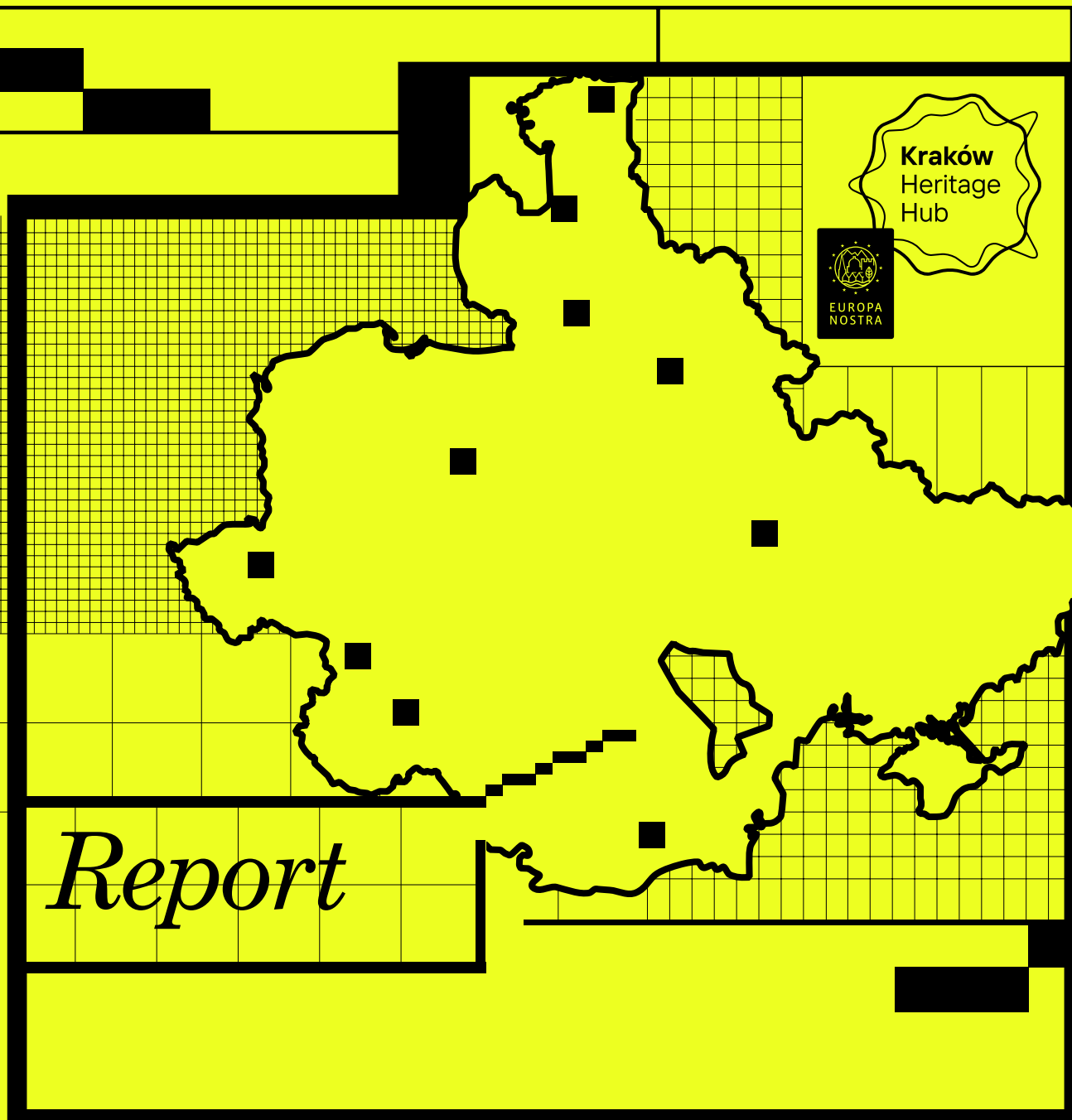


MAPPING OF THE CENTRAL

AND EASTERN EUROPEAN

HERITAGE SECTOR

NON-GOVERNMENTAL



MAPPING OF THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN NON-GOVERNMENTAL HERITAGE SECTOR

Report

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Kraków 2025



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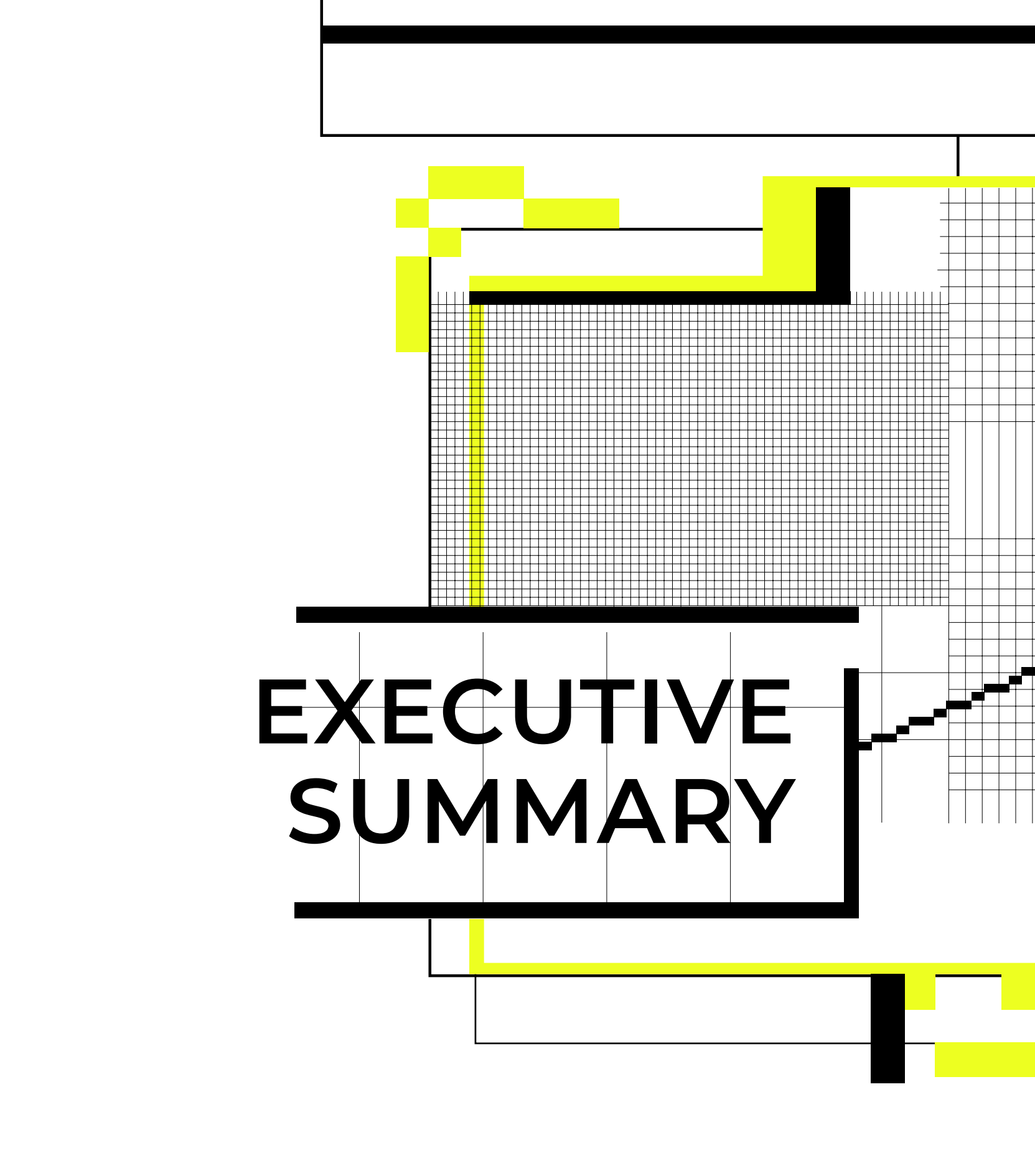
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the first comprehensive mapping of the non-governmental heritage sector in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), conducted between November 2023 and March 2025, which covers ten countries: Belarus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine. It was prepared by the Europa Nostra Heritage Hub for Central and Eastern Europe in Kraków, in cooperation with Centrum Cyfrowe in Warsaw, as part of the broader European Heritage Hub initiative funded by the European Union.

The research project responds to a pressing knowledge gap: despite the growing visibility of heritage NGOs and their essential contribution to safeguarding, interpreting, and reimagining Europe's diverse cultural and natural heritage, no systematic comparative study has, until now, attempted to map this vibrant sector across the CEE region. The findings are exploratory but robust, drawing on a carefully designed and triangulated methodology combining desk research, quantitative data analysis, an online survey completed by 290 NGOs, 18 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, and 21 group discussions ("roundtables") with six to eight practitioners in each country conducted throughout 2024. Ten country facilitators supported the data collection.

The study estimates that approximately 33,500 non-governmental organisations across the region are engaged in heritage-related activities. For the purposes of the research they were defined as follows:

A multidimensional civil steward of heritage; a non-governmental organisation in the field of heritage whose activities make an important contribution to the protection, management, and promotion of cultural and natural heritage, tangible, intangible and digital, on a local, national, international, or intercultural level. Its multifaceted efforts extend across various domains, from restoration and documentation, research, education, and capacity building, developing awareness of heritage values, and guarding of cultural identity, (re-)interpreting and using heritage, engaging and empowering communities to advocacy, broking, and rallying support for heritage policy changes.

These organisations range from small, volunteer-driven initiatives rooted in local traditions and community memory, to professionalised NGOs managing major restoration projects, archives, or educational programmes. While the sector's diversity is a strength, it also contributes to its institutional invisibility, as there is no common legal or statistical framework for identifying and supporting heritage-focused NGOs in most national contexts.

Most organisations are formally registered as associations or foundations, though informal citizen initiatives, church-affiliated groups, rural women's circles, and other hybrid entities are also significant actors. The NGOs operate across a broad spectrum of heritage domains, with cultural heritage dominating (including tangible, intangible, and digital forms), while natural heritage is less frequently cited. Activities span restoration, education, research, advocacy, community engagement, and the safeguarding of local traditions and memory.

A Fragmented but Dynamic Sector

Motivations Rooted in Values and Community

The research reveals a sector animated by strong intrinsic motivations. Survey respondents pointed to identity, community well-being, and knowledge-sharing as their main drivers. Economic incentives, by contrast, play a minimal role. The voices captured in interviews and roundtables repeatedly emphasised the sense of purpose, fulfilment, and emotional commitment that underpins this work. Many participants described their organisations as “spaces of care” for heritage, community, and social cohesion – despite limited recognition and precarious funding.

Volunteers form the backbone of the sector. Most NGOs operate with few or no paid staff, and rely heavily on voluntary contributions. While this fosters community ownership and resilience, it also presents significant challenges in terms of sustainability, continuity, and the risk of burnout – especially among younger or newer entrants to the field. Furthermore, there is a perceived lack of recognition and support from both governmental bodies and the public, which affects their ability to advocate for heritage preservation effectively.

Funding: A Fragile Ecosystem

Access to financial resources varies widely across the region but is universally fragile. Public grants – primarily from national or local governments – form the core of most NGOs’ funding portfolios. Private donations, membership fees, and occasional commercial activities (such as publications, guided tours, or workshops) also contribute. However, dependence on short-term project funding, a lack of core financing, and the absence of philanthropic cultures (a legacy of the communist regimes across the region) or supportive fiscal frameworks in many countries all contribute to systemic insecurity.

Many NGOs report difficulties accessing EU or international funds due to administrative burdens, lack of co-financing, or language and capacity barriers. Furthermore, recent political developments in some countries have introduced additional obstacles, including attempts to restrict access to foreign funding, stigmatisation of civic activism, or reduced transparency in public grant allocation.

Insufficient Recognition

A major problem of the heritage sector turns out to be insufficient recognition on behalf of authorities, as well as society in a broader sense. Raising awareness of the role of heritage professionals is a key to address a number of challenges, including funding, state support and bureaucratic constraints. Work in the NGO heritage sector is far too often considered an unpaid mission, both by representatives of the sector and surrounding *milieux*.

Challenge for Balance and Wellbeing

Burnout is the most widespread word that was mentioned in interviews and discussions. Challenges and constraints of working in the sector, a daily struggle for survival and solving problems which are a common hinderance to programme activities, very often result in a loss of energy and impetus, increasing self-doubt in any attempts at meaning and success. Stress management and learning to keep a balance between work and private life only partly addresses the problem; any lasting change of the situation is only possible when the heritage sector will gain wider recognition across the board.

Representatives of the heritage sector across the researched countries mention a lack of or insufficient collaboration: between the NGOs themselves as well as with institutions and private sector. They stay wrapped within their own organisations and environments, rather than reach out. Among the reasons for the trend is an overload of work and the necessity to look for new funding opportunities which could financially secure their existence. Networking, in turn, could facilitate programme activities and organisation of work.

The political and legal environment for NGOs varies considerably across the region. In countries such as Belarus and, to a lesser extent, Hungary and Slovakia, the civic space has narrowed significantly in recent years, with legal restrictions, bureaucratic harassment, and politicised discourse undermining the work of many independent organisations. In Belarus, following a widespread crackdown in 2021, many NGOs were forcibly dissolved, and heritage professionals continue to face criminalisation, exile, or a need to operate underground.

In Ukraine, the ongoing war has dramatically reshaped the sector’s role. NGOs have emerged as key actors in the emergency protection of cultural heritage, documentation of damage, and coordination of international support. However, their work is often hampered by security risks, corruption, and limited institutional backing from public authorities. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian heritage NGO sector demonstrates a remarkable agility and high level of trust within professional communities.

Other countries in the region – particularly in the Baltics and parts of Central Europe – offer relatively more constructive environments, yet NGOs still struggle with under-recognition, underfunding, and administrative burdens.

The report explores how heritage NGOs engage with the so-called “triple transformation” (social, digital, and green), a concept promoted at EU and OECD levels. The mapping finds that:

- Social transformation is central to many NGOs’ missions, particularly those working with memory, inclusion, and community-based heritage.
- Digital transformation remains uneven, with limited resources and skills acting as barriers, though some organisations have made progress in digitisation and virtual outreach activities.
- Green transformation is the least developed area. Although environmental concerns are increasingly recognised, few heritage NGOs are systematically integrating sustainability into their core missions or operations.

These findings point to an urgent need for capacity-building, exchange of best practices, and policy support to ensure the sector can actively contribute to Europe’s broader transformation agendas.

Towards Collaboration

Challenges of Operating in a Politically Volatile Landscape

The Triple Transformation: Social, Digital, and Green

***Towards a Strategic
Agenda for Support***

The report concludes with a diagnosis of key needs and strategic directions for strengthening the heritage NGO sector in the CEE region:

1. Recognition – Heritage NGOs must be recognised as essential actors in both cultural policy and civil society development.
2. Sustainable funding – More flexible and long-term funding mechanisms are necessary to support organisational stability and innovation.
3. Wellbeing and burnout prevention – Structural investment is needed in the care, training, and professional development of heritage workers.
4. Generational renewal – Addressing leadership transitions and attracting younger generations are critical for sectoral continuity.
5. Capacity building – Training, mentoring, and knowledge exchange at national and transnational levels can foster innovation and resilience.
6. Support for implementation – Beyond ideas, NGOs need technical assistance and organisational infrastructure to translate vision into practice.

***A Foundation for
Future Research and
Action***

While the study is exploratory in nature and based on a pilot-scale methodology, it offers the most comprehensive snapshot to date of the heritage NGO landscape in Central and Eastern Europe. It highlights both the sector’s resilience and the structural vulnerabilities it faces.

Importantly, the report lays a foundation for future research and policy-making. It calls for the development of more harmonised and transparent data collection across the region, the establishment of regional and thematic networks, and increased visibility for heritage NGOs within the European civil society ecosystem.

In doing so, it positions the Europa Nostra Heritage Hub in Kraków as a catalyst for greater regional cooperation and a stronger voice for the many dedicated individuals and organisations working to ensure that heritage remains a living, inclusive, and transformative force in Central and Eastern Europe.

Introduction

The non-governmental sector engaged in the protection, access and promotion of heritage in Central and Eastern Europe remains significantly under-researched. To date, there has been no comprehensive study that maps the size of this sector, the types of activities it undertakes, or the challenges it faces across different national contexts. Yet such knowledge is essential: not only for understanding the diversity and dynamism of civil society actors in the heritage field, but also for shaping effective support, cooperation, and policy-making at the European level.

For Europa Nostra to fulfil its mission as the voice of heritage organisations across the continent, and for the Europa Nostra Heritage Hub in Kraków to effectively support and connect actors from the Central and Eastern European region, a deeper, evidence-based understanding of the heritage NGO landscape is indispensable.

This report presents the results of a pilot project aimed at mapping the heritage NGO sector in ten countries of the region – Belarus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. The project served as a pilot and tested a methodology, which may be further refined and expanded for application in other parts of Europe. Through a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods (Chapter 1) – including desk research, statistical data collection, an online survey, interviews, and group panel discussions – the study provides a multidimensional view of the sector.

After outlining the wider context of non-governmental sector functioning in the region (Chapter 2), key topics explored in the report include: the estimated size of the heritage NGO sector, its main fields of interest, the types of activities it engages in (Chapter 3), as well as the challenges and needs expressed by organisations (Chapter 4). Special attention was also given to the sector’s attitudes toward the so-called “triple transformation” (Chapter 5) – social, digital, and environmental changes – broadly discussed at the EU and OECD level and included in the sphere of interest of the European Heritage Hub consortium led by Europa Nostra, which is shaping broader civil society and cultural policy contexts across Europe. Finally, Chapter 6 presents a diagnosis of the situation of the non-governmental sector in the region together with suggestions for strengthening the effectiveness of their work, their visibility and role in heritage protection and promotion.

While the findings are exploratory and based on a pilot-scale methodology, they offer invaluable insights into a vibrant but often overlooked part of the European heritage landscape – and they lay the groundwork for more systematic, comparative research in the future.



1. METHODOLOGY

1.1

Definitions

1.1.1

Heritage definition adopted for the project

There is no one universal definition of heritage. However, there is a global consensus that heritage meanings, values, and uses are ever evolving and based especially on recognising the significance of cultural and natural heritage for humanity. This aspect is crucial for the Faro Convention of 2005, which emphasises the need to define heritage in response to major societal changes. Article 2 of the Convention explains heritage 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.”¹ For the purposes of this project, we have adopted this relatively open concept of heritage that has no temporal limits (as it is not simply about the past, but a vital element of the present and future), neither in form nor manifestation. It contains both the tangible and intangible, natural and cultural, as well as the movable and immovable attributes of communities. Understood more as a set of dynamic socio-cultural processes, it involves continual (re-)creation and transformation. Furthermore, we follow the three components of the European Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century: social (citizenship participation and participatory governance); sustainable development (territorial and economic), and; knowledge and education (covering awareness raising, training, and research). These approaches create new ways to ensure heritage resilience and sustainability, recognising that these are not simply the preoccupations of experts and a matter for top-down, state-led actions, but rather emphasise the need for a a bottom-up, people driven approach.

