

# HERITAGE AS A PALIMPSEST OF VALUED CULTURAL ASSETS ON THE PROBLEMS OF FRONTIER LAND ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IN TURBULENT TIMES. EXAMPLE OF POLAND'S UPPER SILESIA

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## Abstract

*Tangible and intangible heritage are inextricably linked with the physical area in which they feature, and with the community that cultivates them and passes them on to future generations. The challenging historical, political and social histories of areas touched by wars, devastation and the displacement and extermination of their populations, lead to huge problems with the redefinition and acceptance of heritage. The aim of this paper is to analyse the complexity of this issue and to demonstrate the redefinition and acceptance of heritage as a palimpsest of valued cultural assets, using the example of Poland's Upper Silesia, whose complicated history has left behind cultural stratification of its many nationalities and communities. The heritological research of J.E. Tunbridge and G.L. Ashworth and the critical approach initiated and developed by L. Smith constitute, amongst others, the theoretical perspective behind this work. The starting point for these considerations is the Second World War, the impact of which wholly reconstructed the concept of heritage and identity. A completely new political and social order in Europe, and by extension also in Poland and Silesia, arose following the end of hostilities. The study ends with a reflection on contemporary measures that help redefine the heritage of the region as a polyphony of material and non-material assets and which effectively lead to social acceptance of this particular palimpsest.*

**Keywords:** Heritage; Palimpsest; Acceptance; Architecture; Local community

## Introduction

‘Cultural heritage’ is only ostensibly speaking a simple and comprehensible concept. This concept is most often applied in relation to tangible monuments, but also to intangible assets which emerge in the course of cultural development. It would appear that the term ‘heritage’ provides things with a particular value and prestige, as compared to merely describing them as ‘monuments’ or ‘relics of the past’ [1-3].

The concept of heritage has also found a place in the professional language employed by architects, art historians and conservators. Cultural heritage has become a subject of particular preoccupation with the institutions and organizations founded to protect it [4]. One can analyze the development of the concept of heritage by studying documentation from around the world. *Yahaya Ahmad* [5] has presented its evolution based on over forty conventions, resolutions and standards, from the Venice Charter to the most recent ones. These range from global, European,

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local to even regional regulations. It is difficult to disagree with the author's conclusion that since the adoption of the Venice Charter (1964), i.e. for more than fifty years, the full extent of the concept of 'heritage' has neither been clarified nor unified among the countries of the world which have developed their own detailed guidelines and terminologies.

The most important documents in this domain formulated by UNESCO (1972) and the subsequent UNESCO World Heritage List (1975) relate to the protection of tangible heritage. They discern the threat and irreversible nature of damage and destruction, and also impose a responsibility to protect the works of architecture, art and historical sites upon the entire international community. In 2003 the UNESCO General Conference adopted a convention establishing a framework of conduct for the protection of intangible cultural heritage as being of specific importance to the cultural continuity of societies and nations. The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was duly established in 2008.

The number of documents from around the world on the subject of protection and management of cultural heritage continues to grow, but it is difficult to find in them the abstruseness and essence of the meaning of the concept of cultural heritage that we come across today. It can be assumed that when the term 'cultural heritage', replacing the term 'historical monument', came into common usage several decades ago, no one could foresee what richness of meanings and what multiplicity of issues it would bring with it. For now, the term is ambiguous, as can be observed during present-day debates on the essence of this concept and its numerous interpretations [6, 7].

Heritage is the process of passing on specific cultural property over the course of history and is a form of relationship between the generations. *Gregory Ashworth* [8], one of the main European researchers of this subject, has formulated a proposition that summarily describes this relationship: "Heritage literally assumes both a legatee and an inheritance; the latter only being definable in terms of the former". Thus, heritage is a process of the passing on of property, with an obligation to protect and develop it. Such an understanding of this concept would appear to be intuitively clear, but it also carries with it many questions that blur this impression of clarity, moving heritage into areas of hazy, ambiguous and even elusive concepts [9].

*Susan M. Pearce* [10] author of *The Making of Cultural Heritage*, explains the origin of the concept of heritage, stressing that the term, borrowed from legal terminology, refers to property passed down from generation to generation to which the descendants of the original owner have rights. The author is aware that such an interpretation of the concept in relation to cultural and natural heritage creates a kind of trap, as it assigns a form of ownership to individuals or groups, eliminating all other people from engagement in the heritage. For this reason, as far as cultural heritage is concerned, relations between the predecessors, successors and the inheritors themselves play a special role, as do the social dynamics inherent in all cultural experiences. This also applies to the study of the mechanisms of heritage transferal in a universal dimension and the creation of a theoretical and academic framework for its progression.

## **Purpose, scope and methods of research**

The aim of this paper is to analyze the redefinition of the complex heritage in areas where a complicated history has left behind cultural stratification of numerous nationalities and communities, and to analyze the acceptance of the resultant palimpsest of valued assets.

Both tangible and intangible heritage are inextricably linked with the physical area in which they feature and with the community that cultivates them and passes them on to successive generations. However, the challenging historical, political and social histories of areas touched by wars, destruction and the displacement and extermination of the population often lead to huge problems with the definition and acceptance of the heritage left behind.

In order to achieve the assumed goal, the following research questions were asked:

- Is the concept of palimpsest valid for the legacy of problematic regions?
- What is the process of redefining heritage in problematic regions?
- What factors can aid or hinder the process of heritage acceptance?
- Who are the key players in this process?

For such an extensive research problem, the author has espoused the following methods:

- Adoption of a theoretical research perspective
- Adoption of a temporal and territorial perspective
- Use of a selected case study method as an effective way to achieve the research goal
- Final discussion including research results and conclusions drawn

Three main strands of the research constitute the theoretical perspective of the study. The first of these is the heritological research of *G.L. Ashworth and J.E. Tunbridge* [11] in which the problem of defining the concept of heritage and seeking an answer to the question "Whose heritage?" plays a key role in the research presented. The second strand of theoretical assumptions is the concept of heritage as a palimpsest of valued assets which appears in research relating to the complex processes of creating cultural property. The third strand is a critical approach to heritage research initiated and developed by *L. Smith* [12]. The researcher undertakes a critical polemic with the official interpretation of heritage (AHD), perceiving heritage as social property, and emphasizes the role of local communities as key stakeholders of heritage. The adopted research methodology is built of the synergy of these three concepts.

The time period covered by the research spans the years between the 1950s and present day. This time frame seems to be appropriate for study given that the region in question lies within the territories of European countries [13]. It was the mid-20th century and the end of the Second World War that saw some of the key turning points in history.

