting power of food and drinks may not be underestimated here. Having a coffee with project partners, providing a simple cake during the heritage labs, or offering some cuisine specialties at events are all easy, yet very effective ways to break the ice. From there, it is important to keep investing in a welcoming and safe environment for project partners and community stakeholders throughout the project. It is moreover important to realise that even when the workload rises, challenges pop-up, and deviations from the original plan are rule rather than exception, it is still worth it to invest in the well-being and trust of all parties.

Sustainability

A big contributor to that trust can be a mindful and constructive look forward. The need for sustainability within heritage projects has become a central talking point over the past decade, and for good reason. Not only does it pave the road for future partnerships, but it also equally strengthens trust and co-creation in the present because all partners are apprehensive of how they can use their experience, means, and connections to enable others to grow. Throughout the project, a deliberate focus on training transferable skills, exchanging good practices, and creating new opportunities for the team goes a long way toward building long-lasting collaborations.

Particularly for organizations that have never worked with heritage before, a good introduction to the field is invaluable. It pays off to explain the intricacies of heritage project proposals, of current practices, and of relevant debates and tendencies that connect to their heritage. As they grow acquainted with heritage work and start contributing to the project, it is also important to enable

them to take up a voice in the field. To do so, it is of course essential to give credit where credit is due, paying attention to the role of all project partners in communication, in reporting, in social media outreach, and of course during events and in the final deliverables. In the same vein, it should be common practice to openly and transparently discuss financial compensations with all contributing partners. Together, these facets strengthen community organizations to partake in the heritage field during and after the project.

Project Management

Many of the facets above equally came to the surface when our interviewees talked about good practices in project management. The following paragraphs do not mean to repeat ideas but rather aim to elaborate on them from a practical and administrative perspective.

Opportunities and Pitfalls

In the section above the focus predominantly lies on respectful and open dialogue between partners, so that cooperation can blossom. This paragraph continues on the same elan, this time round stressing that a project fares well in acknowledging that every partner brings their own expertise, strongpoints, and weaknesses to the project. It is key to reflect on these opportunities and pitfalls at the start of the collaboration, so that strengths can reinforce each other and threats can be alleviated. In that vein, it is possible, and sometimes even recommended, to make a clear division in tasks based on partner specialties. Concerning the practical aspect of heritage projects, our interviewees mentioned funding applications, administrative tasks, event organization, and targeted communication as tasks that can be entrusted with one or more experienced partners.

Funding, Staffing, and Workload

One practical consideration here is the differences in capacity and capital between established institutions and community organizations. In terms of staffing, funding, and workload, museums and heritage facilitators often have more wiggle room, whereas smaller community initiatives have to navigate tight margins. This is not to argue that the latter should therefore be attributed less responsibilities but rather to stress that open communication and supportive partnership is beneficial to all, with threats being tackled by the team as soon as they arise.

Moreover, because their funding is often unstable and dependent on the whims of current municipal, regional, and national politics, community organizations more quickly find themselves pushing or obscuring narratives to safeguard future subsidies. To counteract this, it may be helpful to discuss those dynamics at the start of a project, acknowledging the sensitive position of community organizations and discussing how established actors can be allies for their autonomy

and authorship. This is of particular importance when working on religious heritage, which is a difficult topic as we have discussed above.

Targeted Communication

A last but certainly important facet of heritage projects is the targeted and engaging communication to build an audience. Many established institutions lament that it has been hard for them to reach minority groups, even though they actively seek to do so. Minority community organizations, from their perspective, find that current promotion strategies are lacking and should more actively try to connect to minority audiences' interests. Just as the content and the output of the project should be adapted to the wishes and needs of the heritage community, so should the communication be a reflection of what drives them to participate. So, a heritage project that hopes to foster community cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and participation can benefit from using these goals as explicit buzzwords in its communication.

Additionally, we have already discussed that dynamic heritage experiences and events are generally preferred over static exhibitions. In a similar vein, our interlocutors suggest that the communication toward minority communities might do well by focusing on the 'doing', rather than the 'visiting'. An emphasis on events, social gatherings, and active celebrations of heritage therefore tend to spread faster within the communities. Indeed, effective targeted communication presupposes that it dares to be diversified according to each group's expectations and wishes: what works for one group will not necessarily resonate with the other, and vice versa. This is also true for the medium: while Facebook and LinkedIn might be very effective in reaching the usual suspects, neighbourhood WhatsApp and Telegram channels are more effective ways to mobilise local Muslim and Jewish audiences.