1.1.2

Heritage NGO definition

A multidimensional civil steward of heritage; a non-governmental organisation in the field of heritage whose activities make an important contribution to the protection, management, and promotion of cultural and natural heritage, tangible, intangible and digital, on a local, national, international, or intercultural level. Its multifaceted efforts extend across various domains, from restoration and documentation, research, education, and capacity building, developing heritage values awareness, and guarding of cultural identity, (re-)interpreting and using heritage, engaging and empowering communities to advocacy, brokering, and rallying support for heritage policy changes.

1.2

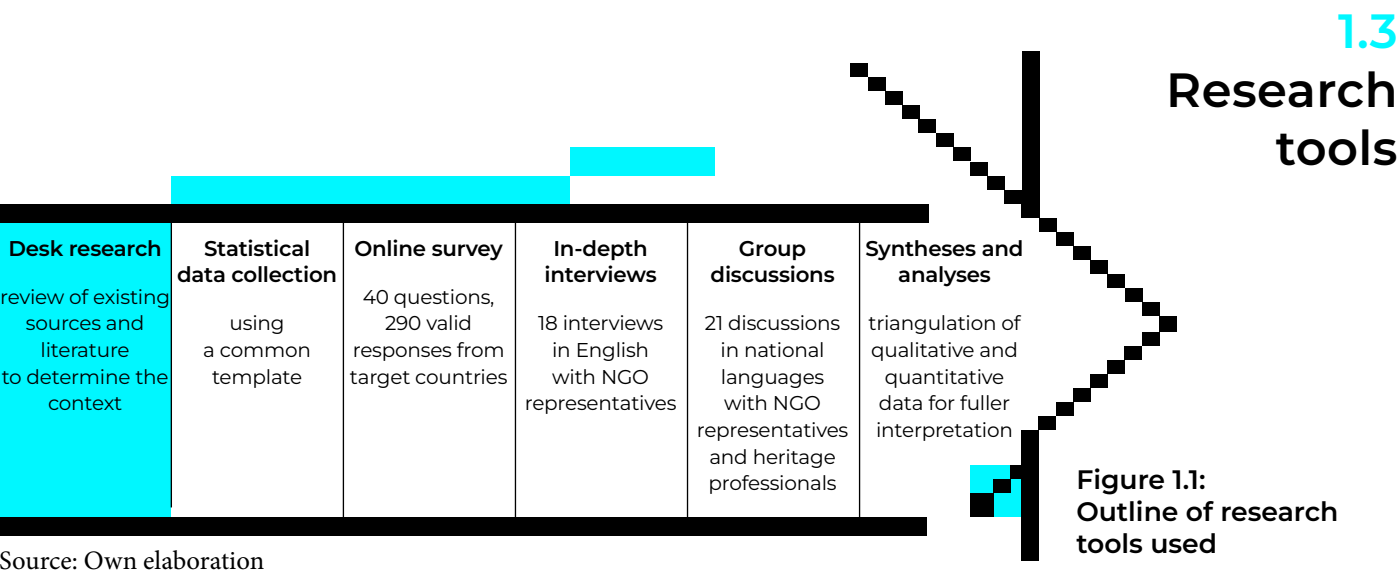
Territorial scope

The geographical scope of the mapping encompasses Central and Eastern Europe (Belarus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine) falling under the scope of the Europa Nostra Heritage Hub in for Central and Eastern Europe’s activities, and Romania as part of the former Communist bloc, sharing a similar history and consequences for the non-governmental sector.

¹ Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society. Faro, 27.10.2005 Council of Europe Treaty Series – No. 199.

Heritage is a part of our cultural DNA. It tells us who we were and who we are today.

Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe.



Source: Own elaboration

The study employed a triangulated research design, combining multiple methods to increase the credibility and validity of findings related to the heritage NGO sector in Central and Eastern Europe. The methodological framework integrated desk research, statistical data analysis, an online survey, in-depth interviews, and group panel discussions conducted in each participating country. Combined, the mixed-method approach facilitated the development of a multidimensional understanding of the sector, despite the inherent limitations of a pilot study (see Figure 1.1).

Given the linguistic and contextual diversity across the region, data collection was supported by national facilitators – one expert per country (two experts for Ukraine), with experience in both the heritage and NGO sectors. Facilitators were responsible for collecting national-level statistical data, organising group panel discussions with heritage professionals from diverse backgrounds and regions, and selecting interview participants for qualitative research purposes. The criteria for selecting group panel-discussion participants emphasised diversity in organisational types, heritage domains, and geographic distribution, while interviews targeted individuals with expert knowledge of the sector.

The online survey, consisting of 40 questions (including single-choice, multiple-choice, and open-ended types), was available in ten national languages and conducted between February and October 2024 using Microsoft Forms. A total of 573 responses were collected, of which 308 came from NGOs and 290 from NGOs operating in the target countries. The final analytical sample included 290 entities, which – against an estimated population (see information on statistical analysis of the heritage NGO sector’s size) of 33,500 heritage NGOs in the region – yields a margin of error of approximately 5.6% at a 95% confidence level. Although this margin slightly

1.4

Facilitators

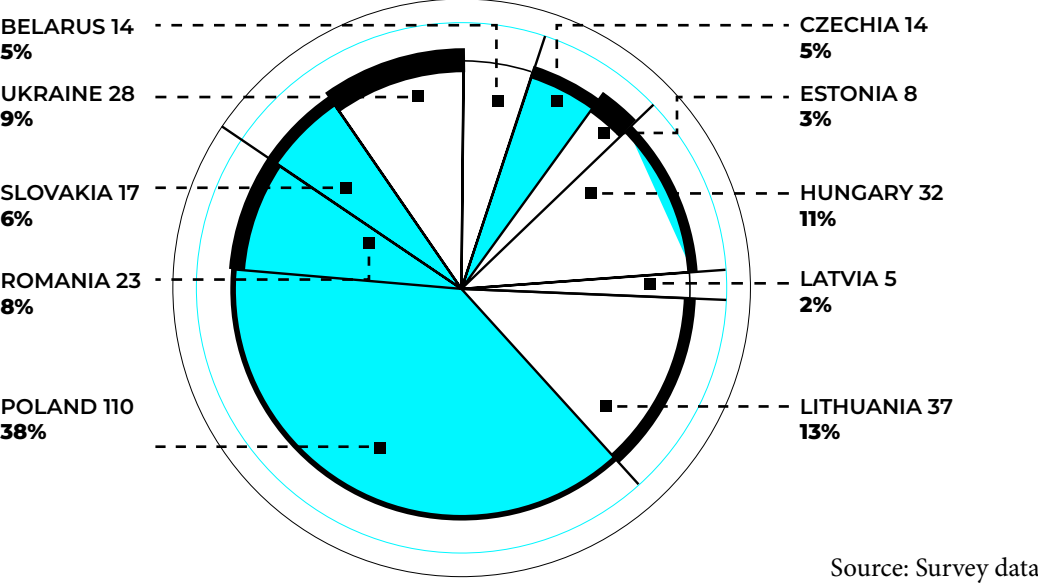
1.5

Online survey

exceeds the standard benchmark, the sample is sufficient for identifying general patterns and trends. It is important to note that the survey was part of a pilot study, aimed at generating a broad overview rather than producing fully representative national statistics.

The geographical distribution of survey responses was uneven (see Figure 1.2), with Poland (110 responses), Lithuania (37), Hungary (32), and Ukraine (28) being the most represented. However, response levels did not correlate clearly with either population size or the estimated number of heritage NGOs. Instead, participation appeared to be influenced more by contextual factors such as the degree of facilitator engagement, outreach strategies, national infrastructure, and political conditions (e.g. in Ukraine and Belarus).

Figure 1.2:
Responses to the
online survey by
country



1.6 Statistical data collection

Statistical data collection, held between January and September 2024, relied on a standardised reporting template filled in by national facilitators. While the reports followed a uniform structure, they also accounted for local legal and institutional specificities. Differences in legal forms, registration systems, and data availability required facilitators to provide additional clarifications and, in some cases, select alternative or estimated data sources. Where formal statistical data was not accessible, second-best sources or manual approximations were used, with each case clearly documented.

Significant variability in legal classifications of NGOs across countries (e.g. treatment of religious or quasi-civic organisations) affected how organisations were included in national samples. In Lithuania, for example, religious entities were excluded by law from NGO registers, while in other countries they were considered integral to the heritage NGO landscape. This further complicated data aggregation and required country-specific adjustments in methodology and interpretation.

Data collected by facilitators was supplemented with online desk research (in English and national languages), and in some cases additional definitions of legal forms were added to country reports to ensure transparency. Not all data could be aggregated – some was presented only in the descriptive sections of national reports due to format inconsistencies or lack of comparability.

1.7

Qualitative research

The qualitative component consisted of in-depth interviews with heritage professionals representing heritage organisations, along with group discussions (round tables) with heritage professionals and experts representing the NGO sector or collaborating with it organised in each country (see Table 1.1). These qualitative inputs provided contextual depth, allowing researchers to interpret quantitative trends through the lived experiences and insights of stakeholders.

A total of 18 in-depth interviews were conducted, mostly following a matrix of two interviews per country. The interviews were conducted online on the Zoom or Teams platforms, with each lasting between 50 and 90 minutes and conducted in English (with the exception of Polish speakers who were interviewed by the report team in Polish). A major limitation of this method was language. Many of the sector representatives are not able to speak freely in English, which made it impossible to invite them for an interview. We decided to choose English as the project team conducted them (with exception to Poland – as Polish-language researchers we conducted the interviews in Polish). The interviews were conducted on a scripted basis, with the interviewer asking about various issues arising in the conversation. In the outcome, only one individual interview was conducted in two countries (Czechia and Latvia). Persons for the interviews were suggested by the facilitators, and in several cases we invited European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award winners to be interviewed. When selecting people for interviews, we tried to ensure their diversity in terms of the type of heritage they deal with, the nature of the organisation and its location (large-small centres).

21 group discussions were conducted. We also provided for two such discussions per country, except in Ukraine, where four were held (this decision was dictated by the specific situation of the sector due to the ongoing war, as well as the size of the country). In Czechia it was not possible to gather a group of participants for the second panel discussion (due to flooding in the country). The group discussions were conducted online on the Zoom platform. Being aware of the inadequacies of computer-mediated remote discussions, we felt that this was the only way we would be able to bring together people representing different localities for discussion, which was intended to translate into more representative findings. The project budget was not able to cover the cost of travel to participate in separate discussions, and online participation was a viable option which ultimately both economised on time and saved on travel-related financial and environmental costs. Between six and eight people participated in each discussion. The panel discussions (which we referred to as “roundtables” for short) were conducted in the national languages by facilitators following a standardised script. The scenario included four open-ended questions. The facilitator asked them in four successive rounds of questions, ensuring that each person answered each question. Discussions were scheduled for approximately 100 minutes, with a few discussions lasting longer at the will of the participants. A machine transcription was made of the discussions in the national language, which was then linguistically verified by the facilitator.

In the next step, the verified text was machine-translated into English, which was also verified by the facilitator. This solution did not have a language barrier in it and using it allowed all potential interviewees to be included (in several cases, the person selected for the IDI who was unable to participate due to insufficient English language skills was invited to the panel discussion).

Table 1.1:
Qualitative study
respondents profiles

| In-depth interview respondent's profile | Group discussion respondent's profile |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Heritage NGO representative from eligible countries● President, Chair of the Board, Director or someone in a managerial position, involved in strategic decision making processes● Fluent in English | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Heritage NGO representative or a heritage professional collaborating with NGOs and having wider knowledge of the sector● Including bigger and smaller organisations from locations of different sizes (not only the capital cities)● Including voices of young professionals |

Source: Own elaboration

The individual and group interviews were conducted between April 2024 and January 2025. They all were coded, the statements of the individuals are anonymous, which gave space for honest remarks and diagnoses.

The interviews and discussions were complemented by debriefing discussions with the facilitators (due to the problem of finding a date corresponding to all those realised in the three rounds) held in November 2024. They were asked to comment on the research conducted and to share their comments and diagnosis of the situation of the heritage NGO sector in their country.

1.8
General problems and important issues affecting
statistical research

This research, conceived as a pilot study covering ten countries, sought to provide an initial mapping of the heritage NGO sector. While a standardised research framework was used, country reports were tailored to reflect local conditions – in particular the differences in legal definitions of NGOs and in the classification of organisational forms. These adaptations were developed in close collaboration with national facilitators, who also helped determine whether certain entities, such as religious organisations or quasi-civic bodies, should be included. For example, farmers’ wives associations were counted in Poland, and religious organisations were excluded from the Lithuanian dataset in accordance with national law. Facilitators combined questionnaire responses with publicly available online sources, often synthesising materials in national

languages. In cases where data was unavailable in aggregate form, only individual entries for registered NGOs were accessible (e.g. in Latvia), sometimes behind a paywall. Where no official statistics were available, facilitators used manual estimates documenting their methods.

The analysis revealed a range of methodological, structural, and contextual limitations that shaped both the quality of the data collected and the interpretation of results. One of the central issues was the reliability of official NGO registries. In several countries – such as Poland, Romania, and Latvia – many organisations remain listed in official records despite no longer being operational. In Poland, for instance, it is estimated that only around half of the NGOs recorded in state databases are still active.²

Another challenge stems from the outdated nature of available statistics. In many cases, the most recent national data available is from 2022, limiting the ability to reflect current sectoral developments. One of the reasons for that is that national statistics offices do not collect data on NGOs annually but periodically (every two-four years, depending on the country). Furthermore, database structures vary considerably across countries. Many registries do not offer filtering by organisational objectives or goals, while others apply inconsistent or incompatible categorisation schemes. Even when filtering is available, the differences in catalogue structures hinder the alignment of data and the ability to isolate heritage-focused NGOs. Facilitators often relied on the “closest possible approximation” based on available categories, which varied both across and within countries. Often these “closest possible approximations” were “culture”, “culture and recreation”, sometimes they also included sports or tourism. This significantly limited the capacity to identify heritage-related NGOs precisely and undermines the reliability of cross-country comparisons.

Where official registries lacked functionality or completeness, secondary databases were consulted. However, these are often based on voluntary entries by organisations, resulting in uneven coverage (e.g. NGO Atlas in Lithuania run by Transparency International Lithuania (TILS)). Duplications, such as one organisation appearing under multiple categories – as was the case in Romania – also introduced distortions to the data. Some of the information sources provided in the country reports are collected as part of time-limited projects. This means that over time, it is likely that this source will not be updated, and thus cannot serve as a long-term, permanent source of information on heritage NGOs. Inconsistencies in data collection methods (e.g. recording only the primary goal of an organisation, where a secondary goal might actually be related to heritage) further complicated the picture.

Political and institutional factors posed additional barriers to data access. In Belarus and, to a certain extent, Hungary, governmental constraints limited transparency and access to civil society data. In Ukraine, the war significantly disrupted data collection and access, making it difficult to capture the current state of the sector.

Given the diverse legal systems, statistical methodologies, and data infrastructures across the region, direct comparison or aggregation of results across countries proved methodologically problematic. Definitions of heritage NGOs varied between countries and sometimes even

2 Charycka, Beata, Gumkowska, Marta and Bednarek, Julia. 2022. *Kondycja organizacji pozarządowych. Trendy 2002–2022*. Warsaw: Klon/Jawor Association, p. 20.

across data sources within a single country. Inconsistent filtering options, classification systems, and timeframes further undermined the comparability of data. While some countries offered comprehensive, if outdated, official statistics, others relied on incomplete voluntary databases or required manual data compilation. Additionally, political and administrative contexts influenced both the availability and reliability of data. In some cases, deliberate restrictions on NGO transparency shaped what information could be accessed and reported. The resulting estimates should therefore be interpreted with caution. They provide valuable national-level insights, but attempts at regional aggregation or direct numerical comparisons may yield misleading conclusions. This underscores the need for more standardised, transparent, and accessible data collection practices across Central and Eastern Europe.

These inconsistencies in the quantitative part of the study highlight the exploratory nature of the research and the need for caution in interpreting cross-country comparisons. Nevertheless, the project provides a valuable initial mapping of the heritage NGO sector in the region and lays the foundation for more systematic, large-scale studies in the future.

The analysis revealed significant challenges in obtaining comparable statistical data on heritage NGOs across the countries examined. These findings underscore the need to advocate for national statistical agencies to adopt more systematic and harmonised approaches to data collection and dissemination in this area. Specifically, improvements should focus on ensuring temporal consistency in data collection intervals to enhance comparability, and on standardising the categorisation of organisational objectives related to heritage. Additionally, these recommendations extend to the classification and reporting of organisations with special legal status, such as Public Benefit Organisations.

1.9

General problems and key issues affecting qualitative research

Several challenges affected the qualitative component of the research, limiting the originally planned scope and influencing the quality of the data obtained. Fewer in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted than initially anticipated – a total of 18. This shortfall resulted from a combination of factors, including a lack of consent from individuals identified by national facilitators, prolonged difficulties in scheduling interviews, and extended delays in receiving responses from potential interviewees. Similarly, one less group panel discussion was held than originally expected. Although the optimal number of participants per panel discussion was set at six to eight people (due to the challenges with conducting group discussions online we limited the maximum number of participants, which usually, in Focus Group Interviews (FGI), amount eight to 12 people), facilitators encountered significant challenges in coordinating schedules among all participants, facilitators, and the technical staff responsible for recording. In Ukraine, additional obstacles included finding a safe and comfortable environment to conduct online meetings amidst power outages and bomb alerts caused by the ongoing war. Difficulties with gathering the minimum number of participants resulted in repeating one panel discussion in Hungary, and technical difficulties with the host computer demanded rescheduling the panel discussion

in Slovakia. The interviewees of the individual interviews and panel discussions participated free of charge, giving up their private time.

Communication with facilitators also proved to be more difficult than expected. In some cases limited availability for joint online meetings and professional obligations outside the project constrained the effectiveness of coordination efforts and even resulted in several changes of people at the position of a facilitator. Language barriers further complicated communication. Conditions in Belarus were particularly severe, where the legal status of NGOs and their activities is highly restricted. This not only made it difficult to identify willing participants for interviews and roundtables, but also required special measures to ensure their anonymity and safety.

Technical challenges further impacted the research process. All interviews and discussions were transcribed with a support of automatic, AI-supported transcription Although they were later reviewed by the facilitators, the editing was very general in nature, its aim being primarily to remove errors. Quality loss appeared during the translation of materials into English, despite an additional verification stage involving facilitators fluent in English. Due to budget constraints the texts could not be revised by professional translators.