A single case study was taken into consideration in terms of detailed research. It is one of the basic methods of qualitative research and involves studying a selected object or area while using multiple sources of information such as documents, interviews, observations and artefacts. A particularly fitting method for the implementation of this research transpired to be a single case study (monographic), allowing one to distinguish the features and principles of the processes in question [14]. A key element of case study research is adopting the criteria for selection of a specific research subject and making the selection. The following criteria were taken into consideration:

- Region located in Europe, defined in terms of history, geography and border location;
- Turbulent history of the region in question - frequent military conflicts, border changes, national affiliations and also changes in population, and of political and governmental contexts;
- Presence of clear traces of many layers of culture;
- Availability of sources and the possibility of conducting research in situ.

The historical and geographical region of Upper Silesia, predominantly situated in southern Poland, was selected as the area for the case study. The region is exceptional as regards meeting the established criteria, as will be described in the following paragraphs. Moreover, an additional factor for the choice was the author's excellent preparation and her in-depth knowledge of the subject.

The research was divided into two main stages:

- Analysis of the research area and heritage in a historical perspective - historical analysis, analysis of the dynamics of changes in a socio-political context, analysis of the dynamics of the approach to cultural heritage
- Analysis of activities in the interests of heritage from a contemporary perspective - types of projects undertaken, dynamics of approach and changes in social awareness

The research ends with a discourse on the results. The discourse demonstrates to what degree the adopted research goals were achieved.

## **A theoretical perspective of the research**

### ***Heritology in the quest for new meanings of heritage***

The discourse surrounding the essence of heritage is animated and has now turned into a separate field of research, known as heritology, which deals with the analysis of meanings, interpretations and approaches to cultural heritage. This new field of learning is a multi-strand interdisciplinary reflection on the concept of heritage, used, *inter alia*, as a means of constructing and interpreting the past, for dealing with the problem of management and protection of heritage, as well as for setting the framework for its future operations. The founder of this discipline is considered to be the American geographer *David Lowenthal* [15], and of the leading representatives and researchers in Europe the top tier includes *John Tunbridge* and *Gregory Ashworth* [16].

*D. Lowenthal* [15] points out that the legacy of the past is central to the essence of our identity, and the ability to recall and identify with our own past gives our existence meaning, purpose and worth. The sequential structure of the progression of history strengthens the identity of man, showing not only his current state, but layer by layer, it places him in the past. Similarly, heritage and memory, through an awareness of the past, enhance the meaning of life in the present. We cannot function properly without being linked to a recognizable past of people and places with which to identify, that is, our own heritage. His book, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, not only provides a broad perspective on the concept of heritage but has also become a kind of introduction to the current robustly developing discourse on the subject of the culture of memory [15].

Heritage is what we inherit from our ancestors. Such a definition appears simple, but it is at this juncture that an alarm sounds, revealing that the problem of heritage is more complex than can seemingly be assumed, as it indicates its links with a location and the surrounding society. John Tunbridge was the researcher who drew attention to the link between heritology and geography, as well as the relationship between heritage and location and society. He noted that when speaking of heritage, we must ask the question "Whose heritage?" Tunbridge observes that a city's heritage cannot be treated as a homogeneous structure, because the inhabitants differ amongst themselves in terms of origin, political views, class affiliation, ethnicity, and values resultant of their cultural systems. Thus, the question "Whose heritage?" would appear to be especially important in mosaic-like and culturally diverse societies. The author further developed his research on this issue when working with Gregory Ashworth. *G. Ashworth and J. Tunbridge* [11] pose the question "Whose heritage?" in relation to the subject of heritage, as well as its identification and interpretation. In their opinion, Europe is a particular terrain where, throughout history, continuous conflicts, border changes, population movements, waves of nationalism and radical political ideologies have taken place in a relatively small area. Interpreting the problem of identity and cultural heritage in such a context becomes extremely complicated.

When analyzing Poland's situation, Tunbridge emphasizes that the contemporary problem of heritage was most clearly defined during the Second World War, which brought incredible devastation as well as the extermination of entire ethnic and national groups. Similarly, when it was over, the shifting of borders was accompanied by waves of resettlement and the imposition of a new communist political regime [16]. These historic shockwaves exacerbated the problem of a lack of identification and adaptation of heritage, which in academic circles has become known as 'dissonant heritage' [17]. Tunbridge's academic studies will be crucial for this paper, not merely in view of his general research, but especially because

of, as with Ashworth, his long-term academic ties with Poland and excellent knowledge of the specificity of the issues being debated in the context of the history of Poland and Silesia.

***Palimpsest - common interpretation and acceptance of the polyphony of phenomena***

The basic meaning of the term 'palimpsest' (Greek Παλίμψηστος meaning 'scraped again') relates to a manuscript recorded on a previously used medium, from which the earlier text has been removed [18]. The techniques for removing previous layers of text were not always completely successful, and over time the original layers began to show through clearly enough under the overwritten text to be readable. However, the very phenomenon relating to the layering of texts and meanings created in various contexts and their re-reading became the inspiration for the notion of palimpsest, which is broadly used in relation to a series of products created by different cultures.

The use of the palimpsest metaphor in relation to works of material and non-material culture has a long tradition. The concept appears in the philosophy of the early days of the first millennium, although its re-popularization can be found in mid-19th century literature, when works were created by means of literary material being layered and rearranged. In the field of literature Gerard Genette is one of the researchers who has dealt with this concept, showing the richness and diversity of kinship between the layers of a text, which could equally be used consciously by authors during the process of creation through commentaries, references and allusions, as well as in texts that required reinterpretation [19]. Similarly, *Sarah Dillon* [20] carries out a detailed analysis of the concept, showing not only its history from ancient times to the present day, but also shows the palimpsest as a process of text layering and thus the complexity of its interpretation, when the basic meanings fade away along with the changing contexts, and other meanings are revealed.

The term palimpsest is particularly appropriate when referring to places where material traces of human past activity overlap, creating a distinctive layered composite, revealing a meeting of many centuries of history in a single region. Such layering is clear in towns with mediaeval or ancient origins, or in individual buildings, where the variety of forms, materials or construction systems become the key to comprehending the history of the building.

One of the pioneers of using the concept of palimpsest as a key to making sense of the results of research being undertaken was the British archaeologist O.G.S. Crawford, who was already carrying out archaeological research using aerial photographs during the First World War. He used the palimpsest metaphor because he observed multiple overwriting and removal of cultural material from the areas being studied. This comparison turned out to be extraordinarily fitting for his photographs of historical landscapes [21].