That being said, successful communication seems to be a recurring issue for many partners and a one-size-fits-all solution is an elusive holy grail. Here, again, the best practice is to share methods and networks between project partners to improve each other's reach. It is important to note that this exceeds the sharing of mail lists and networks but supposes a collaborative exchange to improve the project's communication efforts, through trial and error, to reach a diversified and targeted promotion effort.

2. Stakeholders' Questionnaire

The stakeholder' questionnaire was disseminated online via the LimeSurvey data collection platform[84] between April and June 2025 and received a total of 76 complete responses. It was distributed through project partners' networks, across several European countries. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the research and the intended use of the data for project development and reporting. The survey was designed to balance both quantitative and qualitative data collection. It contained a mix of closed-ended questions (e.g., Likert-scale and multiple-choice items) and open-ended questions that invited respondents to elaborate on their experiences, challenges, and recommendations related to minority religious heritage and the use of heritage trails.

Quantitative analysis

The questionnaire was distributed to 136 individuals and organisations within the various national networks of the eight MIRETAGE project partners.[85] Each partner aimed for a minimum of 10 distributions and 5 completed questionnaires. Additionally, the questionnaire was more openly shared to subscribers of the pan-European network Future for Religious Heritage (FRH; 1,100+ contacts) and Rijksuniversiteit Groningen's Centre for Religion and Heritage (CRH; 50+ contacts) mailing lists. The LimeSurvey platform counted 238 responses in varying degrees of completion, with the majority simply having opened the survey and entered no information. Therefore, only completed responses (75, plus 1 response functionally completed but not registered as such) were tallied in the final assessment.

The respondents were asked to identify themselves using labels that **best described their work or that of their organisation**. These labels were defined by the project's target audiences. Participants were permitted to select more than one option if they felt that they had multiple applicable competences, or to define their expertise themselves, hence the higher total number of responses (91). The responses are shown in Table 2.1 below:

[84] LimeSurvey [https://www.limesurvey.org].

[85] The reported nationalities/resident countries of positive respondents were as follows: Netherlands (30); Spain (12); United Kingdom (11); Belgium (7); Germany and France (each 3); Italy and Norway (each 2); Luxembourg, Romania, Hungary, Cyprus and Greece (each 1). Additionally, one respondent identified solely as a U.S. national but was affiliated with a Spanish organisation.

Table 1. Respondents by (organisational) self-identification ('Other' includes 'artist,' 'museum,' 'freelance historian,' 'charity,' 'social welfare,' 'student association,' cultural management firm,' and 'foundation').

Respondent (organisational) self-identification (multiple answers permitted)	Count	Percentage
Cultural heritage institution	37	48.68%
Religious community or faith-based organization	19	25.00%
Adult education centre / Lifelong learning provider	7	9.21%
NGO / Grassroots association	6	7.89%
Public authority or local government	2	2.63%
Research or academic institution	11	14.47%
Other	9	11.84%

Given the variety and overlap of respondents' self-identification, a standardised set of questions applicable to each area of expertise was not feasible, so the questionnaire was divided into three 'question sets' in which participants were asked to **choose one that best fit their competences**. These sets were defined by the projects' target audiences and key thematic areas.

This also meant that respondents would only answer a certain set of questions based on their chosen designation as opposed to the full questionnaire, which may not have proved consistently relevant to all. The spread of responses is illustrated in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Respondents by selected question set.

Respondent selected "question set"	Count	Percentage
Questions for heritage professionals	42	55.26%
Questions for representatives or members of a religious minority community	16	21.05%
Questions for educational professionals, teachers, and those working within adult education	18	23.68%

As multiple self-identification categories in Table 1 could be selected, respondents could answer a set of questions that differed from the labels they had chosen - why, for instance, ‘adult education’ responses are higher and ‘religious communities’ lower in Table 2 than in Table 1. Before proceeding to the questions within these individual sets - which sought to identify experiences, challenges, and needs in working with minority religious heritage and heritage trails - two general questions were asked to all respondents about awareness and experience with minority religious heritage. Responses to the first (**‘How familiar are you with the concept of "minority religious heritage"?**) are detailed in Figure 3:

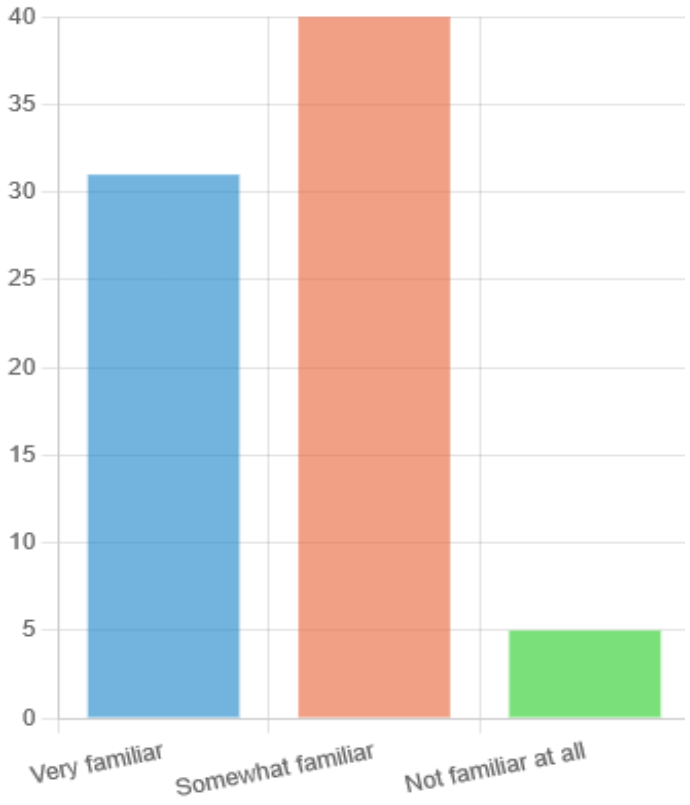

Figure 3.Responses to the question ‘How familiar are you with the concept of "minority religious heritage"?’ with responses ‘very familiar’ (31; 40.79%), ‘somewhat familiar’ (40; 50.62%), and ‘not familiar at all’ (5; 6.58%).

The responses to this question indicate a **wide but varied level of familiarity** with the concept(s) of minority religious heritage, though a more thorough exploration of participants’ understandings were further explored later in the questionnaire.

The second question asked to all participants was ‘Have you ever participated in a project related to cultural heritage involving minority religious communities?’ The responses are shown in Figure 4:

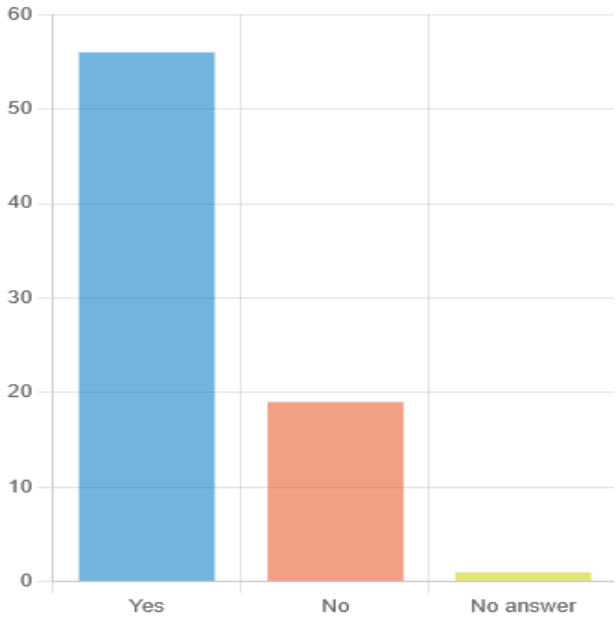

Figure 4. Responses to the question ‘Have you ever participated in a project related to cultural heritage involving minority religious communities?’ with responses ‘Yes’ (56; 73.68%), ‘No’ (19; 25.00%), and no answer given (1; 1.32%).

Again, those respondents who engaged the questionnaire demonstrated an **overall high level of previous experience** in working with the cultural heritage of religious minorities. Respondents to the second question were also given an opportunity to provide a brief description of their past experience, of which 47 (61.84%) did. These comments ranged from single instances of participation in a project organised by a contact or related organisation, to decades of consistent commitment to the valorisation of minority religious heritage.

The uniformly moderate to high awareness (Fig. 3) and experience (Fig. 4) is expected given the professional orientation of the questionnaire, and the high response rates to the ‘heritage professionals’ question set in particular (Table 2) reflects the composition of the project’s consortium and the partners’ associated networks. However, the level of experience and understanding amongst respondents requires a deeper reflection on the multiple-choice and qualitative answers that were provided within the different ‘question sets’ that constituted the body of the questionnaire. A discussion of these questions, and some reflections that can be drawn from them, continues in the following section.