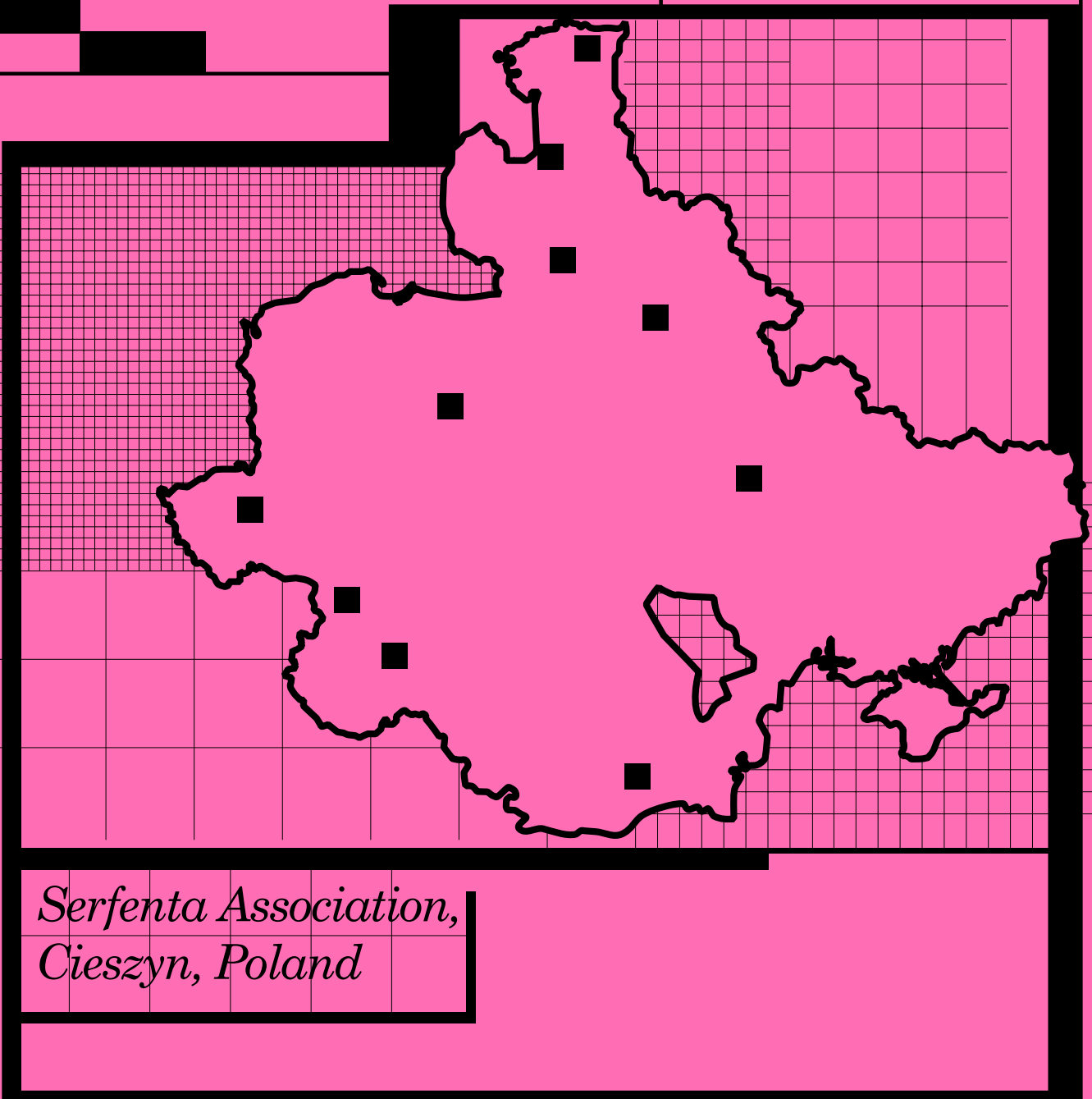
In the process of preparing this report, the following generative artificial intelligence tools were used: TurboScribe (transcription of interviews and roundtable discussions), DeepL and GoogleTranslate (translation of texts written in national languages), ChatGPT 4o (paraphrasing of text, calculation of statistical data, summarising). The content obtained as a result of the use of these tools has been verified and edited by the authors, who are legally responsible for the content of the work.

HERITAGE NGOS FROM

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE:

SNAPSHOTS

*Serfenta Association,
Cieszyn, Poland*



Serfenta Association

Founded in 2006, **Serfenta** has moved from being a regional crafts centre based in Cieszyn, southern Poland, to being a hugely popular and successful NGO in the promotion of intangible cultural heritage far beyond the city's limits.

The association contributes to the continuity of intangible heritage by raising awareness and popularising traditional skills and techniques, transmitting knowledge and encouraging people to make their own objects according to traditional methods. Serfenta promotes the values and qualities of traditional basketry crafts, making this intangible heritage vivid, attractive, and useful to modern people.

Serfenta has what it calls an open approach to craft. Not only do they concentrate on the product itself, but also on the experience of the process as an essential starting point for seeking new ways of development.

il. 01. Serfenta craft experience weaving workshop with cattail typha latifolia.

Photo by Rafał Soliński.



il. 02. Craft experience workshops at the Serfenta studio.

Photo by Michelle Altaner-Frat.



The seventeen years of gathering knowledge and gaining experience from traditional masters of basketry led us to creating an original model of teaching crafts, which is based not only on skills transfer but also on the opportunity of innovative work with natural materials. Our ethnographic expedition in 2009, "On the Basketry Trail of the Vistula River", which resulted in the publication of a book titled "Baskets", revealed a wide range of craft-based opportunities in Poland. Also as a result of this expedition, we chose our areas of specialisation, focusing on straw, cattail, and willow. We learned the properties of those natural materials to be able to use them also in ways which veer away from traditional basketry.

To promote basket-making skills, we teach them at all levels. Our trainees are both beginners and specialists who need such skills in their professional development. The participants in our workshops come from Poland as well as other countries. What we find particularly important is that we not only present strictly technical skills but we also draw attention to the psychological aspects of craft experience. We emphasise the value of crafts which comes from the repetition of movements and the relaxation which is achieved through focusing on a single activity and being offline. We combine traditional Polish craft techniques with our knowledge and experience related to basketry materials and techniques from across the globe.

The success of Serfenta lies in the personal engagement of the association's leadership. Paulina Adamska's ethnographic research of basketry, her studies of traditional basketry techniques at the University of Art and Crafts, followed by many years of observation and training with craft masters across Poland and other countries, have grown into a life philosophy which she persistently realises in Serfenta. Łucja Cieślak is an entrepreneur, crafts instructor and is on the constant search to find nexuses between cultural heritage and the market. The momentum set by these two women set the pace for Urszula Szwed, an expert in responsible business and NGO financing who was co-responsible for the association's innovative business model.





il. 03. Craft experience workshops at the Serfenta studio.

Photo by Michelle Altaner-Frat.

Want to weave your way to better wellbeing? Listen to this episode of Holistic Heritage, a podcast series by the Europa Nostra Heritage Hub in Kraków:

Weaving our way to wellbeing with Serfenta

 available on [www](#)
 available on [Spotify](#)

The team's flagship product is the Crafts Revitalisation Model, a business model introduced and popularised by Serfenta. The model aims to maintain the continuity of craft skills, modernise them and bring them to market. Serfenta has managed to achieve financial sustainability and now shares its experience with other organisations and individuals. Their example proves that the mission of heritage preservation and education does not need to be dependent on public grants, and they now instruct others on how to achieve this.

Serfenta holds a strong position in the market as one of the few Polish organisations which have undergone the economisation process and is now able to function independently, without relying on grants

– underlines Paulina Adamska, head of the Serfenta Association.

We grow our experience by presenting Serfenta's business model at various international conferences, such as the 17th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Rabat, Morocco, dedicated in 2022 to climate change and its impact on cultural heritage, or at a conference prepared for the Swedish Skånes Hemsjödsförbund in October 2024.

Serfenta is one of the three UNESCO-accredited NGOs in Poland, and was awarded by the Polish National Commission for UNESCO for its educational activities supporting the implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. In October 2022, Serfenta was awarded at JIAPICH 2022 (Jeonju International Awards for Promoting Intangible Cultural Heritage), and in 2023 was recognised in the final of New European Bauhaus.

As an integral part of the cultural heritage ecosystem in Central and Eastern Europe, Serfenta are also sharing their know-how and transferring best practices to other heritage and crafts NGOs. As experts in their field, members of Serfenta currently cooperate with organisations and individuals in Japan, South Korea, Norway, Iceland, Spain, and a number of other countries.

il. 04. Serfenta's managers: Paulina Adamska, Urszula Szwed and Łucja Cieślak at the European Heritage Awards Ceremony in 2024.

Photo by Katarzyna Skupny.



In recognition of their groundbreaking work, in 2024 Serfenta won a European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award in the category "Education, skills and training" for its Crafts Revitalisation Model. Speaking in Bucharest at the prize ceremony, Łucja Cieślak said:

We believe that we can show a way of working with crafts nowadays to other people, and I hope it will be the effect [of the prize] that we will share this business model and, of course, the craft experience workshops and craft experience also: we are already doing this, actually.



il. 05. Local ceremony of presenting the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award plaque to Serfenta in 2024 at their headquarters in Cieszyn.

Photo by Krzysiek Puda.



il. 06. Paulina Adamska during ethnographic research in Jaworzynka at Master Jan Zogata's house.

Photo by Rafał Soliński.



2. CONTEXT OF THE HERITAGE NGO SECTOR IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Before 1989, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) was dominated by totalitarian regimes that suppressed independent civil society. In these state-centric models, civic participation was tightly controlled, and any form of dissent was discouraged. Despite these constraints, dissident movements played a crucial role in challenging the *status quo*, laying the groundwork for the development of future civil society.

The countries of CEE researched in the report went through a political transition between 1989 and 1991, shaking off the communist yoke and regaining independence. Being acutely aware of national differences between the countries of the region, we decided to approach the region as a whole to be able to demonstrate the characteristics of the NGO sector. The regional approach is widely applied by researchers³, justifying that communist citizens lived under relatively similar political and economic conditions and that it makes sense to stress their common characteristics.⁴ The notion of Central Europe or Central and Eastern Europe is elusive and vague, and instead of providing an indication of a precise geography, it rather bears a certain characteristic that differentiates this area from the West and from the East. According to Jacek Purchla,

*Central Europe means trauma and ambivalence. But it is also a repository of values which the West has long forgotten. It is the lesson of communism, the criticism of the idea of progress, the ubiquity of history, the complicated geography and politics, the cultural diversity and strong nationalism, the inferiority complex of the periphery; but is it also the creativity of the frontier. Central Europe is a difficult dialogue with neighbours.*⁵

In this mapping project, we believe that many of the findings are universal to contemporary European societies in a broad sense. Here, however, we acknowledge the specificity of the region and its implications to the findings.

For all countries in the region, 1989/1991 ushered in the first processes of transformation, bringing new cultural possibilities. Purchla emphasises that

*... in most countries of our [Central and Eastern Europe] region undergoing the difficult processes of transformation, culture was perceived above all as ballast, as a traditional burden on the budget, and not as a catalyst for change.*⁶

Overcoming this mindset was one of the crucial aspects of the region's transformation, which was underway in the 1990s and continued after the turn of the century (at various speeds depending on the country).

The last decade of the 20th century was a time of civil awakening and the creation of various non-governmental organisations. These organisations were often supported by foreign donors (e.g. Soros Foundation), and focused on democratisation, human rights, and civic engagement. Researchers stress that this process had its foundation built already under communism.

*In post-communist countries, civil societies were not built from scratch. While the CEE countries did not inherit from communism a civil society properly so called, they did inherit a comprehensive and solidly institutionalised associational sphere. This included powerful trade unions and professional associations, churches, and organisations representing various groups and interests including young people, farmers, veterans, consumers, women, and ecologists. There were also sports clubs, along with recreational, cultural, and leisure organisations and the like.*⁷

However, differences between the countries have been significant and they are also visible today, depending on numerous factors of a political, economic and societal nature. Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik argue that

*... post-communist civil societies are becoming more divergent from one another, whether in sectoral composition, behaviour, normative orientations, or predominant modes of relating to state authorities. These differences reflect not only the historical traditions of various subregions within the old Soviet bloc, but also the contrasting outcomes of post-communist transformations and the new divisions created across the European space by the EU's successive enlargements.*⁸

The turning point for Central European countries was the moment they gained membership within the European Union (EU). In 2004, most countries of the region joined the EU (Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, and Poland), followed by Romania (and Bulgaria – not included in this report) in 2007. Introducing the EU *acquis communautaire* into their legal systems confirmed their acceptance of the European values of respect for human dignity and rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law as well as the integral for the European way of life nations of inclusion, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and non-discrimination. These values are of key importance to the development of civil society.

However, joining the EU excluded many NGOs from being eligible for funds that helped them develop throughout the 1990s – such as funds for democratisation, human rights, social assistance, and the development of community-based services. International donors, including Western foundations and EU pre-accession funds, played a critical role in supporting the emergence and professionalisation of NGOs, which at the time often operated in the absence of adequate domestic funding mechanisms.

Apart from accession to the EU, countries of the region joined other international organisations. They became members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Czechia in 1995, Poland and Hungary in 1996, Slovakia in 2000, Estonia in 2010, Latvia in 2016 and Lithuania in 2018; Romania, Ukraine and Belarus are not members) and the Council of Europe (with Hungary joining in 1990, Poland in 1991, and others such as Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania joining in 1992 and 1993). Accession to NATO made a particularly strong mark on the transformation of the region in terms of its security. In 1999, Czechia, Hungary and Poland became the first members of the former Warsaw Pact to join NATO, while Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia became members in 2004.

A new wave of challenges appeared in the 2010s, and then the 2020s, with the political, social and economic situation being influenced by the coming to power of right-wing and populist parties,

3 The most recent major research is Vandor, Peter, Traxler, Nicole, Millner, Reinhard and Meyer, Michael, eds. 2017. *Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe: Challenges and Opportunities*. Vienna: ERSTE Foundation.

4 Howard, Marc Morjé. 2005. *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 147.

5 Purchla, Jacek. 2009. "Biblioteka Europy Środka." In Csaba G. Kiss. *Lekcja Europy Środkowej. Eseje i szkice*. Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, p. 7.

6 Ibidem, p. 8.

7 Ekiert, Grzegorz and Kubik, Jan. 2014. "The Legacies of 1989: Myths and realities of civil society." *Journal of Democracy* 25 (1), pp. 46-47.

8 Ibidem, pp. 54-55.

accompanied by increased restrictions on NGOs, especially those involved in human rights, gender equality, and anti-corruption work. Some governments introduced laws targeting foreign funding and stigmatising certain segments of the sector, echoing similar developments in Russia.

Since 2010, the Hungarian government under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the Fidesz party has introduced a series of legislative measures that have systematically restricted the space for civil society. One of the most notable examples was the 2017 law on “foreign-funded NGOs”, which required any organisation receiving over 7.2 million forints (around €20,000) from foreign sources to register as a “foreign-funded organisation” and label themselves as such in their publications. Critics, including Amnesty International and the European Commission, argued that the law stigmatised civil society actors and was aimed at discrediting human rights and watchdog groups, especially those receiving support from international foundations such as the Open Society Foundations. In 2020, the European Court of Justice ruled that the law violated EU rules on the free movement of capital and fundamental rights such as freedom of association. Although the law was repealed in 2021, it was replaced with new legislation that grants the Hungarian State Audit Office the authority to review the financial operations of NGOs, a power previously reserved for public institutions. This maintains a level of state pressure on civil society organisations. The Hungarian government has consistently portrayed NGOs, especially those involved in human rights, environmental protection, and migrant support, as threats to national sovereignty or as agents of foreign influence. Organisations linked to philanthropist George Soros have been a particular target of smear campaigns, with government billboards, advertisements, and public speeches accusing them of attempting to undermine Hungary’s national interests. Another significant challenge facing Hungarian NGOs is limited access to funding. Organisations that are critical of the government or operate independently often find themselves excluded from national funding schemes or targeted in ways that make them ineligible for public grants.

There have been attempts across the region to introduce similar measures. Between 2016 and 2020, Poland’s ruling party Law and Justice (PiS) proposed ideas for a central registry of NGOs receiving foreign funding, stricter rules on transparency and greater state oversight of so-called “political” NGOs. At that time, foreign funding, especially from George Soros’s Open Society Foundations, was used rhetorically to suggest “foreign interference” or “anti-Polish agendas”. A subsequent change of government meant the proposal was dropped. In 2017–2018 the Romanian government drafted a similar proposal which called for the public disclosure of all foreign donations over a certain threshold and restrictions on “politically active NGOs” from receiving foreign grants. Following heavy criticism from Romanian NGOs, international observers and the EU, the idea was ultimately withdrawn. The Slovak government was more successful in their attempts to implement a law copying the Hungarian model. In April 2024, Slovakia’s parliament approved in the first reading a legislative amendment requiring NGOs receiving more than €5,000 annually from foreign sources to register as “organisations with foreign support”. These organisations must disclose donor identities and nationalities. This proposal is viewed as even stricter than the one in force in Hungary. In July 2024, the EU warned Slovakia against adopting the “foreign agents” law targeting NGOs. The process of adopting the law is still ongoing, and there is significant opposition from civil society groups and international organisations, which could influence the final outcome.

2015 saw an increased influx of migrants and substantial discussions on ways to handle the situation at a European level. In 2020–2022 we witnessed the Covid-19 pandemic and the full-scale Russian invasion on Ukraine, which resulted in yet another extensive wave of refugees in 2022 (especially in neighbouring countries), most of whom found temporary (as well as more permanent) refuge in the countries of the region.

Despite many challenges, civil society in the region has also demonstrated remarkable resilience. The Euromaidan protests in Ukraine (2013–2014), mass mobilisations against corruption in Romania (2017), and pro-democracy movements in Belarus (2020) are testament to the enduring power of civic engagement. While in some countries of the region civic society faces laws that seriously hinder the operation of NGOs, the Baltic states, for example, have enacted so-called Magnitsky laws that allow countries to sanction foreign individuals and entities involved in human rights abuse, corruption and money laundering. This act shows their strong alignment with democratic and human rights values.

Over time, civil society has become more professionalised and diverse. NGOs have been adapting to new realities by embracing digital tools, building local and regional alliances, and engaging more actively in diverse agendas, including environmental, feminist, as well as anti-authoritarian activism. However, the development of civil society organisations has been a long process, which still struggles with insufficient recognition (see Chapter 4). At the beginning of the century, Marc Morjé Howard wrote that

*... as a direct legacy of the communist experience, most people in post-communist societies still strongly mistrust and avoid joining any kind of formal organisations, even in the newly free and democratic setting.*⁹

Findings from this research have furthermore proven that changes to this situation have been sluggish.

The persistence of relationships in the private sphere dominated over the formal and public sphere¹⁰ and citizens expressed “disappointment, and ... some even disillusionment, with political and economic developments since the collapse of the state-socialist system”.¹¹ These three factors limit participation in organisations. Howard’s findings have been confirmed ever since in various statements referring to particular countries in the region. For instance, sociological diagnoses conducted in Poland since the early 1990s and up until 2015, demonstrated that civil society engagement in the country was not developing as expected and remained worryingly low. One of the indicators is the organisation of and participation in activities for the benefit of the local community (whether they be in housing estates, towns, or in the immediate vicinity). In the most recent diagnosis of 2015, only 15.4% of those surveyed had been involved in participatory activities within the last two years.¹²

Nevertheless Ekiert and Kubik challenge the image of the post-communist societies of being “chronically weak”, observing that

⁹ Howard, p. 27.