However, since Crawford's time the idea behind the palimpsest metaphor has broadened considerably. Thus, the concept of palimpsest in relation to cultural heritage is based not only on the layered construction of its structure, but above all else on dynamic transformations and the creation of complex networks of associations. These connections, understood as the relationship between events taking place in time, and also between the actors engaged in these events, result each time in changes in the cultural material, something which we call 'heritage' [22].

The palimpsest metaphor, understood on the one hand as the blurring and overwriting of meanings, and on the other, the extraction and re-reading of previous layers, is a perfect model for the interpretation of processes taking place within the cultural and symbolic spheres of frontier lands. This theme is taken up by authors such as *N. Kinossian and U. Wrakberg* [23] who write about the palimpsests of the coastal area located in today's Lithuania (north-eastern Europe on the Baltic Sea) with its main urban center of Klaipeda. This region has successively belonged to the Polish Crown and Grand Duchy of Lithuania (15th-17th centuries), Prussia (18th-19th centuries), after the First World War to independent Lithuania, during the Second World War to the Third Reich, and after 1945 constituted an area within one of the Soviet

republics of the USSR. After 1990 it belonged to the Republic of Lithuania again. The authors focus on analysis of the transformations of city urbanization and the observed influences in this respect over the course of the 20th century, as well as concentrating on the changes in the aesthetics, importance and symbolism of the city. The authors emphasize that the palimpsest has become an excellent model and tool for the recognition of border areas not only in economic and social terms, but also in terms of the layers of cultural heritage and the reading of the city's memory capes [23].

The palimpsest metaphor makes us conscious of, and sensitizes us to, the complexity of phenomena in culture and teaches us humility in respect of the historical processes to which we have become heirs, and the acceptance of the polyphony of phenomena. *Veronika Della Dora* [24] writes about reading places as an "(...) enormous book of memory, much more intricate than a book and much more difficult to read". Therefore, the challenge is not merely the recording and interpretation of individual layers, but also the decoding of the meanings. This takes into account the contexts of their formation, as well as a demonstration of these meanings from today's perspective, with reference not only to knowledge but also to broadly interpreted memories and their associated narratives.

### ***"Whose heritage?" – a critical approach***

As to the question of "Whose heritage?", alluded to in the previous paragraphs with reference to the relationship between the transferor and the heir, let us now try to read it from the perspective of social law and shared responsibility for the received cultural property. The classicists of monument protection at the turn of the 20th century did not perceive a social role for monuments, nor did they treat society as a partner in their protection. When observing the course of the decades-old debate on what is broadly viewed as cultural property and heritage, there is a noticeable shift towards opening up to the social community as the depositary of heritage. It is probable that such a wide-ranging look at the dynamics and essence of heritage has allowed us to make a kind of U-turn in our thinking and research in the domain of cultural heritage. More and more often during debates on heritage, postulates instigated in the international ICOMOS document of 1979, known as the Burra Charter, are invoked. Article 26 is one of those which emphasizes the direct role of the local community in the conservation and management of heritage. This document, approved for the first time in the second half of the 20th century (1979), is quoted again today and written anew, is very modern, pointing to the role of societal participation in heritage protection and in the process of raising responsibility. The charter, originally intended to embrace Australian heritage, has become a set of rules and guidelines, even a conservation philosophy, recognized and valid all over the world (The Burra Charter, 2013). However, with an eye to ultimately achieving results this new approach - which significantly surpasses the traditional concept of heritage care, requiring more work, culture, tolerance and attention from all parties involved - is worth the effort.

One of the leaders of innovative research in this field is *Laurajane Smith* [12] who formulated the concept of Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), and then undertook a constructive critique of it, revealing new research perspectives. AHD is, in her opinion, the great debate on the theme of heritage and monuments that began in the 19th century, focusing attention on aesthetic material buildings, places and landscapes. According to the author, this discourse is tainted with a fossilized way of understanding the value of culture, and the heritage itself is perceived as finite and non-renewable, subject to the exclusive care of experts and professionals, and also treated as a tool for creating and strengthening emotively conceived national pride and social divisions. This danger of placing a value on, or even manipulating, heritage, depending on utilitarian, economic, political or propaganda needs, results, among other things, from the fact - as underlined by *Brian Graham and Peter Howard* [25] - that it is always viewed and assessed from today's perspective; ergo it is always tempting to use it for specific purposes. *Laurajane Smith* [26] is critical of this approach, emphasizing that it usurps

the right to decide what is and what is not heritage, promotes a chosen vision of history and tampers with ideological arguments. Such reasoning, in the view of the author, narrows down the right of participation in the heritage to selected groups of society, thus ruling out the opportunity for a real debate on its social role.

In realizing the above views, a young generation of researchers brought about the foundation of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies in 2012, whose aim it is to criticize the official, traditional approach to the concept and handling of heritage. The postulates, as declared by the association and formulated in the form of a Manifesto, posit a critical look at the traditional concept of heritage; rejection of traditional thinking and inclusion of society in a wide range of responsibility and heritage management; the undertaking of research and interdisciplinary projects in the field of heritage management, its protection and promotion; democratization of heritage and rejection of domination by an elite in the debate on heritage; and the development of a critical approach and dialogue between researchers, institutions and local communities [27].

### **Upper Silesia as an area for research**

Upper Silesia (Latin - Silesia Superior, Polish – Górny Śląsk, Czech - Horní Slezsko, German - Oberschlesien) is a historical region, located in Central Europe. Today it lies mostly in southern Poland and partly in the north of the Czech Republic. However, the administrative divisions of the Upper Silesia region and its national affiliation have changed many times throughout history.

In the Middle Ages and in early modern times Upper Silesia was inhabited by Polish, Czech, Moravian and German peoples and also a large percentage of the local, i.e. Silesian, population. This mosaic of traditions and cultures was reflected in the spatial shaping of buildings, in tradition and also in the language [28]. People of various faiths, mainly Catholic and Protestant, but also the Jewish faith, coexisted in this area, as Jewish communities began to settle here in the 17th century. The native culture of the Upper Silesians contains Polish and German elements, as well as some influences of Czech, Moravian and Jewish cultures. This relatively harmonious coexistence of the Upper Silesian multinational mosaic was dramatically interrupted by the Second World War and its aftermath. This is described in more detail in the next subsection.

The post-war history of cultural heritage in Upper Silesia is still a current and important topic for academic research and for practical projects to protect this heritage and to educate society. As the author of many research, conservation and educational projects in this field, I am presenting my own reflections and conclusions below.

#### ***Historical context of Upper Silesia***

A study of the cultural heritage of Upper Silesia would not be possible without introducing, even in the form of a broad outline, the features of the extremely complex historical developments of the region in modern times. The region at the heart of Europe has been subject to constant changes in nationality and continuous border shifts [29].