Qualitative analysis

Challenges

Across all respondent groups, heritage professionals, minority religious communities, and educational organizations, a set of recurring and interrelated challenges emerged that continue to limit inclusive engagement with minority religious heritage. Foremost among these is a widespread lack of **sustainable funding**. Heritage professionals pointed to limited staff, difficulty securing long-term resources, and overreliance on volunteers as key obstacles. One respondent explained, "*It mainly comes down to resources and staff. Building and maintaining sustainable networks requires time and personnel,*" while another noted, "*We encounter a lack of funds to provide this. Project-based it is possible, but structural is more difficult*." These financial constraints were mirrored in responses from minority communities, with one respondent stating, "*We need funding for historical research and interactive online presentation thereof,*" and another explaining that the lack of a permanent space of worship prevents their community from displaying or preserving religious heritage. In educational institutions, funding concerns were subtler but still present. Several respondents expressed interest in collaborative work with MIRETAGE but described internal constraints such as time limitations and high workloads, with one stating, "*No wriggling space timewise*," and another noting that participation would depend on "*the kind of partners*" and institutional alignment.

Knowledge gaps and conceptual misunderstandings were also widely reported, though they appeared differently across sectors. Heritage professionals identified the need for internal training to improve engagement with minority communities, emphasizing the danger of relying on a few knowledgeable individuals. One respondent highlighted, "*Training the team to know the different minorities, to treat them and develop projects,*" as a key priority. Another cautioned against starting from institutional assumptions, stating, "*The main mistake is the conceptual framework from which we start.*" Community members expressed a parallel but opposite concern: a lack of familiarity with the institutional world and heritage discourse. A representative from a Christian migrant background remarked that "*many [communities] are very hospitable… but initially it does take time to build trust,*" referencing the cultural and administrative distance that must be overcome. In educational organizations, the conceptual gap centred on the recognition of heritage as a pedagogical method. One educator admitted, "*I know a lot about local heritage… but would never understand this as a pedagogical tool,*" only revising their answer after understanding how heritage trails function in adult learning. This misunderstanding underscores the need for reframing and pedagogical clarity, even among institutions already working with heritage content.

Issues of visibility, trust, and representation cut across all modules. Heritage professionals warned against top-down, extractive approaches, with one advising, "*Don't work alone, but look for collaboration,*" and another emphasizing the importance of "*collaborators of religious minorities*

and experts in intercultural mediation." Communities, in turn, reported being excluded from institutional decisions and lacking recognition in public discourse. One respondent expressed the need for "*greater awareness of [Muslim] memorials*" and lamented the lack of platforms for publication and storytelling. Others raised security concerns, particularly for interfaith events, and highlighted the emotional toll of representing one's community in often hostile or indifferent environments. In education, some respondents worried that focusing solely on minority heritage might inadvertently limit broader engagement. As one explained, "*Focus on minorities only would miss the opportunity to meet that goal,*" referring to the need for inclusive framing that connects diverse communities through shared experiences.

Finally, **structural and institutional inertia** was a persistent concern. Many heritage professionals expressed that existing efforts remain reliant on individual champions rather than embedded strategies. One respondent noted, *"We would need more institutional support from the association's board of directors and find the right partners to do it together."* Community respondents similarly pointed to the absence of institutional infrastructure or support for their initiatives, particularly for groups that lack official recognition or space. Educational organizations did not highlight this challenge due to the nature of their questions, still flagged logistical issues and the need for clearer institutional commitment before joining pilot initiatives or trail development efforts. These responses suggest that despite pockets of innovation, the broader system supporting minority religious heritage engagement remains fragile and uneven, sustained more by goodwill than by durable structures.

Addressing Stakeholders' Needs

The challenges identified across the three respondent groups point to systemic gaps in resources, knowledge exchange, trust, and institutional responsiveness. While these challenges are diverse, they intersect around a common need for inclusive, long-term, and relational engagement strategies, precisely the areas where the MIRETAGE project can offer significant added value. Although MIRETAGE is not a funding body and cannot directly resolve financial constraints, it is well-positioned to strengthen the structural and educational foundations that make inclusive heritage work more sustainable, more collaborative, and more impactful. Its adult education framework, particularly through heritage trails and labs, provides an adaptable, low-barrier methodology for fostering engagement, building competence, and creating shared ownership among heritage professionals, community members, and educators.