¹⁰ Howard, pp. 27–28.

¹¹ Howard, p. 29.

¹² Czapiński, Janusz. 2015. “Stan społeczeństwa obywatelskiego.” In Janusz Czapiński and Tomasz Panek (eds.) *Diagnoza społeczna 2015. Warunki i jakość życia Polaków*, 332–372. Warszawa: Rada Monitoringu Społecznego. Quarterly of University of Finance and Management in Warsaw 9 (4), pp. 341–344.

... some civil societies in the region have dense and comprehensive organisational structures, operate in a friendly institutional and legal environment and have some capacity to influence policy making on local and national levels. In other post-communist countries, especially those that have reverted to various forms of authoritarian rule, civil societies are often organisationally weak and politically irrelevant.¹³

NGOs operating in the region have been successively working to bridge the gap between the state and the citizens, as well as to strengthen the values of the civil society. An example is the case study “Regeneration of the heritage of Saxon villages by Mihai Eminescu Trust”, Romania (see page 99), where also a reference to communism impacting the society’s mindset was made. As Howard predicts, “a strong, active, and supportive state will encourage the development of civil society”,¹⁴ which is undeniably happening in all countries of the region. However, contemporary political contexts severely impact the functioning of NGOs. Apart from the political hindrances discussed here previously, one needs to take a closer look at two countries within the scope of this research whose civil societies suffer from particular difficulties – Belarus and Ukraine.

Belarus

The political situation in Belarus has impacted the non-governmental heritage sector in the most extreme way, making civil activity in this field practically illegal since 2021. Compared to other countries in the region, civil society in Belarus has been largely underdeveloped. In the late 1980s, when Belarus started to gain its independence, the first civil society initiatives were initiated and continued until 2021. A representative of the sector in Belarus comments:

we had a very low base. People in Belarus, they are hard-working, but not proactive, and historically we have trouble with pushing people to raise any initiatives. Once these initiatives are launched, people are working hard to implement them. But initiation is a challenge.
[RTF3]

In 1994, Alexander Lukashenko won the presidency in the country’s inaugural presidential election and from then on, the situation for civil society has consequently deteriorated. Although the NGO sector was partly ‘clandestine’, i.e. not supported by the state nor by the large part of the society, it started to change with a new generation of young activists coming to the stage, especially in the 2010s. The Box below describes the nature of this period.

We realised that we can do something using the framework of civil society and using typical instruments of civil society. Also in fundraising, also in some communication techniques. After Belarus joined the Eastern Partnership Initiative and some Interreg programmes, this opened a relatively huge flow of resources. And we were able to use them. I mean, international scholarships, grants, networking possibilities, conferences...

During the last decade, more and more private money was going to conservation [activities]. It was still a smaller percentage if we compare it with governmental money, but there was more and more. And these private investors, they were ready to talk.

¹³ Ekiert and Kubik, p. 55

¹⁴ Howard, p. 17.

They were ready to speak with civil society, with local communities. They were ready to participate in different networking sessions or conferences. This was a big success and a big achievement of the past years.

Even the government, they started allowing civil society to take part in, well, not in decision-making, but at least in consulting the decision-making process. In the process of another round of negotiations with European political institutions, they agreed to increase the presence of NGOs in the decision-making process on a governmental level. It was a political decision.

And they created kinds of civil society councils attached to some major ministries. The Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Ecology, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, surprisingly, saw the creation of such civil society councils. We were allowed to come to the ministry once per month, and we were allowed to criticise, to talk, to ask questions, etc. And our big achievement was that step by step, gradually, their fear of civil society started to go. So, they were less and less suspicious towards us. They realised that we are useful, that also they can achieve more with our help. It was also our big achievement. [RTF3]

Even in 2020, the year of brutal suppression of the last huge protests after another unfair presidential election, the Ministry of Culture still supported celebrations of the European Heritage Days in Belarus. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic events took place online.

The situation changed in April 2021 after a round of European economic and political sanctions against the political regime in Belarus.

Since then, they decided that as revenge, they will liquidate, as they see it, the fifth column in Belarus, the agents of European influence, those who were supported by European institutions and with whom the progress of Belarus was somehow associated. So, it was against the whole independent NGO sector, not without any distinction between political activists or social, think tank centres, ecological organisations, and heritage. [RTF3]

The Minister of Foreign Affairs announced the delegalisation of the NGOs in an interview, however, no legal act referring to the entire civil society organisations was introduced. Delegalisation has been proceeded case-by-case in court decisions, starting with ICOMOS Belarus where the legal decision was made by the highest court of Belarus, which excluded the possibility to appeal, while in the case of other organisations, decisions were made by regional courts.

Heritage professionals were forced to leave the field. It is estimated that around half of them left the country, while some left after the start of criminal prosecution for participating in peaceful protests. Some people, who decided to stay in the country and not leave the field, work below the government’s radar.

Even if there are still a few non-liquidated public entities from NGOs, they try to act as calmly as possible and to act in a more concealed way. And the best way for them to survive in the profession is to join some already legalised activities in the field of heritage. [RTF3]

Ukraine

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation attacked Ukraine, escalating the military conflict which has been ongoing since 2014, with Moscow's annexation of Crimea. NGOs in Ukraine play a pivotal role in delivering humanitarian aid, supporting displaced populations, and fostering civil society. However, the ongoing conflict and evolving political landscape have introduced significant challenges that impede their operations. Operating in active conflict areas exposes NGOs to severe security threats. The use of heavy artillery, missile strikes, and drone attacks pose direct danger to aid workers. The influx of well-meaning but uncoordinated aid has created logistical bottlenecks. Unnecessary or inappropriate supplies can overwhelm distribution channels, causing delays and inefficiencies that may hinder the delivery of essential assistance.

A heritage professional comments that

there are not so many organisations which are involved in heritage or cultural heritage protection. Many more organisations have given their assistance to the military, military groups and aid for medical volunteers, but for cultural protection, not so much. There are some NGOs which are concentrated on digitisation... We are acting – my organisation and our partners – like an emergency assistance team. [IDIUK2]

Heritage and culture professionals representing NGOs enjoy trust among heritage circles and usually are the point of contact regarding requests for assistance, distribution of foreign aid for the cultural sector, as well as for damage documentation. Civil society representatives are usually very critical regarding public authorities, pointing out their inertia and lack of support: not only financial, but also logistical.

The minister of culture doesn't have money. They are looking for grants and for international support. But now, the minister of culture changed a year ago, and now we have quite good relations. ... We communicate, [but] we do not cooperate; they cannot help us, unfortunately. Civic society now does much more than the ministry. [IDIUK2]

One of the problems enumerated is the high level of corruption in the country, which makes it difficult to attract aid from Western countries, especially as the initial wave of aid has significantly weakened since the initial mobilisation immediately following the armed aggression in 2022.

*HeMo: Ukrainian
Heritage Monitoring
Lab, Ukraine*

HeMo: Ukrainian Heritage Monitoring Lab

HeMo is an organisation which monitors and documents damage done to built cultural heritage in Ukraine by Russian forces following the outbreak of the full-scale war in 2022. As of 1 February 2025, HeMo has inspected some 1410 sites in 17 Ukrainian regions (oblasts). The documentation which is gathered by HeMo is shared with the Ukrainian military and is to be used as evidence in criminal proceedings against the Russian Federation.

In an article written for *Expedition Magazine*, published by the Penn Museum in the USA, Vasyl Rozhko writes:

*Documenting heritage involves producing written documentation, taking photographs, and creating 3D models. The amount of data required to record damage quickly becomes overwhelming. No ready-made database in Ukraine exists that can manage this amount of information. Following working meetings with UNESCO and the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, the need for a robust data infrastructure that could combine data on Ukrainian heritage with current international standards became clear. The idea of the Ukrainian Heritage Monitoring Lab (HeMo) was born.*²¹

Vasyl Rozhko is the founder of the HeMo Ukrainian Heritage Monitoring Lab, co-founder and coordinator of the Heritage Emergency Response Initiative, the head of Tustan NGO, and a former head of the Museum Department in Ukraine’s Ministry of Culture. A team from the Europa Nostra Heritage Hub for Central and Eastern Europe met Mr. Rozhko in Lviv in April 2024.

HeMo has a team which travels across Ukraine recording and documenting – using 3D modelling and drone photography – buildings of historical importance which have been destroyed or partially destroyed by Russian forces.

First was Borodianka, this famous cabinet with a rooster. When the building was damaged, but the cabinet was still on the wall, it became a symbol of resilience for us. And as museum workers, we understood that we should save this, preserve it in a museum. So, we took it to the Maidan Museum. Ihor Poshyvailo is also a member of this team. But before that, I should document this scene. So, we did a 3D model with the help of drones, aerial photography, to document everything as it was, the whole quarter. So, this was the first expedition. But then, we understood that many places should be documented, liberated, or those where we can reach as civilians.

Apart from documenting damages done to cultural heritage sites and buildings of historical importance, HeMo also has ambitions to create an overarching database which will also include the inventories of Ukrainians museums and cultural institutions.

We have a lack of information about museum inventories, about heritage inventories, about the real state of everything in all regions. After Maidan, for two years, I was in the ministry, so I saw from above the real state of this. So, besides damage assessment, we have a big dream and a big goal to jump, to do what should have been done before, to have a picture of Ukrainian heritage to take care of.

Most of the work done by HeMo is on-the-ground documentation – often in areas where there is

²¹ Rozhko, Vasyl. 2023. “Documenting Damage to Ukraine’s Heritage.” *Expedition Magazine* 65(2), Penn Museum, p. 17.



il. 07. Chernihiv Art Museum. Field documentation in November 2022. The museum was damaged during battles for Chernihiv in February-April 2022. Damage from artillery shelling is visible.

Photo by Zoriana Pohranychna.



il. 08. Skovoroda Museum. Hryhorii Skovoroda was a central figure of the Ukrainian 17th century philosophy and a prominent figure in Ukrainian history. The museum in Skovorodynivka, Kharkiv region, memorialised the place where he died and was buried. In May 2022, the Russian military hit the museum with a direct rocket attack. The documentation was performed shortly after the damage.

Drone footage.

ongoing armed conflict – by using modern technology to scan and create 3D models, although even these are not enough to create a full image of a specific building in question.

In some cases, we do 3D models, but more resources are needed, and not everywhere you need this, because, for example, when windows are cracked or some small cracks, you should not do 3D. But we have an example in Vyazivka, a wooden church, and we did a 3D model, photogrammetry [a method of approximating a 3D structure using 2D images] and laser scanning. And then, while we were deciding what to do with it with the authorities, it fell down during the winter. And the 3D model is the only thing we have as for now. So, 3D is also needed for complicated objects.

Apart from documenting buildings and heritage sites, the expeditions are also to bring a legal case against Russia, with results passed onto the Ukrainian Prosecutor General and the international legal community.

We document for future criminal proceedings against Russia. And this is another methodology, forensic heritage documentation, which was used in Iraq and other places by our partners from SCRI [Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative]. And together with them, we also started to do this. So, it’s a specific way to let pictures be like evidence in the court.

il. 09. M. Arkas First Ukrainian Gymnasium in Mykolaiv is a historic building that was used as a school. In November 2022 it was hit with the ballistic missile by the Russian military. The documentation was performed by HeMo in September 2023.

Photo by Matvii Pohranychnyi.



Also, we provide this information to military forces, our inventories of damages, and generally of heritage sites from our database, to let them know where heritage is, and to preserve if possible, not to shoot or damage the sites, if possible, during war actions. That's why the database is very important for us.

Rozhko highlights the organisational challenge of the HeMo expeditions, saying that only once the team has been to a certain vicinity is the true scale of damage.

It's a huge amount of work, and our goal is to support this, and to provide this information, data for management. How does it work in practice? You know that something was damaged, and then your team goes on site with the equipment, and you do the documentation, or you just go from one place to another, and simply cover whatever was damaged? It's a huge amount of work, so it should be well prepared.

So, firstly, we work with lists. We try to create a route, but then in situ, of course, many more sites are detected. For example, we came with a list of 25 buildings to Odessa, and we left with 60. Because, you know, in the list of state monuments, in the state registry for monuments, there are only 19,000, and before there were much more.

A challenge which the HeMo team faces is also the number of people at its disposal. In 2024, that number stood at around 25 people scattered across the whole country, undertaking a multitude of different tasks.

We have nearly 25 people, mostly of them working full-time. So we have people in Lviv, in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and also in Odesa. Kharkiv has a local team. In Lviv we have a mobile team, and in Kyiv people come where needed. But we have sub-teams. So we have specialists for databases and GIS (Geographical Information System), where we gather all information about Ukrainian heritage, and all lists from our partners and everything.

We separately deal with museum digitisation, such as photographers, scanner operators, and so on. The other direction is the forensic heritage team, because investigations are very deep



il. 10. The wooden church in Vyazivka, Zhytomyr region, was damaged during shelling in 2022. Shortly after, Ukrainian and international professionals performed 3D documentation that demonstrated high instability of constructions. While the stakeholders were deliberating on next stabilisation steps, the church collapsed. The 3D models are now all that remain from this monument.

3D model by Bruno Deslandes.

and in cooperation with American partners. And we are working thanks to partners: Cultural Emergency Response, World Monument Fund, SCRI Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative, and the Penn Cultural Heritage Center support us with this. Thanks to them we can do this every day. We are thinking about a platform and data infrastructure where we can join our sources with other investigators.

In January 2025, the HeMo team held a meeting in Lviv to sum up its activities and look to the future. As a post on the organisation's social media states: "We are working to ensure that Ukrainian heritage is included in the lives of Ukrainians and plays a role in restoring our identity!"



il. 11. The documentation of the kitchen cabinet with the traditional Ukrainian rooster figurine that survived the bombing of the residential building in Borodianka. The cabinet was documented along with damage in April 2022, and the cabinet was preserved in the Maidan Museum.

Drone footage.

3. THE NGO HERITAGE SECTOR IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

– THE BIG PICTURE

3.1

Size of the sector

In order to analyse the heritage sector in Central and Eastern Europe, one should first try to assess its key characteristics, including its size, main areas of operation, financial resources, etc. Estimating the size of the NGO heritage sector in Central and Eastern Europe already proves to be a great challenge (see Annex 4) given, first of all, the lack of proper statistics available in each country of the region, as well as the diversity of definition of the term “heritage NGO” and the difficulty to actually identify which organisation falls into such a category. **A rough estimate of the number of heritage NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe**, based on the figures gathered throughout this research (see methodology section for details) **is 33,500 entities**. These include associations, foundations, public benefit corporations, diverse charities, as well as church organisations. The full estimation is provided in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1:
Estimation of the size
of the heritage NGO
sector in various
countries

| Country | Total no. of NGOs | Basis for the selection as a heritage NGO | Estimated no. of heritage NGOs | Legal forms | Year of publishing of provided data |
|---------|-------------------|---|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Belarus | 5 961 | Facilitator’s estimates ¹ (no selection of heritage as the field of activity in the registers) | 300 | Associations and association unions; foundations; private establishments; religious communities | 2023 |
| Czechia | 55 950 | Facilitator’s estimates ¹ (for selected legal forms, no selection of heritage as the field of activity) in the registers | 2 200 (incl. associations; foundations; public benefit corporations) | Associations; foundations; institutes; public benefit corporations; church and charities organisations | 2023 |
| Estonia | 45 470 | Selection of NGOs active in folk culture amateur groups, museums, churches and congregations; plus additional calculations by the facilitator | 2 368 | Associations; foundations; churches and congregations | 2023 |

| | | | | | |
|-----------|---------|--|--------|--|------|
| Hungary | 60 878 | Selection based on the following fields of activity: for membership associations – culture; for foundations – culture and arts | 10 019 | Membership organisations (associations, public law associations, advocacy and professional organisations, trade unions, professional associations, nonprofit enterprises); foundations | 2022 |
| Latvia | 26 370 | Selection based on the following fields of activity: architecture and restoration; library activities; museums; folk art and intangible heritage | 238 | Associations; foundations | 2024 |
| Lithuania | 2 205 | Selection based on the following fields of activity: culture and leisure | 1 162 | Public institutions; associations; foundations | 2024 |
| Poland | 101 500 | Selection based on the following fields of activity: culture and arts | 13 800 | Registered and ordinary associations; foundations; farmers’ wives associations; social religious entities | 2022 |
| Romania | 139 394 | Facilitator’s estimates ¹ (no selection of heritage as the field of activity in the registers) | 1 612 | Associations; foundations; federations | 2024 |
| Slovakia | 69 283 | Facilitator’s estimates ¹ (no selection of heritage as the field of activity in the registers) | 1 500 | Non-investment funds; organisations with the international element; foundations; non-profit organisations providing generally beneficial services; civic association | 2024 |
| Ukraine | 78 168 | Facilitator’s estimates ¹ (no selection of heritage as the field of activity in the registers) | 387 | Public organisations; public associations; charitable organisations; charitable foundations | 2024 |

¹ Country reports in the Annex explain in detail the estimation or calculation performed by the relevant country facilitator.

Source: Authors’ and facilitators’ own calculations

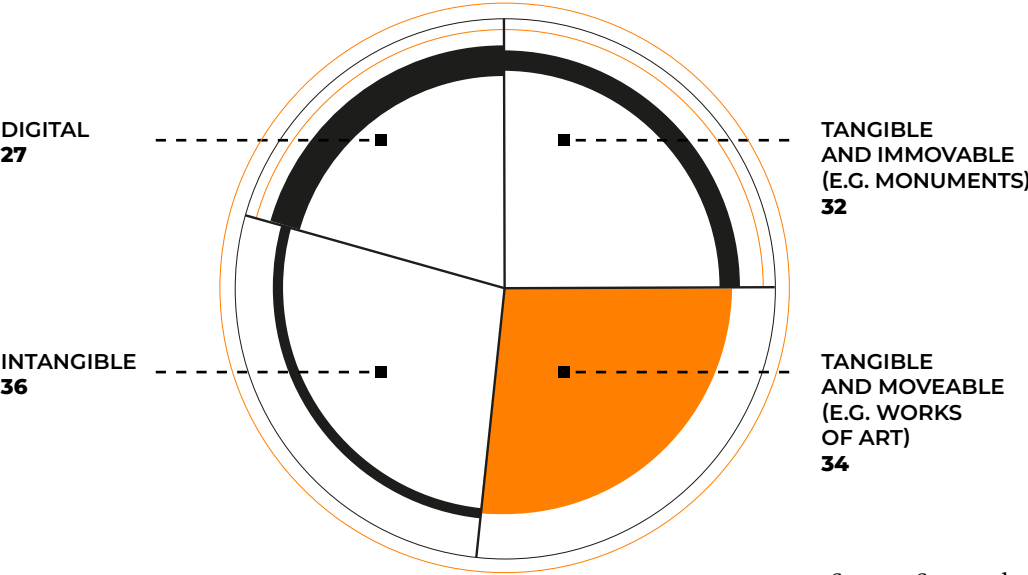
3.2

Heritage domains and types

Most organisations deal with cultural heritage (83.7% of responses), while some combine both cultural and natural heritage (13.3%). Only 1.5% of survey respondents declared natural heritage as their main field of interest.