In the Middle Ages it was under the rule of Polish princes of the Piast dynasty until the mid-14th century. After the Polish-Czech wars, which lasted until the beginning of the 16th century, Silesia was incorporated into the territory of the Austrian Habsburg monarchy in 1526. In the middle of the 18th century, owing to the Silesian wars between Austria and Prussia, Austria lost Silesia, which was then incorporated into the Kingdom of Prussia, later the German Empire. And it remained so until the end of the First World War. As a result of a deliberate Germanisation policy while within the borders of the German state, the diverse, multi-ethnic structure of Upper Silesia (Poles, Germans, Jews, Czechs and local Silesians) had been heavily dominated by German influence [30]. Economically and culturally the 18th and 19th centuries

were a period of great prosperity in the Silesian region. The rapid development of heavy industry based on local raw materials (mining and metallurgy), urban development and the growth of capital, strengthened the standing of the German state in the region and created the image of Silesia as being inextricably linked with heavy industry (Fig. 1a and b).



**Fig. 1.** Architectural palimpsest of Upper Silesia:

- a) city of Gliwice; b) city of Racibórz before the WW II (source: Archive postcards);
- c) War destruction of Gliwice; d) war destruction of Racibórz, (source: Archive materials);
- e) Postwar reconstruction of Gliwice; f) reconstruction of Racibórz;
- g) destruction of postindustrial structures of Silesia in 90s; h) destruction of Giszowiec housing estate in 70s and 80s;
- i) Jewish House of Remembrance in Gliwice; j) New Silesian Museum in Katowice. (photos e-j taken by the author)



The First World War (1914-1918) and its aftermath, which led to the disintegration of great powers, including the German Empire, and the establishment of the Weimar Republic in its place, as well as the creation of an independent Polish state, had an impact on the situation of Upper Silesia. As a result of the Treaty of Versailles, the Silesian Uprisings (1919-1921) and a plebiscite, Upper Silesia was divided between Germany and Poland [31].

Another landmark historic event was the Second World War unleashed by Nazi Germany. It brought with it devastation and victims on an unimaginable scale, systemic plundering and destruction of the cultural heritage of the countries occupied by the Nazis, and the extermination of the population. The war and its aftermath completely changed the world order, Upper Silesia included (Fig. 1c and d). By virtue of the decision of the Yalta Conference almost the whole of German Silesia was given over to Poland, which, as a result of the conference resolutions, fell under the control of the Soviet Union. As a consequence of these decisions the Polish state was transformed into the Polish People's Republic and joined the emerging bloc of communist states subordinate to the USSR. The new Polish state created by the communists was to have a system led by the working class, eliminating all traces of the previous system. The consequences of these political decisions were far-reaching. The German population and the small, scattered communities of Czech people, who had up until this time lived within Upper Silesia, were mostly forced out. Their place was taken by Poles forcibly displaced from the areas of former eastern Poland, which, as a result of the divisions decided by the Yalta Conference, found themselves within the borders of the Soviet Union.

After the end of the Second World War Upper Silesia, especially its western part, was subjected to intensive Polonisation.

The new reality of Upper Silesia after 1945 meant not only new borders and a new nationality, but also a new communist political system, an almost complete replacement of the population and strong ideological and propaganda activities. After 1945 the new historical reality of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, on whom a new socialist political system had been imposed and who were unequivocally to conform to the political and ideological dictates of the USSR, exacerbated the problem of the 'troublesome heritage of the past'. At the same time the problem was incontrovertibly resolved through the implementation of the concept of 'alien' or 'enemy' heritage. This immediately resulted in traces of the past being rapidly obliterated. It meant not only neglecting the heritage, but also destroying it and enveloping it in a hostile narrative. The wave of extermination and resettlement that swept through Poland caused a long-lasting problem of alienation, a sense of harm and loss of heritage, as well as a rejection and negation of the new reality.

### ***"Whose heritage?" and further questions about the identity of Silesia***

In the years following the Second World War Silesia, together with its spatial heritage, which according to contemporary classification was included in the so-called 'regained lands', became an extremely complex problem. On the one hand, due to the displacement of the German population, it had become 'a heritage without heirs'. On the other hand, the Polish population, who had been displaced from the territories of the former eastern borderlands of the Republic now occupied by the Soviet Union, arrived in Silesia with a deep sense of wrong done to them and a sense of loss of all their accomplishments and those of their ancestors, and a feeling of alienation towards the newly occupied regions. The 1940s and 1950s were filled with a particular kind of chaos. The war had just ended and emotions connected with it were still running high. Communist propaganda intensified. All of this firmly anchored the notion in Upper Silesia of 'alien' heritage, devoid of any value. Despite a certain stabilization in the following decades, this pejorative term continued for many years after the war and was the source of a general lack of interest in the heritage and a kind of self-absolution in respect of its progressive degradation [31].

In Silesia urban housing, along with administrative and industrial buildings and associated workers' accommodation, were all put to utilitarian use where possible. Considerations about their architectural or artistic value were not taken into account. It is worth noting that in the post-war years, as part of intensive Polonisation, the concept of 'heritage' was only applied in the region to examples relating to Polish or Piast history dating back to the Middle Ages. The 'post-German' heritage, regardless of its actual historical value, lost out on many different levels being considered by communist ideologists as 'the enemy' and alien to the working classes; 19th and 20th century neo-style buildings, as well as later modernist ones, were, at that time, not generally perceived as historical or of value. The concept of post-industrial heritage, abundant in Upper Silesia as the leading center of heavy industry in Europe since the 19th century, did not exist either.

The question of approach towards the problem of heritage after the Second World War goes hand in hand with the reconstruction, undertaken in the 1940s, 1950s and subsequent years throughout the whole of Poland, of wartime damage. The priority in this respect was, of course, the rebuilding of Warsaw, which had been almost completely destroyed by the Germans during the war. The operation under the slogan 'The whole nation is building its capital' was without doubt a passionate national undertaking. *David Lowenthal* [15] is one of the writers who stresses that the reconstruction of Warsaw was essentially a fight for the memory and defense of the national symbol. The fervor and enthusiasm of the Polish nation was rewarded in 1980 with a prestigious entry of the rebuilt Warsaw Old Town on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The key argument in favor of including Warsaw on the UNESCO list was "the will of the nation to maintain and document its identity which had been condemned to extinction" [32]. Thanks to a very well-organized construction, transportation and propaganda campaign, literally the whole country joined in the reconstruction of Warsaw. Participation in the reconstruction of the capital took various forms – assistance in carrying out the work, fundraising and social activities, as well as donation of building materials. As a consequence, buildings from other parts of the country, including many from Silesia, were often dismantled to obtain materials for the reconstruction of Warsaw.