PART 3: FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

MIRETAGE seeks to foster this dialogue between the past and present by providing forums (labs and heritage trails) where Muslim and Jewish communities can articulate and preserve their cultural memories and valorise them in heritage. In doing so, they contribute to the broader European narrative of multivocal cultural heritage, pluralism, and inclusion. *MIRETAGE's* focus on co-creating heritage experiences in its labs further underscores this dynamic, offering a platform for minoritised groups to redefine their heritage independently, i.e. unbound by dominant (national) accounts of the past.

This report has identified the following needs, when approaching heritage education with minority communities:

1. The need to bridge the dual knowledge gaps identified by both heritage professionals and minority religious communities. As the data suggests, professionals often lack training in religious literacy and intercultural engagement, while communities require guidance to navigate the institutional and procedural frameworks of cultural heritage work. Adult education should directly address this through non-formal, dialogical learning models. For example, heritage trails are not merely site-based experiences; they are also structured processes for co-creating meaning, learning from lived histories, and collaboratively curating public narratives. This learning model reinforces insights from the literature review, which emphasised the need for inclusive, place-based educational tools that challenge dominant heritage narratives and support pluralistic historical understandings. In the stakeholder interviews as well, the importance of "*meeting people where they are*" emerged repeatedly, both in terms of physical space and knowledge. Experiential formats can provide precisely that: accessible, embodied entry points into heritage discourse that are flexible across contexts.
2. Heritage education cannot be fleeting but requires time investment to get the trust and build the cooperation of all stakeholders in the education process. For trail making, this means that it must take place within a framework provided by some equivalent to the heritage lab model proposed by MIRETAGE. This offers a framework for sustained engagement and institutional learning. Unlike one-off workshops or academic conferences, heritage labs encourage long-term reflection, co-design, and iterative project development. These formats can help address concerns raised by heritage professionals regarding the fragility of current initiatives, which are often dependent on the efforts of a single individual. They also align with requests from communities for time and space to build trust, as well as the need for training that is reciprocal rather than didactic. In this sense the method of trail making is not to "train" communities or institutions in isolation, but rather to facilitate a mutual learning process that rebalances power and voice in

heritage-making practices. This approach echoes the responses from the stakeholder interviews, which stressed the necessity of creating horizontal spaces for dialogue, especially in intercultural and interfaith settings.

3. Heritage educators need to reframe how participation and inclusion are understood. The research shows that many institutions struggle to concretely conceptualise how to fully include minority heritage as an integral part of national narratives or public education. A pedagogical model is needed that can help address this by making heritage practices legible as educational tools, especially within adult learning settings. Responses from educational organizations showed that while many were already using local heritage informally, they often did not recognise this as pedagogically structured practice. Through workshops, pilot trails, and resource development, those who train the trainers can help make these implicit practices explicit, thereby empowering educators to develop culturally inclusive curricula that speak to diverse learning communities. This connects back to the literature review's emphasis on lifelong learning and the value of heritage as a means of fostering civic engagement and intergenerational dialogue.
4. The use of trail making in adult education, whether in a museum or out in an urban or rural community, can also play a crucial role in promoting visibility and public recognition for minority religious heritage, which many respondents described as overlooked or marginalised. While the use of heritage in education cannot directly shape national policy or institutional funding priorities, it can help position minority heritage work within broader discourses of European cultural pluralism and social inclusion. By fostering the production of participatory narratives, supporting intercultural storytelling, and sharing model practices, the project can amplify underrepresented voices in ways that both reflect and challenge dominant frameworks. This is particularly relevant for communities that lack formal recognition or physical space and for institutions unsure how to engage with diversity without falling into tokenism. The stakeholder interviews and literature repeatedly warned against symbolic inclusion, calling instead for structural participation. It is by developing and testing such methods, such as shared authorship in trail creation and co-curated heritage experiences, that Erasmus Plus projects like MIRETAGE can move beyond symbolic gestures toward collaborative practice.

In summary, while adult education projects such as MIRETAGE must reckon with various structural barriers, they are uniquely equipped to respond to the educational, conceptual, and participatory deficits that currently limit engagement with minority religious heritage. Through its emphasis on adult education, dialogical methods, and co-designed heritage experiences, MIRETAGE creates the conditions in which both professionals and communities can work together in meaningful, sustained, and transformative ways. These contributions respond not only to the challenges outlined in the survey data, but also to the broader imperatives set out by the European Union and surfaced in the literature and stakeholder interviews: to make the co-creation of heritage a key site of generating a democratic society.

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