When it comes to the types of heritage that organisations work with (see Figure 3.1), over one third of all respondents are active in the field of intangible heritage and another one third in the field of tangible and immovable heritage. Moveable heritage seems to be similarly popular here (34.44% of responses), while digital heritage received 26.67% in the survey. Respondents could choose more than one type of heritage field and most frequently they declared that they work with both tangible and intangible heritage.

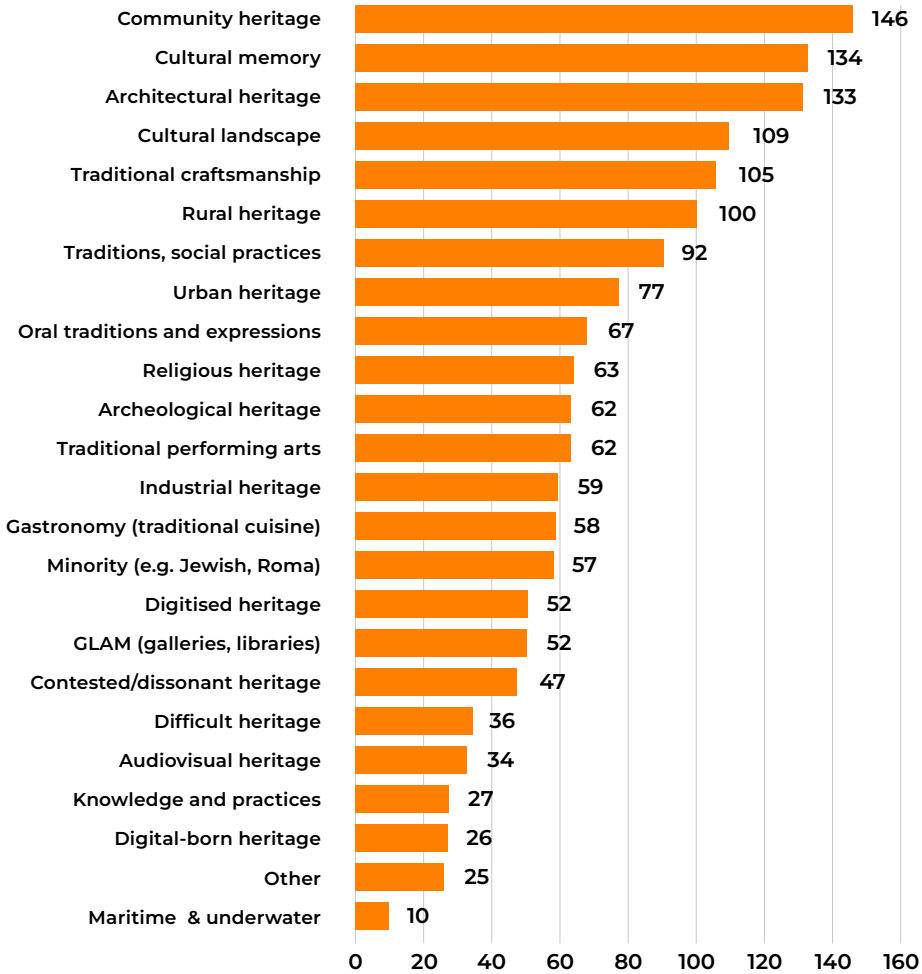
Figure 3.1:
Heritage types chosen
by organisations
to work with (%)



Source: Survey data

Almost 9% of all respondents declared that community heritage (e.g. community archives, oral histories, public history) are of most interest to them (see Figure 3.2). This was closely followed by 8.2% who declared cultural memory, including collective memory, experience, whether it be lived or imagined, related mutually to culture and memory) and 8.1% who indicated architectural heritage as their main area of interest. The first two coincide well with the previous declarations of intangible heritage being the most popular among the NGOs. Maritime and underwater heritage received less than 1% of indications which is understandable given the fact that only some of the countries where the survey was conducted have access to the sea. A few votes for digital-born heritage (1.5%) can be explained by its novelty as a heritage category.

Figure 3.2:
Heritage domains of interest for heritage
NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe
according to the number of indications
in the survey



Source: Survey data

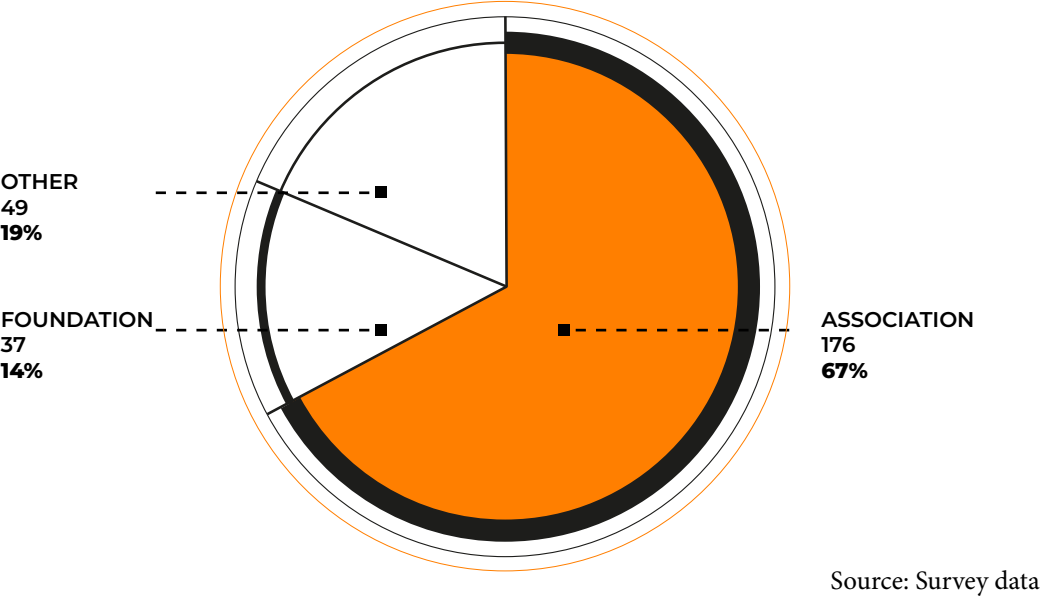
Analysing the areas in which NGOs want to expand their activities, the highest number of mentions indicatethat many NGOs prioritise the safeguarding and promotion of traditional cultural expressions, regarded as traditional culture and folklore (including traditional crafts, folk dance and music as well as local rituals and intangible heritage). NGOs are also interested in history and memory, with some of them wanting to move into commemorating historical events and figures, preserving minority heritage or the legacy of past eras (such as communism). Built heritage seems to be a domain also where NGOs want to expand their activities – namely preserving historical buildings, conservation and adaptive reuse, as well as developing cultural routes to raise awareness of architectural heritage. Plans concerning digitisation and technology as well as ecology and sustainability were also mentioned but to a much lesser extent.

3.3

Legal forms

Almost three quarters of the heritage NGOs (based on the survey conducted) are registered as associations, 37% as foundations and one fifth declare other legal forms (see Figure 3.3). Respondents who indicated “other” as their legal form, declare to be informal groups, social guardians of monuments, rural wives circles, church and charitable organisations, etc.

Figure 3.3:
Legal forms of heritage
NGOs in Central
and Eastern Europe



Apart from regular legal forms, such as associations and foundations, in each of the analysed countries (apart from Belarus) there is a special status for NGOs which work as public benefit organisations (see Table 3.2). These are organisations that work for the benefit of society, helping the state fulfil its obligations to citizens (conducting public tasks in lieu of the state), have special status as well as special rights and prerogatives (such as tax exemptions, free advertisement time in public media, etc.).

Table 3.2:
Special status heritage NGOs
in various countries

| Country | No. of public benefit organisations | No. of heritage NGOs acting as public benefit organisations | Basis for the calculation of the number | Year of publishing of provided data |
|-----------|---|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| Belarus | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Czechia | 2 500 | 20% deal with culture and heritage | Facilitator's estimation ¹ | 2023 |
| Estonia | 2 706 | 2 406 | Facilitator's calculation ² | 2024 |
| Hungary | 6 201 | not possible to estimate | | 2024 |
| Latvia | 1 708 | 400 | Facilitator's estimation ¹ using the best possible category "cultural promotion" | 2023 |
| Lithuania | 4 267 | not possible to estimate | | 2024 |
| Poland | 9 550 | 1 012 | NGOs dealing with culture, art, protection of cultural goods and national heritage | 2022 |
| Romania | 54 | 2 | Heritage NGOs ² | 2024 |
| Slovakia | 4 255 – total amount including defunct and closed entities 1 950 – active (Ministry data) 3 578 (Statistical Office data) | not possible to estimate | n/a | 2004 |
| Ukraine | 20 671 | 93 | Heritage NGOs | 2023 |

¹ Number estimated by facilitator based on knowledge of heritage NGO ecosystem

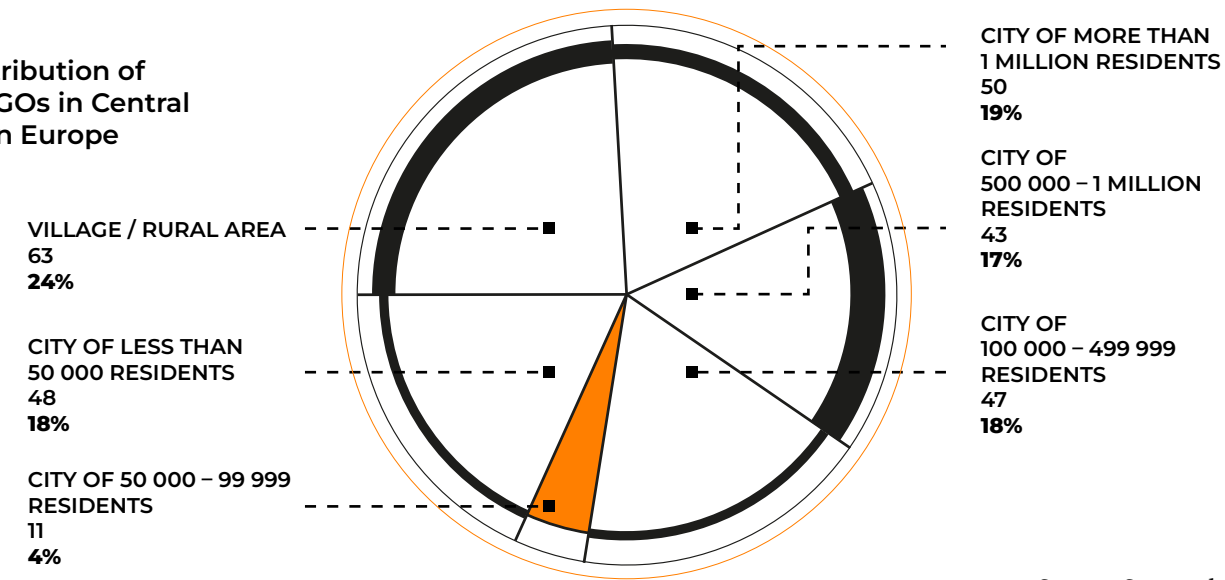
² Number calculated by the facilitator manually when the NGO database does not provide the opportunity to obtain an automatic result by according to the purpose of the activity

Source: Authors' and facilitators' own calculations

The heritage sector is relatively evenly distributed across cities, towns and villages of different sizes over the entire area of Central and Eastern Europe (see Figure 3.4). The only exception are mid-sized cities (between 50,000 and 99,000 residents) where only 4% of heritage NGOs seem to operate. 66% of heritage NGOs are rather established entities, having been in operation for over 10 years at the time of reporting. Meanwhile, only 8% of NGOs have experience of being active for less than two years.

In locations impacted by armed conflict, war or internal political turmoil, such as Ukraine and Belarus, heritage NGOs are frequently forced to operate from a distance, with the organisation's headquarters often being moved to another (often neighbouring) country.

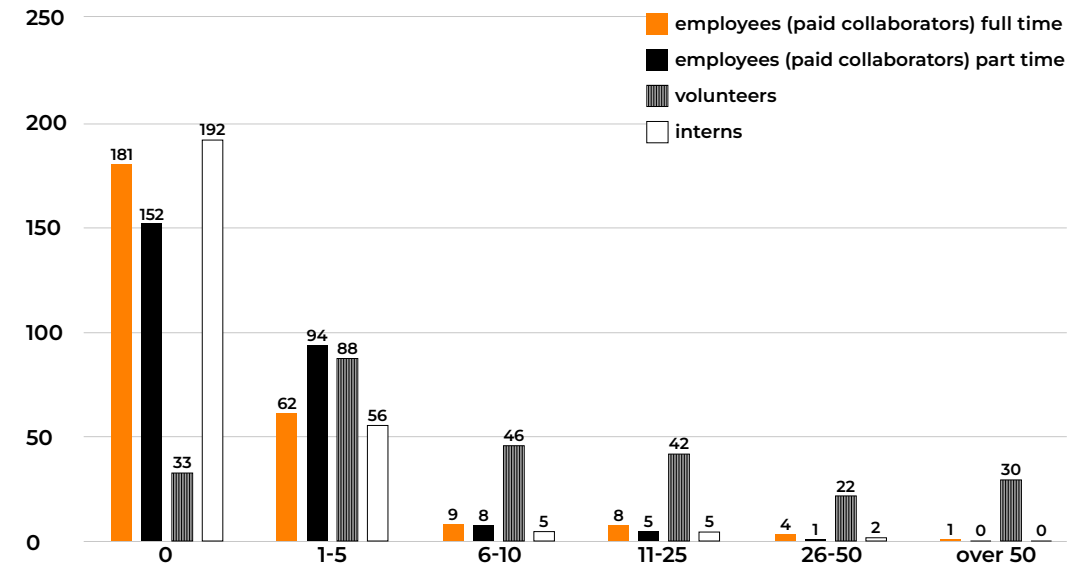
Figure 3.4:
Spatial distribution of
heritage NGOs in Central
and Eastern Europe



Source: Survey data

3.4 Employment

Figure 3.5:
The numbers of people
working/collaborating
with a heritage NGO



Source: Survey data

68.3% of the respondents declare that they do not employ anyone full time and 58.5% say they do not have any part-time workers. Interns rarely help heritage NGOs – 73.8% state they do not have any in their NGO. However, if they do collaborate with anyone, the most common declaration is that they work with 1-5 people (see Figure 3.5).

Voluntary contributions seem to be one of the essential backbones of the heritage NGO sector, offering support based on high motivation and enthusiasm. Only 12.6% of respondents do not work with any. In fact, volunteers are the only category of collaborators engaged in larger numbers: 33.7% NGOs work with 1-5 volunteers; 17.6% with 6-10; 16.1% with 11-25; 8.4% with 26-20, and; 11.5% with over 50 volunteers. However, this comes with its obvious limitations – a lack of stability and sustainability, limited time and people’s availability, and the number of those willing to be involved: “We are not always able to attract enough volunteers to maintain long-term projects. People are willing to help, but the commitment required is high.” [RTL2]

3.5 Motivation

Table 3.3:
Factors for motivation for working the NGO sector as explained in the survey question

| Motivator | Explanation |
|----------------------|--|
| Leisure | My main driver for being engaged is associated with pleasure, enjoyment and spending quality time coming from the fact of being part of an NGO focusing on heritage |
| Social interaction | I am involved because I want to associate with other people, create a network of contacts, and spend time in a group of people sharing similar interests |
| Identity | I am involved because I identify with the institution and with the ethical/ social values it embraces, or feel an urge to feel connected with a group, project or values |
| Personal well-being | I engage in activities that bring me personal satisfaction, help me relate to a particular group |
| Community well-being | I engage as a team player. It brings me satisfaction to see our group cooperating together, supporting each other and caring and thus also contributing to a positive change |
| Knowledge | My main driver is acquiring new knowledge/skills, and having a chance to self-improve |
| Creativity | I am involved because I want and like to create new goods or services or ideas |
| Economic | My main motivation is to help the institution to make profit, gain benefits, improve efficiency, and attract new audiences |

Source: Survey data

The quantitative analysis of the survey results reveals a strong emphasis on intrinsic and community-oriented values (see Table 3.3). The top three motivations selected as “A lot” were Identity (79.1%), Community well-being (72.9%), and Knowledge (70.5%) (see Figure 3.6). These results suggest that workers in this field are primarily driven by a sense of purpose connected to cultural identity, serving the community, and learning or sharing expertise. Other

highly rated factors include Creativity (64.7%), Social interaction (64.3%), and Professional interaction (62.8%), indicating a vibrant ecosystem of creative collaboration and meaningful peer engagement. On the other side of the spectrum, Economic motivation stands out as the least influential factor, with merely 22.9% indicating it matters “A lot” and nearly 40% selecting “Not at all”. Similarly, Leisure and Personal well-being rank lower, reflecting that heritage NGOs’ work is not typically perceived as a source of relaxation or personal gain. This profile paints a clear picture of a sector where commitment is not driven by financial reward or convenience but by deeply held values, intellectual engagement, and social contribution.

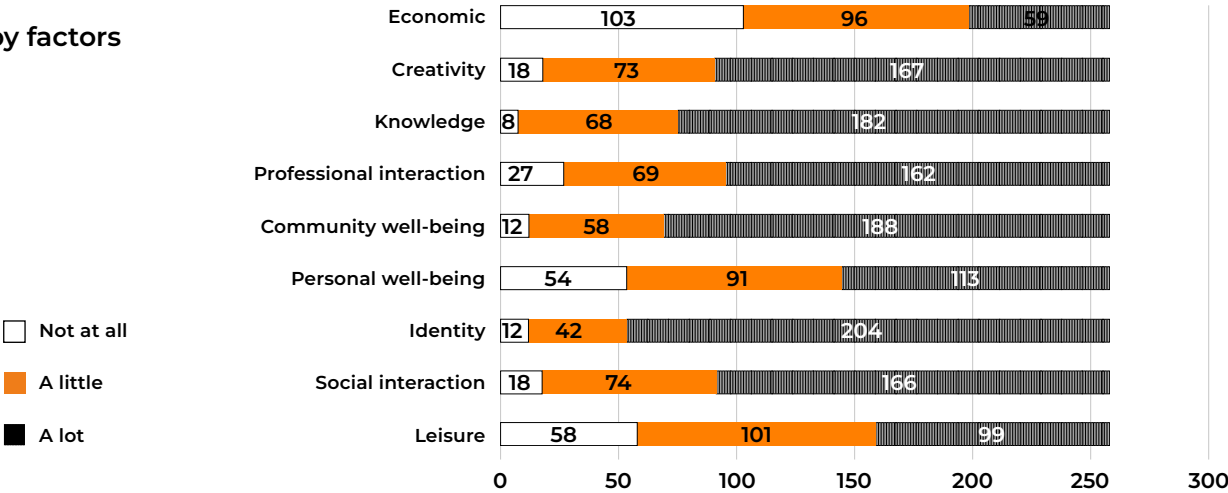
The findings from the survey are also reflected in the outputs from the qualitative research, i.e. the interviews and the round table discussions. Attachment to values, joy from involvement, and the sense of meaning and agency were stressed as relevant drivers depicting the profile of an individual working in the civil society sector. Aware of the limitations – such as fatigue, insufficient resources, etc., the respondents still stressed the uniqueness of the sector that keeps them involved.