Reconstruction of war damage in Silesia was treated as of secondary importance. It turned out to be an ideological problem and, as such, it was used for propaganda purposes. The reconstruction of the devastation in the 'regained territories', which found themselves within the borders of Poland after the war, was to play a special role by displaying, and even shaping, the national face of the architecture of these areas. The restoration doctrine prevailing in the post-war years, combined with the postulates of the style known as 'socialist realism', imposed a 'national format' on the buildings by combining classical forms with elements and details of selected historical styles characteristic of Polish architecture [33].

Many Silesian towns were rebuilt in accordance with these determinants. Of these Gliwice, Pyskowice, Racibórz, Wodzisław, Żory and Opole deserve special attention. Although the reconstruction projects drawn up by architects were on each occasion preceded by a study of the history, spatial development and typology of the town's buildings, the final style of individual buildings had to comply not with historical reality but with the requirements of conservation doctrine. Many buildings which comprised former mediaeval groupings were completely transformed in line with current guidelines (Fig. 1e and f). Regardless of how we assess this method of rebuilding Silesian towns, it should be emphasized that in most of them, thanks to the efforts of the architects, it was possible to maintain the scale and continuity of the shape of the mediaeval urban fabric. Therefore, despite changes in the appearance and details of individual buildings, these towns have retained their distinctive atmosphere to this day.

Many buildings and urban constructions, unable to conform to the 'rewritten' history of the region, suffered a much worse fate. A large number of fine villas and mansions, which had belonged to the founders and owners of large industrial plants in Silesia in German times, were

left to fall into disrepair or were demolished (Fig. 1g). Many townhouses, as well as old districts of towns and workers' estates, often of high architectural value, were pulled down. One of these districts was the picturesque mining settlement of Giszowiec, modelled on Howard's concept of a 'garden town'. It was largely demolished to make way for the construction of a housing estate of multi-storey blocks of flats made of precast large concrete slabs, the type of construction predominant during the socialist era in Poland (Fig. 1h). Finally, it is worth mentioning that since the 1990s, a time of systemic transformation, Silesia had become an arena for the liquidation of heavy industry. At that time, countless post-industrial buildings, which were not only the region's heritage forming its identity but also often examples of excellent architecture, were demolished.

### ***Birth of a new approach***

Throughout the decades since the end of the Second World War the image of Upper Silesia as an industrial region of little attraction and much environmental pollution has been reinforced. This common and also oversimplified and harmful view completely disregarded such qualities as rich cultural heritage, local traditions or prized monuments of architecture and urban planning, which past generations had left behind.

One of the reasons for the persistence of such a stereotypical image was the constant lack of an unambiguous answer to the question "Whose heritage?", that is the question of acceptance, identification and social responsibility for the cultural property. The political and social climate of the years immediately following the war was not conducive to the acceptance of the heritage. However, as more time elapsed since the war and as the society grew into the new reality, and above all as Poland transformed in the 1990s and later joined the European Union, all these factors made it possible to look more consciously at the problem of the region's heritage. At this juncture, one should cite the view presented by Professor *Ewa Chojecka* [34] in the introduction to her monograph entitled *The Art of Upper Silesia*, which, in this instance, was ground-breaking. She writes: "The model of ethnic, linguistic or cultural homogeneity has become anachronistic. Today, the polyphonic nature of historical heritage, including spatial and artistic heritage, is valued as a special quality" [34]. The author sees the value of heritage in its dynamics and polyphony which draw on the resources of various traditions. She also stresses that it is our duty, as trustees of cultural heritage, to accept, enrich and care for it.

Thus, the context of the new times, the emergence of the voice of subsequent generations of people free of the direct burden of post-war trauma and political entanglement, made it possible to look at the accumulated cultural heritage of the region as a kind of palimpsest onto which successive layers of the script are constantly overwritten. From such a perspective it was possible not only to appreciate the multivalence of heritage, but also to notice its broad European context, of which it is an integral part. This new perspective became the starting point for reflections on the issue of regard for cultural heritage as successive 'layers of memory' left in space over the course of history, and for considerations free from the temptation of subsequent reinterpretation.

### **New approach to the heritage of Upper Silesia - analysis of practical activities**

Practical activities in the field of research and heritage protection in Upper Silesia intensified markedly after 1989, when the transformation of the state system began in Poland. This was part of the process of broader political changes in Central Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. The favorable political climate which emerged at that time, giving the nations of Central and Eastern Europe a sense of independence and identity, benefitted the development of regional awareness and contributed to interest in heritage [35]. Various types of activity were undertaken in Upper Silesia in this area - academic research, educational and popularizing activities relating to the cultural heritage of the region and social

activity in this area, as well as investment in the protection of historical buildings and renovation of degraded buildings and areas of historical and architectural value.

### ***Academic research***

Academic research on the region did exist at universities in the Silesian Voivodeship in the post-war period but was selective. We should mention, *inter alia*, studies in the field of art and architecture, published until the 1990s, which mainly covered the mediaeval, renaissance, and baroque periods [36]. Research on later heritage of Upper Silesia, including that of the 19th and 20th centuries, flourished after 1990.

In 1992 the Upper Silesia Cultural Heritage Centre was established in Katowice, the capital of the Silesian Voivodeship, with the aim of documenting material, spiritual and spatial assets belonging to the entire cultural heritage of the region. The Centre has undertaken and published almost five hundred academic studies and publications, including architectural and conservation studies in the interests of protection of cultural property. In 2016 the Centre became the Regional Institute of Culture which continues and develops research on heritage.

In addition, the Silesian Library, with its status of an academic institution, is an important research center. It includes two academic institutes which conduct extensive work on the region's heritage. These are the Institute of Regional Research (established 2011) and the Institute of Architecture Documentation (established 2018). The latter amasses archival collections, develops and popularizes them. Research is also being carried out at two major universities in the region, the Silesian University of Technology and the Silesian University in Katowice. The scope of research areas has been significantly expanded to include such fields as architecture and urban planning of the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as post-industrial heritage, neither of which was previously of interest. The ground-breaking publications in this area include the above-mentioned work by Professor *Ewa Chojecka* [32], where the region's heritage is presented as a polyphony of various influences and artistic phenomena. Over the last twenty years a huge number of master's, doctoral and postdoctoral theses on the heritage of Silesia have been written at the aforementioned universities, as the subject matter has become important and topical, and also owing to the significant dearth of studies in this field and the urgent need to protect the existing historical elements. Of the more important publications in the field of a comprehensive approach to the cultural heritage of the region one should mention the book entitled *Local Architecture Heritage in the Integrated Approach: research - protection - education* [37].

Museums are also important research centers. The largest in the region is the Silesian Museum which conducts extensive research, undertakes mediation and publishes widely. In 2015 the Silesian Museum moved to a new headquarters in the renovated buildings of the former Katowice Coal Mine. The Museum has thus become a new symbol of the region, showing that care for the post-industrial heritage is currently one of the top priorities (Fig. 1j). The Upper Silesian Jewish House of Remembrance, a branch of the Museum in Gliwice, is also an important research and exhibition center. It was established in 2015 in a renovated former pre-funeral home at the Jewish cemetery in Gliwice. The creation of the House of Remembrance was a turning point in the efforts to promote Jewish heritage in Silesia (Fig. 1i).

### ***Educational and popularizing activities***

The development of academic research and promotional activities contributed to the extensive interest in the cultural heritage of the region. This resulted in outstanding educational and popularizing initiatives, often on a national or even international scale.

The main events in this area include the European Heritage Days organized by all member states of the Council of Europe. Poland began actively organizing this event in 1993. The aim of this annual event is the concept of a broadly defined historical and cultural education, promoting the diversity of the regional cultural heritage and highlighting the common roots of European culture. Heritage Days are held in all Upper Silesian towns. They

perfectly bring out the multicultural palimpsest of the region's heritage. The event is always organized by local authorities, cultural institutions, institutes of higher education, community associations and volunteers involved in the promotion and protection of heritage (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** Educational and popularising activities:

- a) Post industrial structures visited during "Industriada";
- b) Historical Silver Mine in Tarnowskie Góry - UNESCO Heritage;
- c) Educational workshops for children and local communities in Silesia;
- d) European Heritage Days - guided tour in Gliwice. (Photo by the author)

An important event on the cultural map of the region is also the annual ‘Long Night of Museums’ which has taken place in Poland since 2003, following in the footsteps of the European initiative as ‘Lange Nacht der Museen’ in Berlin or ‘Nuit Blanche’ in Paris.

The most important initiatives connected with post-industrial heritage include the launch of the Route of Industrial Heritage of the Silesian Voivodeship in 2006. It includes forty-three buildings associated with the heritage of heavy industry in Upper Silesia. Examples of these are the historical Coal Mines of Guido and Queen Louise in Zabrze, the Historical Silver Mine in Tarnowskie Góry, the Szombierki Combined Heat and Power Plant, breweries in Tychy and Żywiec, historical Silesian workers' housing estates, and many others. In 2010 the Silesian Route of Industrial Heritage was added to the prestigious European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH) network and is currently one of thirteen European regional routes and the only one in Central and Eastern Europe.

An annual festival of post-industrial heritage culture, the ‘Industriada’, is organized as a feature of the Route. During the festival all the buildings included in the Route of Industrial Heritage and many accompanying facilities are shown off to their best. The local authorities within the Silesian Voivodeship are responsible for the organisation of the festival (Fig. 2a). The idea of organizing the festival is modelled on the ‘ExtraSchicht’ event which has taken place in the post-industrial Ruhr Coal Basin in Germany since 2003 [38].

Post-industrial heritage and associated cultural and educational activities have become popular tourist attractions in the last twenty years and are a source of pride for the region's inhabitants, attracting visitors from all over the country and from abroad. This short overview of flagship activities relating to cultural heritage does not exhaust the long list of events and educational initiatives organized in the Upper Silesia region by municipal museums, universities, schools, associations and community organizers of activities. It is important to emphasize the huge popularity of these events and the extraordinary active participation of local communities (Fig. 2).

#### ***Engagement of associations and social organizations***

Social engagement in the area of heritage protection, promotion and education is very clearly visible in our region today. Like the types of activity alluded to above, it has intensified over the last twenty years. This should be attributed to an increase in social awareness of the value and the role of local heritage. The engagement manifests itself in many forms. These primarily include the formation of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) acting in the interests of heritage, the engagement of local cultural organizers and social guardians of monuments, and also the many spontaneous actions undertaken by residents to save buildings threatened with destruction or demolition.

There are currently dozens of associations in Upper Silesia whose aim it is to educate, promote and protect heritage. Their activities are usually focused on specific urban areas e.g. ‘Metamorphoses of Gliwice’ and ‘Fans of Żory Town Association’ or on selected buildings e.g. ‘Castellum’ Society of Friends of Chudów Castle. The scale of the projects undertaken by these organizations varies and is dependent on the adopted objectives. All these activities have a huge social impact. The activities of ‘Fans of Tarnowskie Góry Region Association’ are undoubtedly some of the most outstanding. The association, founded in the 1950s, is one of the oldest non-governmental organizations in post-war Poland. The enormous commitment of the association's members in their work in the interests of the region's heritage has led to the annual planning of the historical ‘Days of the Miners’ festival in Tarnowskie Góry, which represents the tradition of silver and lead mining in this town dating back to the 13th century. Members of the association, working alongside experts and public institutions, are actively engaged in the preservation and protection of the post-mining heritage of the Tarnowskie Góry region (Fig 2b). Undoubtedly, the Association's greatest achievement, and the result of over a dozen years of hard work, is that in 2017 the Historical Silver Mine and a group of twenty-eight

silver mining facilities in Tarnowskie Góry were entered onto the UNESCO World Heritage List [39]. The acquisition of such a prestigious entry at the bidding of a mere social association should be viewed as a phenomenon of global proportions.

The work of local organizers of cultural activity and social guardians of monuments also plays a very significant role in the interests of heritage. Pursuant to the new Protection and Preservation of Monuments Act in Poland [40], any individual who has relevant knowledge in this field, or is a legal entity or other organizational unit without legal personality, may apply to acquire rights of social guardianship of monuments. The request is made by submitting an application to the Voivodeship Office for the Protection of Monuments, outlining a description of implemented and planned activities. The role of the social guardian of monuments is to supplement the operations of specialist services. The guardian has the authority to initiate activities pertaining to the protection of cultural property, e.g. by entering it onto the list of buildings protected by law, or by directly saving a historical building and stimulating interest in cultural heritage. The role of social guardians of monuments is continuously growing, as are their numbers.

The spontaneous actions of local communities also play a very important role. These are often interventionist by nature, as for example the large-scale protests between 2006 and 2008 against the construction of a fast-moving road - Central Dual Carriageway, through the historical city center of Gliwice; against the closing down of the historical tram line in Gliwice in 2009; defending the modernist style train station in Katowice against demolition in 2010; or in defense of the historical lime tree avenues in Gliwice in 2013, and many other such protests [41]. They were directed against the inertia of the city authorities and conservation institutions in the face of improper investment choices. Sadly, owing to the pressure levied by investors, the local communities do not always meet with success, but they undoubtedly demonstrate their strength and growing civic awareness and prove that the heritage of the region is perceived by residents as a common asset for which they feel responsible.