Many experienced people over the past 30 years – since it was possible to have a non-profit organisation in Romania – have implemented thousands of projects, putting their heart into each of them. I think this is the difference between a company and a non-profit organisation – you are working in a non-profit organisation because your heart is there, because you like to do it. [IDIRO2]

It’s a great feeling to have a sense of agency and to run events. And when I observe this joy that I have, it’s a matter of the fact that there are so many people who think similarly. Sometimes, people think they’re lost or that they’re crazy due to this sensitivity or social empathy. And then you run a discussion event and 110 people come to it. And everyone wants to take a position and it turns out that we all speak with the same voice. [RTPL1]

I’m tired physically, but mentally I’m charged. It brings us energy, and when we see that it’s meaningful it’s a weightless feeling. [RTCZ1]

Figure 3.6:
Motivation by factors



Source: Survey data

An analysis of motivation factors by country (see Table 3.4) shows that three groups of countries can be distinguished. The first group seems to be driven by professional knowledge, expertise and community needs with more modest attention to individual benefit. NGOs from countries like Ukraine, Latvia or Hungary in this group show high motivation in knowledge (1.75), professional interaction (1.73), and identity (1.65). However, they score lower on personal well-being (1.10) and economic factors (~0.97). Countries from the second group are relatively equally motivated by all factors but with highest scores in creativity (1.80), professional interaction (1.80), and knowledge (1.80) – and weaker in Economic and Interaction factors. NGOs from Romania and Estonia belong to this group representing the most strongly and consistently motivated countries across both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Slovakia, Poland, Belarus, Lithuania and Czechia represent the third group. While showing decent scores in identity (1.75) and community well-being (1.69), this cluster is weaker in economic motivation (0.76) and professional interaction (1.40). This might indicate countries with more community-centred but less networked or materially supported NGO environments.

Table 3.4:
Motivation factors by country*

| | Leisure | Social interaction | Identity | Personal well-being | Community well-being | Professional interaction | Knowledge | Creativity | Economic factors |
|------------|---------|--------------------|----------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------|------------|------------------|
| Belarus | 1.4 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 1.1 | 1.9 | 1.6 | 1.3 | 1.6 | 0.4 |
| Czechia | 1.3 | 1.7 | 1.5 | 1.2 | 1.5 | 1.2 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 0.8 |
| Estonia | 1.4 | 1.6 | 1.8 | 1.5 | 1.9 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 0.8 |
| Hungary | 0.9 | 1.3 | 1.7 | 0.9 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 1.9 | 1.4 | 0.8 |
| Latvia | 1.2 | 1.4 | 1.6 | 1.0 | 1.4 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.2 |
| Lithuania | 1.2 | 1.5 | 1.7 | 1.1 | 1.6 | 1.5 | 1.6 | 1.5 | 0.8 |
| Poland | 1.2 | 1.6 | 1.8 | 1.3 | 1.8 | 1.4 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 0.8 |
| Romania | 1.2 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 1.2 | 1.6 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 1.0 |
| Slovakia | 1.5 | 1.7 | 1.8 | 1.4 | 1.6 | 1.4 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 0.9 |
| Ukraine | 1.0 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 1.4 | 1.5 | 1.9 | 1.7 | 1.6 | 0.9 |
| mean value | 1.2 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 1.2 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 0.8 |

*Average values of responses for each motivation factor by country, numerically coded on a 3-point ordinal scale ('Not at all' → 0, 'A little' → 1, 'A lot' → 2)

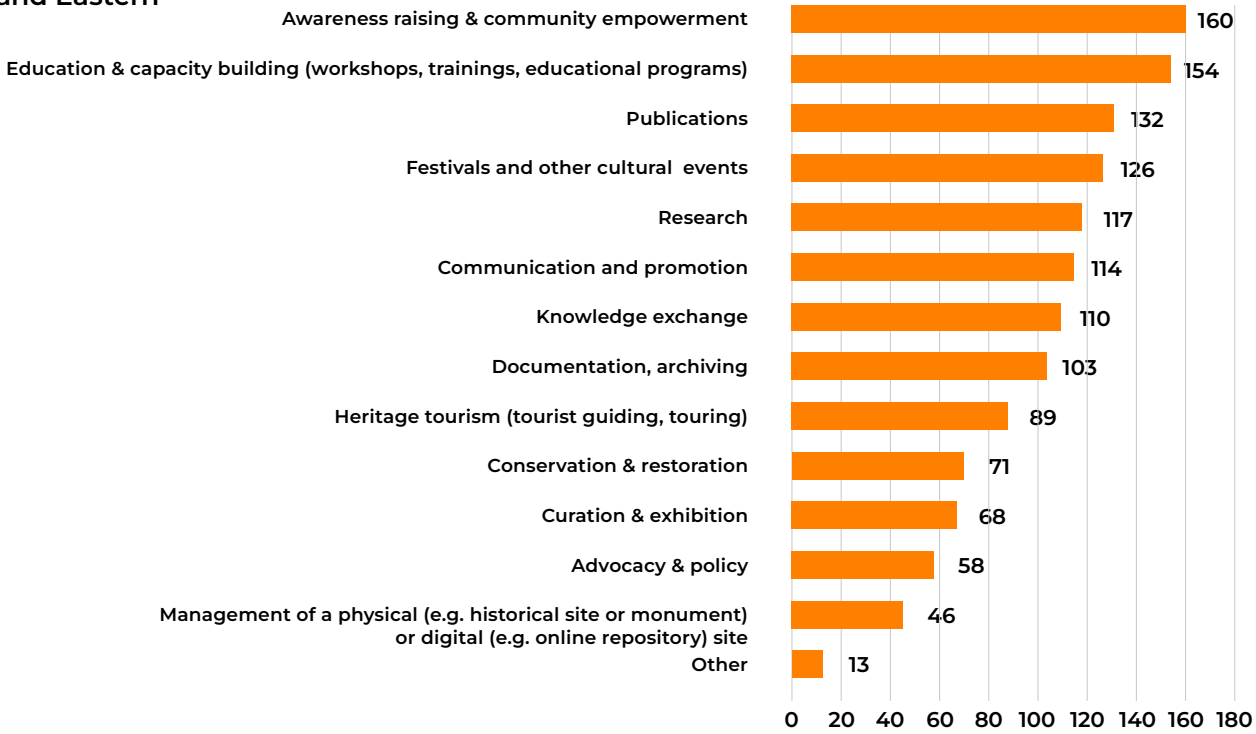
Source: Survey data

3.6

Type of activities

Figure 3.7:
Areas of activities
of heritage NGOs
in Central and Eastern
Europe

Goal-attaining methods and the types of activities employed by the NGOs included awareness raising and community empowerment as the most common action (see Figure 3.7) – 11.8% indicated their activity in this field. Knowledge sharing and exchange by organising workshops, training, capacity building and educational programmes was selected by another 11.3% of respondents. Issuing publications was also high on the list of areas of activity (9.7%), similarly with organising festivals and other cultural events (9.3%). Interestingly, only a few of surveyed NGOs manage a physical (e.g. historical site or monument) or digital site (e.g. online repository) – merely 3.4%.

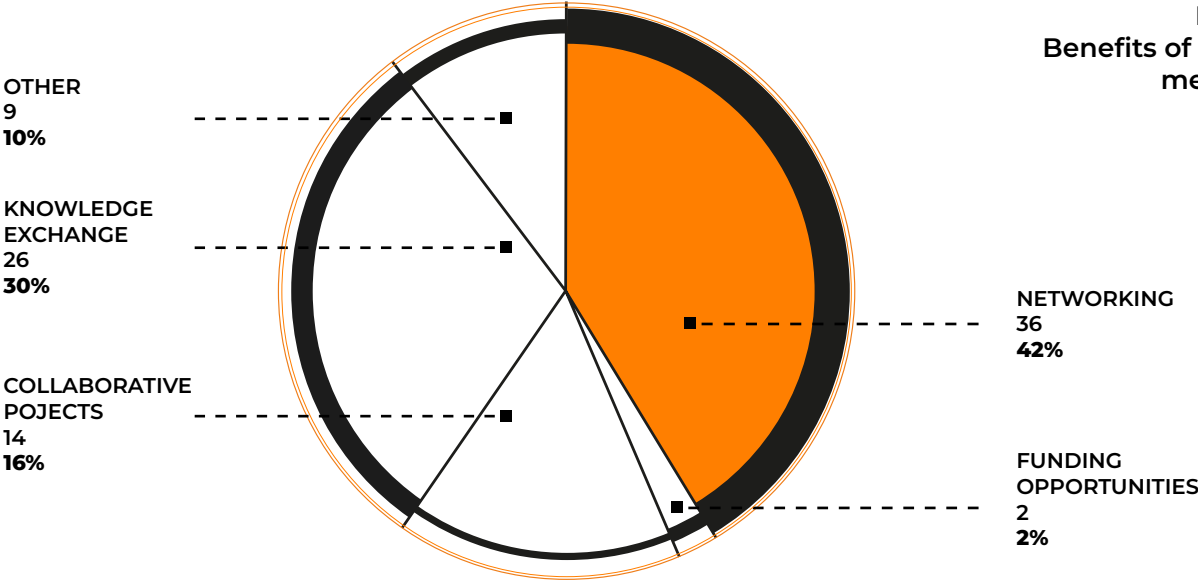


Source: Survey data

3.7

Networking and collaboration

Figure 3.8:
Benefits of a network
membership



Source: Survey data

Almost 70% of NGOs declare not to be a part of any network or larger organisation (see Figure 3.8). If they are, it is mostly a European or national organisation. The top five most frequently appearing organisations with respondent membership are Europa Nostra – 10 organisations; ICOMOS – 6; Save the Castles – 4; Interpret Europe – 3, and; CIOFF – 2. Networking and contacts are the main reasons to be a member (42% of responses). Knowledge exchange is also valued (30% of responses). Funding opportunities are not really the cause for joining a network (only two NGOs listed it as a benefit, both of them representing the Belarusian heritage NGO sector). International cooperation is not a strength of over half of the NGOs (54.6%) who declare no cooperation with international partners or within international projects.

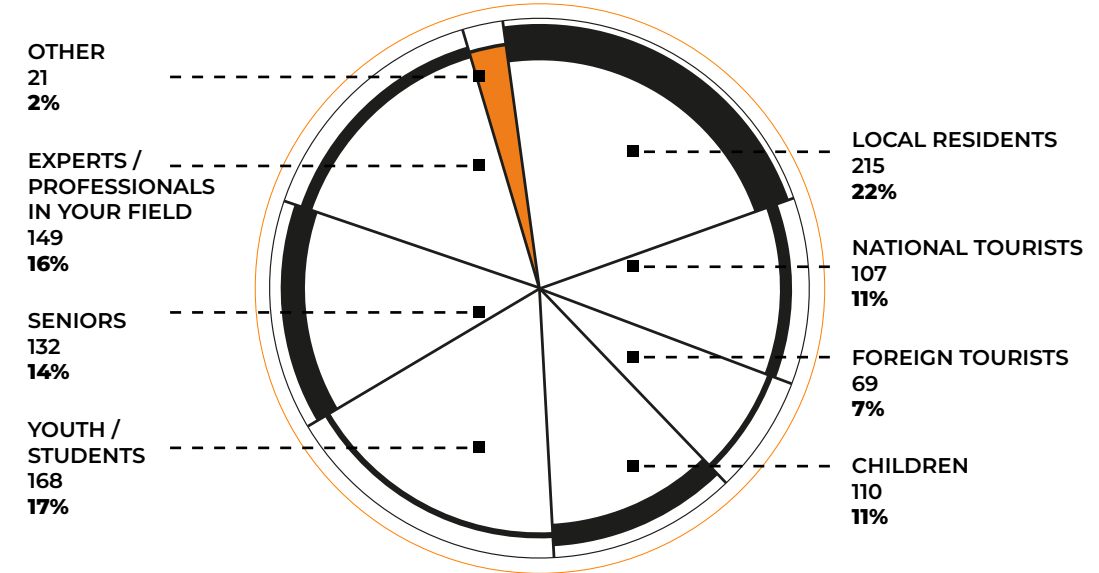
A minor involvement in larger collaborations and diminutive interest in network participation could be explained by the lack of sufficient resources and daily fatigue caused by regular tasks and responsibilities leaving little or no space for much else:

It's a matter of a lack of bandwidth, as all of us have our own work, jobs and families and all the rest... And simply the administration is so demanding and not just time consuming, but it's almost impossible, as a result to be part of a bigger project. [IDISL2]

3.8
Target groups and key stakeholders

The selection of key stakeholders and targeted audiences is naturally aligned with the main organisational goals and activities. Over one fifth of the analysed NGOs work with local communities, making their residents their primary target group (see Figure 3.9). Youth and students receive relatively large attention as 17% NGOs declare undertaking activities for them. When it comes to the age groups, 13.6% NGOs declare targeting seniors in their activities, with 11.3% targeting children. Tourists can also be the recipients of the NGOs’ work, for both domestic guests (11.0% of NGOs) and foreign visitors (7.1% of NGOs). Depending on the type of activities undertaken by an NGO, its actions can also be directed towards experts and professionals in the field, as stated in 15.3% of the responses.

Figure 3.9:
Target groups
for heritage NGOs’
activities

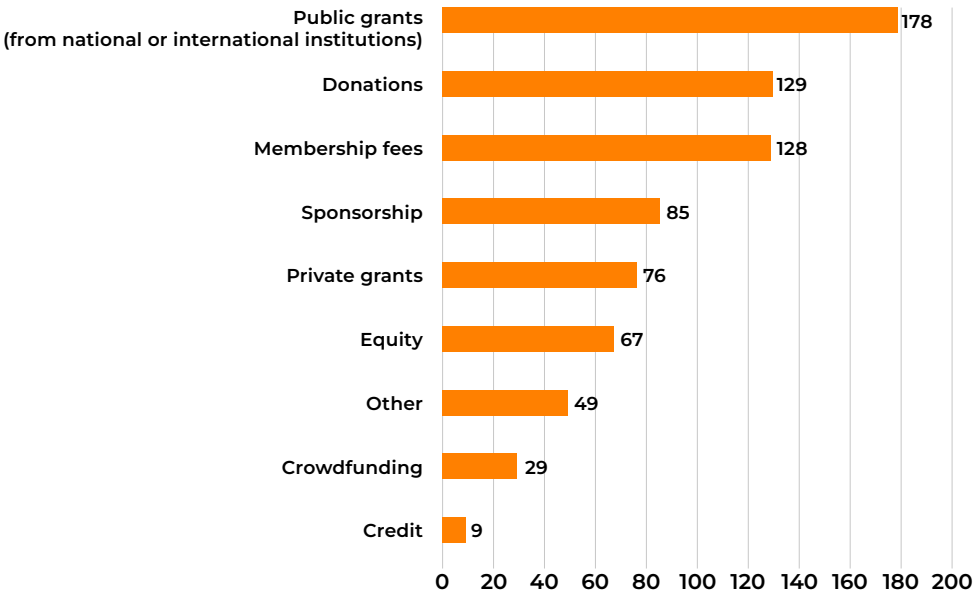


Source: Survey data

Some organisations presented a more focused approach. Under the “Other” category (see Figure 3.9) they mention people with disabilities and special needs, or with specialised interests (hobbies). There is also a focus on individuals who can influence or teach others (multipliers such as teachers) as well as the academic world. Some NGOs also work with professional and institutional groups, such as NGO leaders, politicians, decision-makers, public authorities, and experts.

3.9
Funding

Figure 3.10:
Sources of funding



Source: Survey data

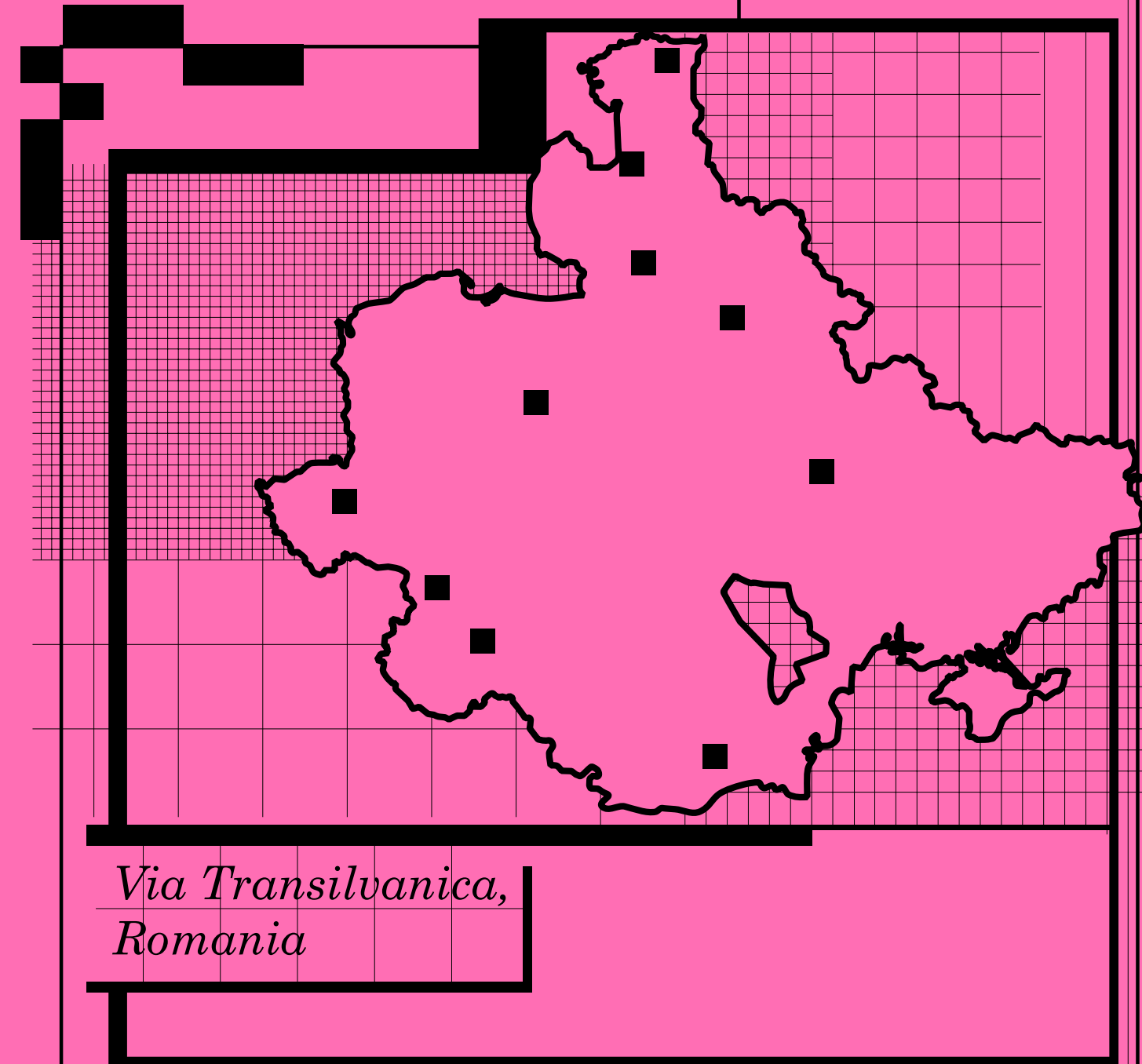
Generally speaking, for half of the NGOs, public sources make up to 50% of their budget. Similarly, the other half states that public sources are responsible for more than 50% of their budget. While for 34.7% of respondents national public funds are the primary source of financing (between 81 and 100%), 30.9% of them declare that public funds do not surpass 10% of their budget revenue. Public grants are key sources of financing (see Figure 3.10) for NGOs’ activities (23.7%). Membership fees and donations also play an important role (17.2% and 17.1% of respectively). The role of the private sector seems relatively small, with only 11.3% of responses pointing towards sponsorship and 10.1% towards private grants. Crowdfunding plays a small role as well here, with only 3.9%. In some cases, the budget pie is formed from many pieces:

Sponsors, private companies... And we also have very successful, depending on the project, campaigns in which society can get involved. We have, I think, one of the most successful campaigns here in Romania regarding donating for heritage via text message and you donate two euros. We also do that and we try to apply to different open calls from the National Architects Order or the National Cultural Administration Fund, which is part of the Ministry of Culture. We recently also finished a project that was funded by Creative Europe. But mainly we work with private companies and we try to do that, especially in the last years, as much as possible, because it's very difficult with the state funding, with the write-offs at the end of the project. [IDIRO1]

HERITAGE NGOS FROM

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE:

SNAPSHOTS



Not many decide to apply for a bank credit to finance their activities (1.2%). Apart from sources presented in Figure 10, NGOs state that in order to get some revenue (“Other”) they run some sort of business activity, for example selling various services (such as paid guided tours) and goods (e.g. books). There are also tax allocations from individuals’ income taxes, depending on the country, to the amount of 1-2%.