#### ***Investment activity and revitalization of buildings***

The development of academic research, the implementation of numerous educational projects and social programmes have led to a fundamental change in attitudes and approach to cultural heritage in Silesia in the new economic and political reality. The systemic post-1989 transformation in Poland has brought about fundamental changes in the functioning of the economy and moved it closer to that of Western European countries. This was ultimately capped with Poland's accession to the European Union, opening up new prospects for the funding of structural projects.

There is a perceptible increase in interest from both public and private investors in the protection, modernization and adaptation of historical buildings. Owing to ever increasing knowledge about the value of the architectural and urban substance of a region and the correct methods of approach when tackling conservation, modernization and adaptation to create new regenerative uses it has been possible to save many valuable historical edifices. These include sacred and public buildings, mansions and accompanying parklands belonging to former Silesian industrialists, and residential buildings from the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Thanks to the intensification of the efforts of local authorities of the Silesian Voivodeship to further save post-industrial heritage, many buildings have been revitalized and adapted to new uses. The restructuring processes within the coal mining and metallurgy industries, begun in the 1990s, have resulted in the liquidation of a significant number of plants - over 70% [42]. Abandoned post-industrial buildings, often of high historical value, have been subject to degradation or demolition. European Union directives currently in force require member states to take action in respect of degraded areas, especially those with a high cultural value, with a view to restoring to them a social use and increasing their investment and tourist attractiveness [43].

## Discussions

Discussing the results will demonstrate that the research objectives have been accomplished by answering the research questions originally posed. The final conclusions will show the possibilities of generalizing the research results and applying them in a more universal way.

### *Appropriateness of adopting the palimpsest concept in the conducted research*

The adopted concept of a palimpsest in relation to the layered composition of cultural heritage in Upper Silesia, as well as in other regions with a long and complex history, is fully justified. Cultural layers have overlapped each other over a long period of time. Thus, to use a different model, a mosaic for instance, to illustrate the structure of Silesian heritage would prove to be a complete misunderstanding of the subject.

The Silesian palimpsest is almost a classic example of cultural stratification, where almost every layer has been formed under different national, political, social and civilizational conditions. Research has shown that deciphering and accepting such a heritage palimpsest over the many stages of development has proved to be a challenge and a source of conflict. Selective or manipulated interpretations and elimination of inconvenient historical layers from the overall heritage of the Silesian region have surfaced many times over the years. The most dramatic of these occurred in the years after the Second World War. Using Upper Silesia as an example, the process of redefining the heritage palimpsest in a time frame is presented in the diagram below (Fig. 3).

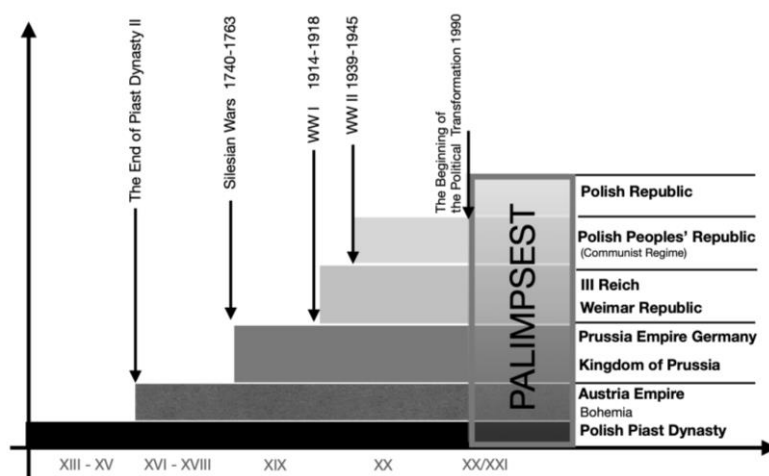


Fig. 3. The heritage palimpsest of Upper Silesia region

### *Factors determining the process of redefining the concept of heritage in problematic regions*

From the analysis undertaken of Upper Silesia region's heritage, one can see that the process of redefining the concept of heritage is clearly linked to, and conditioned by, such factors as:

- Time scale
- Changing the approach to the subject of heritage and memorial sites
- Changing the political and ideological context and its accompanying narrative

The brief period of time since the events of the Second World War, the strong emotions and the traumatic experiences to which nations and communities had been subjected, as well as



the political context of the communist system and accompanying ideology, led to the emergence of the concept of an 'alien' or 'enemy' heritage in Upper Silesia. Redefining this concept and viewing the palimpsest of cultural phenomena as a polyphony of assets was a difficult and complex process. It required a long period of time during which emotions gradually cooled. It also led to the formation of a new generation of heritage trustees and fresh local memory linked to the heritage itself. Local memory is associated with a specific group of people - the local community - permanently bound to a territory (locum). Local memory is a key point of reference for cultural heritage. An excellent theoretical model in this regard is the concept of 'memorial sites' (lieux de mémoire), introduced in the mid-1980s by the French researcher Pierre Nora. In his view, memorial sites are not only places in a physical sense, but they are also the events, the characters and symbols which, by survival through individual or collective memory, can contribute to building a common heritage and identity [44]. That is why it is so difficult to create a platform for a common dialogue within communities which have experienced the trauma of war, and why the time elapsed and emergence of new generations of inhabitants can support the process of working through these problems.

Another key factor which enabled a redefinition of the concept of heritage in Upper Silesia was the transformation of the political system in Poland, i.e. the fall of communism and the accession of our country to the community of democratic European countries. This moment marked the beginning of a new perspective and a new narrative around cultural heritage. At that time, the existing 'alien heritage' was also mentally absorbed within the totality of the phenomena, creating an indivisible cultural palimpsest. Narrative is crucial when interpreting heritage, especially heritage that is often described as difficult or unwanted. When the time comes to face it, one requires a commentary which explains, familiarizes and brings out intrinsic values [45]. Memory and narration are therefore linked as soon as they begin to relate to the matters being described and which are embedded on a common timeline. Narration is a tool that can assist in the resolution of problems relating to a complex cultural heritage, but it can also intensify conflicts, which was clearly visible in Silesia in the immediate post-war period. The narrative manifests itself in various dimensions of scale: familial, local, public; in various spheres: political, religious, cultural, commercial, and in various forms: official and 'whispered'. Contradictory streams of narratives colliding with each other often force the listener to have to make a choice, especially difficult in a situation where reliable information is lacking [46]. The Dutch historiographic theorist and researcher of the problems related to narration, *Frank R. Ankersmit* [47], adopts the view that narration cannot be separated from interpretation. He also stresses that the study of historical narrative cannot become the basis for the study of facts, as it is interpretative and not descriptive material. Therefore, the development of academic research, the collection of source materials and a thorough analysis of cultural heritage resources form the basis for its valorization.

***Factors supporting the process of heritage acceptance and protection and the main actors in this process***

The aforementioned factors transpired to be fundamental and conditioned the possibility of beginning the process of redefining the concept and subject of cultural heritage in the studied area of Upper Silesia. One can, however, point to a whole list of factors which develop and support this process. Of these, the following are the most important:

- Development of interdisciplinary research;
- Universal education and the promotion of heritage;
- Galvanization of local authorities as well as public and local government institutions
- Galvanization of local community and private stakeholders.

Activities which support the process of heritage protection can be divided into two main groups, mutually complementing and supplementing each other. The first group is the raising of

the level of knowledge through academic research and its popularization. Research is the basis for the popularization of knowledge at a high substantive level, leading to an increase in social awareness of cultural heritage and its worth. Social awareness of its worth seems to be the key to building a positive image of a place, of its acceptance and sense of identity. It conditions the activities of the second group, which embraces all the activities undertaken by public authorities and institutions as well as those undertaken by private stakeholders, non-governmental organizations and the local community.

Developing this awareness, however, requires work and the involvement of parties from all sides. In this respect a sage and well-managed education plays a fundamental role [48]. The concept of education rooted in Enlightenment thinking carries with it a crystallized concept of the process of education and development of an individual based on the values of humanism and history. The debate on the approach to a formative and educational process, although deeply rooted in tradition, must be open to the polyphony of assets when dealing with complex processes of historical stratification of cultural heritage [49]. Where places are saturated with a diversity of material heritage, but also with the memories stored by people, a deciphering and acceptance of a palimpsest is never an easy or clear-cut process. Numerous examples demonstrate how history and cultural heritage can play a constructive role in the process of building social capital and creating social bonds, although many problems concerning an acceptance of the past and the definition of identity often remain to be overcome [50]. The term 'cultural heritage' nowadays refers to those objects, buildings and values with which individuals or groups of people have been endowed as heritage, but also to their mindful co-creation by society through identification and conscious care [51].

Heritage and its cultural assets represent a great potential for integrating a community. These are assets worth nurturing, especially nowadays when heritage and memorial sites continue to be exploited by politicians and ideologists [52]. Awareness and social memory may turn out to be the only effective protection of heritage against manipulation, as it often becomes a hostage in potential conflicts between the 'official' version of history and imposed concepts of national identity, and local memory and a local sense of identity [53].

As demonstrated, using the Silesian region as an example, this process lasted over half a century and certainly cannot be considered as finished. At present, however, very positive changes can be observed in this domain: the activeness of non-governmental organizations, local leaders and the interest shown by, and involvement of, local communities seem to set new standards in social life. Such attitudes, combined with increased awareness, contribute to the active care and protection of heritage. The active participation of organizers of cultural activity from academia and of experts has a great influence in the effectiveness of social and popularizing activities relating to heritage issues. This is clearly confirmed by the results of the research undertaken but is also endorsed by the many voiced opinions of researchers around the world. A local community, whose concepts are changeable and inconsistent, needs mindful support and substantive guidance [51].

A key factor bolstering the care and promotion of cultural heritage is the galvanization into action of local authorities, public and local government institutions, as well as the adaptation of the legal protection system combined with finding a solution for the means of funding activities. The effectiveness of activities is impossible without the synergistic actions of all stakeholders, as illustrated in the diagram below (Fig. 4).

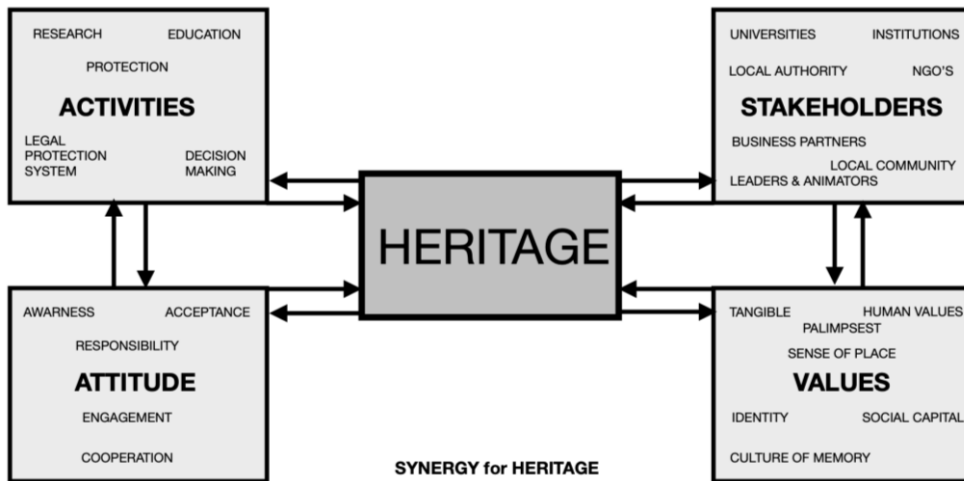


Fig. 4. The synergistic actions of all stakeholders of heritage

## Conclusions

Heritage, as a multilayering of the produce of cultures, arises over time and forms the structure of a palimpsest. In the context of the process of cultural property transference, heritage requires predecessors and successors who constitute the humanistic foundation for the continuation of inheritance. Without the involvement of the human (social) factor and the values resulting from it, inheritance cannot be fully discussed, but only the material objects with their specific characteristics can be taken into consideration. The humanist element has equal status in relation to the material values of the heritage as a whole. Both remain in a mutual relationship, which is often complex, difficult and even conflicting.

Resolving conflicts amassed through the problems of heritage is a process that requires a long time and a favorable political and social climate, plus the conscious interaction of many factors. Undoubtedly, one of these is the involvement of the local community as a key beneficiary to the cultural heritage. Engagement can increase the likelihood of developing a constructive dialogue and building a shared narrative [54]. However, it should be emphasized that only the mindful and integrated engagement of all stakeholders - the local community, local authorities, public factors, and academic, institutional and business communities - can ensure full efficacy of the measures taken to ensure acceptance of the complexity of heritage, its protection, comprehensive exploitation and further development. Attempting to protect heritage on the basis of public enthusiasm alone will probably remain a utopian dream, just as investment in sites and monuments that will not be cared for and accepted by local residents may turn out to be a wasted effort.

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