A lot of work still relies on voluntary contributions and commitments:

I’m acting like a volunteer, and the other coordinators are not funded. And we don’t get money, we only get the materials and technical support. And the main departments, they are looking for donations. [IDIUK2]

Via Transilvanica, Romania

Via Transilvanica is the flagship project of **Tășuleasa Social**, a Romanian NGO which is dedicated to volunteering as well as educational, social, environmental and cultural activities. The organisation turned 25 in 2024, and has a wealth of experience in running projects which are geared towards empowering local communities and youth education.

As the name suggests, Via Transilvanica is a 1,400km hiking trail which traverses the country, taking in over 400 communities and 12 UNESCO World Heritage sites. The trail spans from Putna Monastery in the north, to Drobeta-Turnu Severin, which lies on the River Danube in the south-west of the country. The trail was inaugurated in 2022 after four years of preparations which involved over 10,000 volunteers nationwide. Each kilometre of the path is marked by individually crafted milestones from Andesite rock, providing Romanian as well as international artists a chance to make their mark on the trail. Over 60 sculptors have taken part in the project so far, in what Tășuleasa Social Vice-President Anna Szekely calls the “longest sculpture exhibition in the world”.

il. 12. Man working the fields on the Sucevița – Vatra Moldoviței route.

Photo by Vlad Dumitrescu.



Before the Via Transilvanica project got under way, Tășuleasa Social was involved with tree planting projects as a way to combat the Romanian logging mafia which was destroying vast swathes of virgin forest.

Everything started by taking care of the forests. This was a really big problem in Romania 20 years ago, there was a very active logging mafia and the forest was disappearing. So one of the first we had was tree-planting with volunteers in places where others were stealing the wood and cutting it down. We went with a few youngsters and we tried to plant the trees back. And this was, of course, the only method for us to try to do something against it. It was our fight. We were fighting back by planting trees back together with a few volunteers. Nowadays, when we are organising a planting activity, it's like a big rock concert, we have many, many

volunteers: and with an army of 1,500 people we managed to plant 10 hectares in one single day.

– Anna Szekely, Vice-President, Tășuleasa Social

Following the success of the tree planting projects, Tășuleasa Social began other social and



il. 13. The Biertan fortified church (as seen from Via Transilvanica).

Photo by Andrei Moldovan.

volunteering activities which involved the youth, which continue to this day.

We tried to change the mentalities of the people who are living in the villages and near the beautiful forests of Romania. But we realised that you cannot do that, to change the mentalities of the people who are already old, but you can change their children's mentalities and you can educate them for the future, so to say. Via Transilvanica wasn't made from scratch. Saving the forest is the overarching idea and various activities always start with thinking green.

– Anna Szekely.

The motto of Via Transilvanica is the “road that unites”. Tășuleasa Social wanted to make a positive image of Romania in other countries:

We can unify all this ethnic, cultural, geographical diversity and to make it the road that unites. And after we do that, we make it to be loved by its own people, to be loved from Romanians. And after that, of course, to be the best ambassador of Romania.

– Anna Szekely.

In 2023, Via Transilvanica was awarded with a European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award in the Citizens Engagement and Awareness-raising category, as well as the Public Choice Award. Since then, numerous hikers have come from far and wide to walk the Via Transilvanica. The geographical, ethnic and cultural diversity of the 1,400km route has been a real draw for hikers who come from across the world to experience Romania on foot. Since its inception, Via Transilvanica has garnered attention from the world's most well-known walkers, including German long-distance hiker Christine Thürmer, who has walked over 65,000 km across the

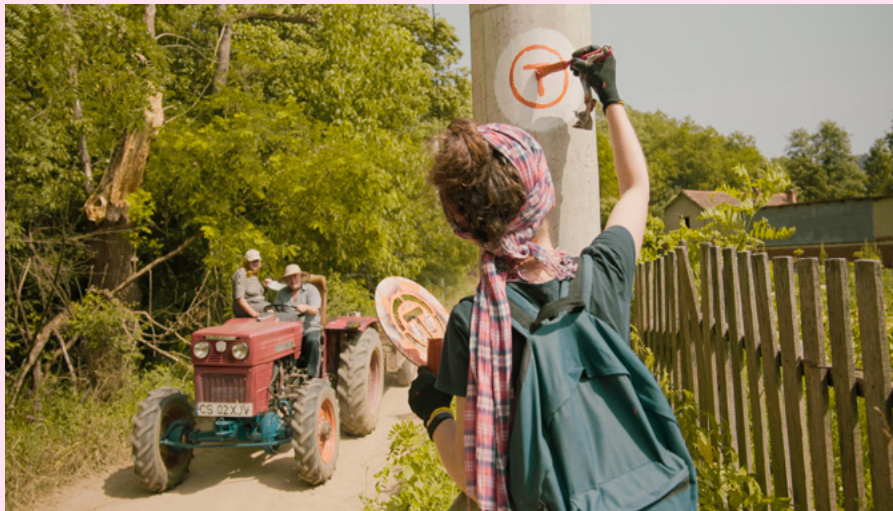
il. 14. Hikers on Pasul Mestecăniș, Vatra Dornei route.

Photo by Vlad Dumitrescu.



il. 15. Trail marking in Petnic, Caraș-Severin county.

Photo by Mircea Gherase.



globe. The trail has also been walked by Polish geographer, hiker and author Ewa Chwałko.

We have [hikers] from Australia, from New Zealand, from Japan, from the United Kingdom, from USA, Germany, Austria, France, Israel, I don't remember all the countries, but most of these tourists, these hikers, if they are coming to Romania to hike the Via Transylvania, then they do not stay for just one or two weeks. They mostly hike the whole trail, the whole 1,400 kilometres, because if they travel such a long way, they won't stay for a short period. So this is having a very positive impact on the economy of the communities through which they are hiking.

– Anna Szekely.

The idea of bringing life back to the local communities through which Via Transilvanica leads is one of the most pressing issues of the project. With a rowing number of tourists – both domestic and international – villages which were depopulated and abandoned now have a chance to have life brought back to them.



il. 16. Lunch at Galan's meadow (accommodation at a sheepfold).

Photo by Bogdan Dincă.



il. 17. Petruț Chirteș carpenter in Ibănești, Mureș county.

Photo by Andrei Becheru.



il. 18. Petruț Chirteș carpenter in Ibănești, Mureș county.

Photo by Andrei Becheru.

Via Transylvania is helping the communities to grow economically ... People are thinking about their businesses, they're thinking about growing businesses on Via Transylvania only thanks to these international travellers and thanks to the hikers and also the Romanian tourists, of course, because they are also eating and finding accommodation on the trail. So, I think, it's like an economic circle somehow.

It's a socio-economic circle, because the communities which were almost dead, we can say, most of the people who have the power to work, they migrated to other countries where they can gather much more money. And some of the villages were almost dead and almost non-existent, only with a few older people. And we managed with Via Transylvania to bring back people to start their own small businesses and to manage to survive from this economy.

– Anna Szekely.

The Via Transilvanica trail comes with its own guidebook, providing hikers with information on where to eat, stay, as well as highlighting the numerous cultural heritage sights along the way. There is also a section on what to do when encountering bears, of which there are plenty still roaming the Carpathians across Romania.

il. 19. Landscape on Sucevița
– Vatra Moldoviței route.

Photo by Vlad Dumitrescu.



Want to walk the Via Transilvanica? Listen to this episode of Holistic Heritage: On the Road by Europa Nostra Heritage Hub in Kraków and let us take you there!

Via Transilvanica: Romanian heritage step by step

 [available on www](#)

 [available on Spotify](#)

4. CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

One of the key areas of the mapping’s findings comprise the challenges and needs of the representatives of the non-governmental heritage sector. Of course, these refer to the negative aspects of the NGO ecosystem – elements which hinder or block activity in the sector. However, such complaints are intended to have a positive purpose, as the identification of problems can be used to find solutions. Some of these will require action on a national or even international basis, while others can be undertaken from the bottom up by the organisations themselves, given the common problems that have been identified internationally.

4.1 Challenges of non-governmental organisations working in the field of heritage in Central and Eastern Europe

Challenges of the non-governmental heritage sector constituted one of the core elements of the mapping project. We put an emphasis to this aspect to gain better understanding and knowledge of the nature of problems and obstacles for heritage professionals and their activities, and subsequently offer ground to formulate possible solutions. Seven subject areas were identified on the ground in survey analyses, as well as individual and group interviews.

Insufficient Recognition and Marginalisation

The greatest challenge which affects the entire heritage sector, both public and non-governmental, is the insufficient recognition of heritage as an integral and indispensable area of life which is worth supporting, funding, participating in and caring for. Despite numerous European campaigns and specialist publications demonstrating the impact of heritage on the economy, society and ecology (e.g. *Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe* published by a consortium led by Europa Nostra¹⁵) it is all too often marginalised and the engagement of civil society in heritage taken for granted. The situation is improving and change is visible, yet the position of the sector as raised by respondents in several countries has not yet reached a satisfactory position.

I think it’s in a way better now than it was a few years ago. But the challenges remain. It’s this lack of understanding of why heritage is important and why we should preserve it, why we should invest in it. It’s actually an investment, the money isn’t lost. [IDIRO1]

The Romanian respondent, for instance, said explicitly that there is no national strategy or vision from the government and the Ministry of Culture regarding cultural heritage, which causes challenges not only to NGOs, but also to the owners of heritage sites who plan restoration works [IDIRO1]. The lack of recognition of heritage among national decision makers results in an array of further challenges: access to grants and other funding schemes, legal and organisational procedures.

¹⁵ Jagodzińska, Katarzyna, Purchla, Jacek, Sanetra-Szeliga, Joanna, Thys, Clara, Vandesande, Aziliz, Van Balen, Koenraad, Van der Auwera, Sigrid. 2015. *Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe*. Krakow: International Cultural Centre on behalf of CHCFE Consortium.

The problems regarding recognition are visible at various levels of governance and are the result of the lack of understanding of the importance of work that NGOs are performing. According to respondents there is

a lack of education, lack of awareness of these people, because they do not understand what we can do and how we can do it. [RTUK4]

[local authorities and national authorities] don’t understand that non-profit organisations are filling a gap which they cannot fill. This is what we are always doing. We are like the firefighters, trying to do what they cannot do. And this recognition or this real work together, this is what I’m missing a lot. [IDIRO2]

Collaboration with the authorities, as mentioned above, is a challenge according to many respondents (e.g. “lack of cooperation between governmental institutions, municipalities and NGOs; we still need to make this dialogue more intense” [IDILT1]). Instead of collaboration or partnership, which comprise one of the needs that the sector calls for (as discussed in Chapter 4.2) representatives of the sector mentioned instrumentalisation or being used to perform certain tasks, which are rather imposed, not jointly discussed.

I have a sense of constant struggle with systems that impose certain solutions on us, and the kind of work we have been doing in the last few years in particular has taken on the role of a buffer between the state administration and self-governments, various initiatives, and we have less of a sense of co-creating a community. If any does arise, then it is a temporary one, or a kind of post-modern, contemporary, temporary one, and then we are more of a kind of a bastion, which on the one hand constantly mediates in situations in which we imagined or defined our role quite differently earlier on. That is to say, we positioned ourselves as acting, undertaking research and supporting a number of areas, and we have reached a point where both the expectations of local authorities and the state, that is, the executive and the legislature, are quite oppressive and so controlling ... It would seem ideally that this world is constructed in such a way that we co-create reality, and indeed we co-create it. [RTPL1]

Working with public administration is the biggest challenge – officials often operate on the basis of “tick-Box” projects rather than engaging in long-term dialogue. ... Officials very often want to operate on the basis of: we have a project, we have a budget, we want to complete it as soon as possible. We try to convince them that you have to look at it more broadly. [IDIPL1]

The lack of recognition may have a more systemic and extreme character. Participants of the panel discussion in Slovakia stressed the need for general legitimacy of the NGO sector whose representatives are currently “labelled as some kind of foreign agents, and actually our activities so far are [treated like] rubbish as if they were insignificant, as if we were some kind of anti-state elements...” [RTSL1].

There is also a lack of equity when it comes to collaboration between public, private and non-governmental entities in the sector. NGOs which become involved do not have the same position as bigger actors. They are not seen as equal, especially when they are small in size. Respondents said in a discussion:

There are difficulties in making partnerships truly equal – sometimes we are just a small part of a larger project led by bigger institutions. [RTL2]

We should be seen as partners in shaping policy, not just as organisations that occasionally receive funding. [RTL2]

High expectations of NGOs’ performance does not align with recognition of the value of people who perform these activities which would be expressed in their salaries. That is why when it comes to a discussion on motivations for working in the sector, responsibility is often mentioned.

There’s a contradiction that’s built in here... that on the one hand we expect these NGOs or the third sector to implement something very sensible and good... but this order and this national policy is not followed in any way by a well thought-out, well organised system of organisation, which also means people and funding. [RTS1]

It must also be stressed that the representatives of the NGO sector also do not value their work as much as they themselves would like the authorities to value them. There is a perception in societies that services and activities, e.g. workshops, should be offered free of charge. This may be connected to the fact that in common view NGOs which get public grants should be obliged to offer their heritage services without a fee. The public resistance, or at least bewilderment and reluctance to pay a fee which members of the NGOs face, may be an obstacle in developing their services and cause difficulty to function under the rules of a free market economy. The challenge in this respect is to build solidarity within the sector to value its work accordingly and this way transmit this recognition outside.

On the one hand, we are all very keen to provide access and education to as wide a group of people as possible, and at the same time, over the years, the finances flowing from the top, whether it is the EU, or whether it exists solely in the form of relying on grants and not charging people anything, has perhaps made people see a little less value in heritage activities. It seems to them that because it’s free, it will always be free. Meanwhile, the funding will eventually stop flowing. Our clients, or our audiences, were also surprised at first that we suddenly offer paid activities. When we no longer have external funding and we have to make a living from something, well then we turn to our audience. ... We’ve lost a bit of awareness of the value of heritage, we need to bring it back now and talk about it again so that people are aware that this work is worth it and that all the values behind heritage are hugely needed and have a high worth. [RTPL2]

... it is a challenge to convince the NGO community to value their own work and that there should be a certain solidarity within that community which will make us stop agreeing to certain things and stop agreeing to various processes or doing things for free. [RTPL2]

... they themselves are guilty of being good because they are seen to be doing a great deal of work for minimal fees or free of charge, so to say, and since things are working well, why change them? [RTS1]

Analysis of the challenges in the survey reveals that the most frequently mentioned issue faced by NGOs in the region is a lack of sufficient and stable funding, which appears in 225 responses, accounting for a significant portion of the challenges mentioned (27.0% of all responses, see Figure 4.1). This indicates that financial instability remains a major concern for NGOs active in the heritage sector. Additionally, the combination of limited technical and/or organisational capacity (reported by 15.7% of respondents) with lack of funding emphasises the critical role that financial resources play in improving NGOs’ infrastructure. Without sufficient funding, NGOs cannot invest in technology, training, or other capacity-building measures needed to enhance their effectiveness. Furthermore, poor networking and lack of strategic planning (both reported by almost 5% of respondents) are often found together with funding and staffing issues (17.4% of responses). This indicates that NGOs, despite their best efforts, may struggle to connect with potential partners, collaborators, and funders, which further exacerbates their resource challenges. The lack of strategic planning paired with these other issues suggests that many organisations may operate reactively rather than proactively, making it difficult for them to plan for growth or long-term sustainability. This analysis also shows that legal restrictions/procedures and a lack of operational sustainability are often paired with operational and financial challenges. This suggests that regulatory hurdles, alongside internal capacity gaps, can prevent NGOs from adapting to changes and pursuing opportunities for sustainability.

Funding



*The chart shows the number of distinctive responses, whether provided as a singular response or as part of a combined response (more than one challenge mentioned per NGO)

Source: Survey data

Figure 4.1:
Key challenges
currently faced by
NGOs *

Almost every interview and group discussion with representatives of the sector in the project revolved around financial resources, however, they usually appeared at some further stage of the conversation. Despite the fact that money is a crucial factor for the existence and running of activities, one may gain an impression from these meetings that the need for better funding is an immanent and never-ending demand of the NGOs, hence it always appears as part of the conversation, while its fulfilment has fallen into the category of wishful thinking, and as such has moved from pole position.

In the case of numerous organisations, problems with securing funding may effectively block the realisation of programme activities and result in limiting the number of staff (e.g. “our biggest difficulties are still resources, we have a lot of ideas and desires to make something happen, but unfortunately, after the Covid years, we have laid off, for example, half of the staff.” [RTES1]).

The widespread lack of long-term funding and the necessity of a constant filing of applications to various funds results in great time and energy consumption, especially since many organisations rely on teams consisting of only a several people (even though when the membership indicates otherwise, many NGOs have only a handful of active members who perform daily duties). The constant preoccupation with finding potential funding schemes and devoting time on preparing submissions impedes strategic and long-term thinking and contributes to deepening burnout (more on this below). Representatives of the sector say:

Money would help us not to be distracted by survival. [RTUK2]

Sustainability ... We are applying for a three year period. ... For us, it's the last year of this period. So we are now thinking “will they support us next year, or not?” ... We are applying for finances all the year round. And this is like the Cultural Capital Foundation, another fund in Latvia. Then we are trying to attract money from European foundations. And then there are local funds. When you are doing local projects, then you are attracting local money. But it's like being a hamster in a wheel. All the time you are doing something to have some money to survive. [IDILV2]

The continuity or existence of the organisation largely depends on short-term grants which do not offer security and stability. The work is performed in the rigour of short-term projects, which demand reaching goals fast. The necessity of winning more grant competitions and simultaneous and overlapping realisation of all new projects results also in the lack of proper evaluation, thus making it difficult to take a broad view of the overall performance of the organisation from a distance. In one of the group discussions it was clearly articulated that

... heritage work is long-term projects and activities. Grants are at best for two or three years. Each time we are held accountable for whether these are new activities that we are proposing, how innovative they are compared to the ones that have been done recently, whereas the value of this work above all is in the continuity, in being able to safely say that we can continue this work and keep creating with the community. [RTPL1]

Short-term and project-oriented funding results in the seasonality of activities, which otherwise could be much better conceived and planned, usually with greater financial efficiency. This issue was widely discussed with participants of many panel discussions – the following is a very explicit voice:

... it forces our projects to be seasonal, and this is a big issue because you cannot do long-term interventions, and if you're working with a monument, if you're working on changing habits, on the education side, you need to do long term interventions, you need to work with multiple generations. And the fact that you're always relying on short-term regional or national funding really messes with us and forces us into a very stressful lifestyle. We live from one deadline to another, from one grant proposal writing to another, and we try to somehow tie it together in our head for it to make sense in the long term. But basically, every time you're trying to creatively package concepts that should work in the long term and not reinvent them over and over again. [RTRO2]

Such a model of funding results in the lack of financial stability for staff. For most people, working in an NGO is an additional job, because they need to earn a living elsewhere. The lack of funding for employment remuneration has resulted in people leaving the sector and difficulties with attracting a new workforce.

[There is a] problem of providing people with a permanent livelihood from this work, that is, hiring them not to work on specific projects, but simply giving them the opportunity to have the security associated with permanent work employment. [RTPL1]

[The problem is a] lack of funding, because if people, at least the main team, would be paid for their time, it would be a bit different. Now we are at this point where we can't work anymore voluntarily and we don't have a younger generation who could take over. [IDILT1]

One of the most significant trends visible in the analysis of the survey is the frequent concurrence of a lack of sufficient and stable funding alongside other challenges, particularly a lack of staff/collaborators (a lack of enough staff/collaborators comes second of all mentions, amounting to 17.4%). This combination suggests that financial difficulties are not only a standalone issue but also a catalyst for other operational problems. When NGOs face financial instability, they often struggle to hire the necessary staff, leading to workforce shortages that directly impact the organisation's ability to execute its mission.

Another issue related to funding is the tailoring of project proposals to the requirements of the grant. An ambition to modify them in order to get the funding may not necessarily be fully in line with the identified needs and the organisation's potential (“you always have to fit it into something within the grant” [RTCZ1]).

Harsh competition for funding results in searching for more and more innovative and creative solutions. This may be seen as a positive aspect of the work in the sector, however, when it is constantly correlated with the need to survive it cannot be seen as such. In one statement it is combined with a pejorative word “grantoza” – a word coined in Polish to describe the excessive pursuit of grants and subsidies awarded through a competition for the implementation of projects:

Grantmaking (“grantoza”) forces us to innovate, that is, to look for non-standard solutions, because we are often competing 1 against 10, 1 against 20 other organisations, fighting for the same funds in the same programme ... so we have to somehow be flashy, give something from ourselves. [RTPL1]

Members of the sector have also raised problems with the transparency of rules that are applied to grant regulations, which may raise doubts as to the fairness of this process. The root of the problem is not necessarily bad will, but a lack of knowledge and established standards for working with civic organisations.

Sometimes we feel that changes in the way grants are awarded are opaque and the application process too complicated. [IDIPL1]

There is a lack of clear standards and tools for officials to better understand what the process of working with NGOs looks like. [IDIPL1]

The issues of funding are directly connected to the assistance provided by the state, not only financial, but legal, organisational, and administrative. It is not uncommon for representatives of the sector to be bitter that they are left to their own devices, having to cope with responsibilities and expectations that are beyond their capabilities. An example of a World Heritage Listed site being managed by an NGO is an extreme one where a set of regulations is imposed by UNESCO on the member state, and this cedes all responsibilities to the non-public manager, who receives no assistance, whether it be financial or organisational.

How long are NGOs supposed to bail out the state without giving anything in return in terms of legislation, regulations, laws, resolutions or funding? The problems in maintaining sites, and whether they are local museums or UNESCO World Heritage sites, are plentiful, and we still have this responsibility to the world of preserving this heritage. [RTPL1]

I believe, and this is not necessarily a Hungarian speciality, that civil society organisations, and in fact all institutions and organisations dealing with heritage, are increasingly being pushed in the direction of making heritage and culture self-sustaining, of making it productive, and of ensuring that the costs that it incurs are paid by the civil society as individuals, and not as a society, not as the state in some cases, or as a larger representative community. [RTHU1]

Representatives of the sector maintain that they should be assisted by the state at least in the form of tax reliefs, since they are realising obligations on behalf of the state. In this respect heritage professionals observe the way this system functions in Western countries, with examples from the region being quoted, such as:

I think it is not normal that a non-profit organisation is paying VAT to the government. ... We pay for the materials, the VAT. When we get these grants from other countries or from where we get the grants to save a building in a town, for a couple of years in 2005 and 2006 the non-profit organisations could get this VAT back. I think this is only normal. [IDIRO2]

In many discussions, heritage professionals said explicitly that NGOs replace the responsibility of the state. Even though this is the idea behind creation of NGOs, representatives of the sector comment that this delegation of responsibilities is too excessive and is neither supported with

appropriate funding nor organisational assistance. Statements similar to the three that follow from various countries were often raised:

We are doing so much work in this country, which the government, the authorities are not capable of doing in this field of heritage ... They don't see the value. In the town hall they don't have specialists in this field and they are doing chaotic projects, which are often destroying the heritage in a town or a village. It is important to keep the ensemble intact, not to destroy and put something which has nothing to do with the buildings in this village or town. So, I dream that they would contract non-profit organisations, see us as specialists, because we have many years of experience in this field, to help them make the right decisions. [IDIRO2]

... the lack of public and governmental support. There are a lot of things that should really be the responsibility of the state, and now they fall to the NGOs, but obviously we are struggling with this, because many things are not entirely within our competence. [RTHU1]

Many associations are filling gaps that the state institutions do not or cannot address, yet they are not recognised as essential service providers. [RTLTV2]

The challenge for the daily functioning of NGOs lies also in numerous organisational matters – permissions or decisions that can successfully block or delay the realisation of projects. These problems may discourage NGOs from taking on new tasks that require struggling with formal matters. The following statement sums up the difficulties:

Cooperation with local authorities and cultural institutions is one of the biggest challenges – sometimes we have support, but sometimes we have to fight for every permission, every decision. ... Some authorities understand that NGOs are partners, while others treat us as a problem that needs to be closed down as soon as possible. [IDIPL2]

Excessive bureaucracy is an often repeated challenge which overwhelms NGO staff. They demand, for instance, easier accounting rules [RTPL1], while also complaining about “reducing work to the presentation of evidence to the public administration, [which] is very frustrating” [RTPL1]. Following a number of rules and regulations, which according to the representatives of the sector are unnecessary at this scale, takes away precious energy and consumes time which should be contributed to programme activities.

... the municipal governments are very keen to boast about all the things that happen here, but in reality they very often act as brakes, it just takes a lot of patience to wait for someone to simply accept, sign, approve something. It just takes a lot of strength. [RTPL2]

... administration is a pretty big problem for somebody who has minimal staff and so there's this additional work so it's quite complex. [RTCZ1]

Additionally, the formalism accompanying bureaucracy was raised as incompatible with the contemporary nature of heritage which is dynamic and ever changing. Formal regulations of the state do not follow the needs of the sector. An example of a music festival was raised, which is classified to one domain of culture, while it has the ambition of undertaking cross-sectoral activities: yet funding programmes do not keep up with arising needs:

Bureaucracy

... The Mazurkas Festival is not able to raise money for artistic activities because it is only able to raise money from the field of folk culture. Therefore, when the festival thinks about dialogue between contemporary artists and the rural areas, and contemporary urban communities and the countryside, there is a structural problem, i.e. this siloed communication and tool Box of the state is artificial. Whereas I think that NGOs are able to bridge and communicate these zones and that this dialogue is crucial, it is creative and it is a source of simply updating this culture in a real way. [RTPL2]

In the survey, other prominent challenges include limited technical and/or organisational capacity (15.7%), and legal restrictions/procedures (8.8%), reflecting operational and regulatory barriers that hinder the performance and growth of NGOs in this sector.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing is an issue which was discussed widely across group discussions in various countries, and was mentioned in individual interviews. However, somewhat surprisingly, it was not identified by respondents of the survey. Activities realised within a framework of constant uncertainty and largely relying on voluntary work has drained people physically and psychologically. Working for free or for very low wages, under project-based conditions, is common and the lack of stability of any given organisation is also transferred onto a lack of personal viability. Burnout is an oft repeated word which corresponds with the current public agenda, where the issue of wellbeing and mindfulness is raised more and more often referring to the corporate and cultural sectors. Next to “burnout”, the following words appeared in the conversation: “lack of energy” [IDIHU2]; “overworked” [IDIRO1]; “collapse” [RTPL1]; “sacrificing oneself” [RTRO2]; “overtiredness” [RTES2]; “exhausting” [RTRO1], and; “under pressure” [RTRO1]. The Box presents a selection of statements related to wellbeing.

We’re understaffed and under budgeted. It’s super exhausting to be that way all the time, because you’re constantly under pressure and it is very hard not to get tired. [RTRO1]

... we had no time, we had no energy... [IDIHU2]

I feel like we make tremendous efforts to, for example, save a church, do this project, to act, to get this and that funding. But then we don’t invest as much effort and time in building a sustainable team. ... I feel like the cultural sector in Romania is overworked. It’s actually like burning out. And we need some support in terms of how we can make our organisations sustainable. [IDIRO1]

Physically you just can’t do certain things anymore at a certain point. I see people who are active for six months and then for two months, they simply vanish. This happens like some kind of collapse after a really gruesome and terrible training session. And it’s my impression that it’s kind of a standard in some teams now. [RTPL1]

The biggest challenge is finding a model that strikes a balance between commitment and, maybe that’s not the right word, but let’s call it the “cost-effectiveness” of operating in this field. [RTPL2]

Quite a lot of NGO members also face burnout and are just being told a lot by other people: “Why do I need this if it’s some kind of second job?” Let’s say a person has to work eight hours at his main job and he works at least as much, if not more, for the association, yes, and very often he works for free for the association, and he also puts his own money in. This is also something that is very discouraging for some younger people to get involved in associations, because they, let’s say, maybe look at the association also in terms of, well, not only what I could give to the association, but what the association could give to me. To get over that feeling that, well, the association is there for you to contribute, not for you to benefit, well, it’s quite difficult at the moment. [RTL1V1]

NGOs need psychological containment, to learn how to manage their time, health, emotions and so on, because we are all burnt out freelancers in multiple projects, and somehow you end up sacrificing yourself on the altar of subjects you are passionate about, and the fact that you want to have a positive impact and next thing you know you are like a hamster on a spinning wheel and I think there’s a need. [RTRO2]

People are actually very much on the verge of burnout, we have too many commitments which we have to implement. [RTES1]

... burnout and just overtiredness, which maybe hasn’t developed into burnout yet... [RTES2]

Burnout is such that one can do a lot, people can do a lot under the steam of their own enthusiasm, but one needs to rest, one needs some time for oneself, and time maybe for other things that are not just related to some non-governmental work. [RTL1V2]

Collaboration is missing not only with regard to authorities working at various levels, but also between organisations themselves (“the biggest problem of the development of the NGO sector, it’s missing collaboration” [IDISL2]). As they apply to the same funds and compete for limited resources, they have indeed become competitors. A lack of networking has resulted in the absence of synergy between various actions undertaken independently. Heritage professionals admit that they operate individually, not collaboratively. Especially in Romania, the need for networking was voiced, followed with ideas for specific solutions regarding a common platform or forum for meetings. This should be connected to the first joint meeting of Romanian NGOs working in heritage which was organised in September 2024 on the occasion of the European Cultural Heritage Summit in Bucharest. This is an example of the need for collaboration (more in the Box below).

The absence of a cloud, a forum, a group, a community of these NGOs that can speak out, so that these people can meet and say what is going on in their work, and not only what victories they are achieving, what everybody sees, but also what are the things that are not visible. [RTRO2]

Insufficient Collaboration between NGOs

Changes needed to provide greater efficiency for non-governmental organisations working in the field of heritage in Central and Eastern Europe

While the previous section brought a range of challenges that representatives of the non-governmental heritage sector face in their activities in the field, the following paragraphs concentrate on the needs of the sector, the fulfilment of which would help organisations to become more effective in their activities.

The results of the survey demonstrate that the priorities of NGOs in the Central and Eastern European heritage sector reveal a strong emphasis on community engagement and networking (15 indications in the survey), showing that these organisations probably see collaboration as a crucial factor for sustainability and impact. Many NGOs highlight the need to strengthen local and international partnerships, expand their volunteer base, and actively engage with communities to promote cultural heritage. This suggests that NGOs recognise that financial sustainability alone is not enough – they also need strong social networks and public support to thrive.

During individual and group interviews, respondents indicated that collaboration between representatives of the sector is missing on both national and sometimes international level. One way of improving the situation is to create forums where representatives of the sector could meet up, network, share concerns and jointly look for solutions. Despite a reported constant lack of time, being overworked and overwhelmed with duties and obligations, heritage professionals in various countries see the need of networking with other representatives of the sector. The following statement is such a call to joint action:

I know we're all very caught up [in our daily activities], but I think it would be super important if there was, for example, an event where we could all get together around the table and discuss some specific common goals, some common problems that we all face and the solutions we have found to them, or just to take each other's pulse and give each other a little encouragement from time to time. But from all this discussion, at the national level I see it, there should come out a kind of charter or a document that is coherent and with which you can go forward to the political environment and to potential funders, but I think it is extremely important to approach this nationally, holistically, and to have a very well argued basis that you can then present to stakeholders, whatever they are. [RTRO1]

Knowing the others and what others do results in more efficient work of the sector through possible collaborations and partnerships. A meeting opportunity is needed to achieve synergy, as the following respondent called it:

... in fact, the hermetic nature of the niches we often occupy, the hermetic nature of ourselves in relation to other organisations, the lack of synergy between other NGOs which could cooperate together, which could support each other, and often the lack of such out-of-the-Box thinking in

Need for Networking and Collaboration

I think the NGO sector in Romania in this heritage part lacks cooperation. We don't truly fully cooperate between ourselves. [IDIRO1]

We need dialogue, we need a clear understanding and the creation of certain platforms, such as an association of museums, perhaps an association of NGOs working in the cultural sector, so that there is dialogue and cooperation. Because, for example, one meeting is not enough, but the creation of networks such as Europa Nostra, which is one of the largest European networks related to culture and art, so that there is synergy. Synergy in projects, in thinking, in philosophy, so that there are common values. [RTUK1]

We are divided. I don't want to voice a conspiracy theory, but our division is the result of the environment in which we operate. We're all fighting over the same very little money and we're actually trapped under this glass ceiling that no one really passes through. ... it seems to me that it is fundamental, at the moment, precisely because it seems to me that there are so many NGOs in this field in Romania, to create an infrastructure, a network, a platform that somehow allows all the organisations to come together. And then it could somehow function as a common resource platform that all organisations in the field could access. And it would facilitate partnerships between smaller and larger organisations. [RTRO1]

Apart from the challenges of retaining staff, another challenge regarding the workforce is the need for young people to join NGOs so that the older generation has an opportunity to transfer their skills and pass on their legacy (“the biggest challenge is to find the people who will continue the tradition and the activities and then also the resources” [RTES1]). In some places this constitutes a challenge – the work may be viewed as uninteresting, it is also poorly paid and it lacks stability. In some organisations, especially those specialised in

Ageing and Transfer of Skills

conservation or architecture, the problem is the ageing of its members and little influx of younger professionals who could take over some of the workload and lead the way towards the future. Here the challenge seems to be very characteristic of the current young generation, which has a different model of spending time, different needs and different expectations compared to seniors working in the sector. The following example touches this generational gap:

... our biggest challenge is skills transfer – whether we can transfer skills to young people and whether young people will want to do it. I also perhaps did not fully understand before that the young man of today is very complex. I myself have been rafting on the Gauja river for 17 years this year, I had no fear or doubt to be on the water for three days, physically working and working, and I thought it was cool. Then most of the young people, I think, for them, spending an hour in nature is already a problem. It is even crazier if they have to spend the day without a phone or without any device there. This is a huge challenge. So, again, our big challenge is to transfer skills to young people. Finding young people who are really interested. [RTL1V1]

the context of cooperation with other institutions which, let's say, are not from the same field as ours, but maybe we have some chance of synergy, maybe we have some chance of coexistence. [RTPL2]

Depending on the country, the “forum” proposal takes various forms. In some places, the idea took the form of an organisation animating NGOs:

Maybe there could be some such nice organisation that could connect ... how we could do better and what kind of events we could have ... it would be possible to come together and exchange ideas. [RTES2]

In Hungary, taking into account political decisions taken against NGOs (see brief comments about Hungary in Chapter 2), it was stressed that any umbrella organisation should be independent and in contradiction to the state authorities.

It's very important ... that there should be an umbrella organisation for civil society, representing civil society against the elected authorities. [RTHU1]

Collaboration can bring various positive results. One of the ideas which was raised in the research is sharing information, tools and human resources between NGOs [IDIRO1].

Need for Intergenerational Transmission

The second most frequently mentioned priority in the survey is education and youth engagement (9 answers in the survey). Many organisations seek to attract and educate younger generations, ensuring the continuity of their work and fostering a deeper connection between youth and cultural heritage. This aligns with broader concerns in the heritage sector, where intergenerational transmission of knowledge and skills is seen as essential for long-term preservation. This, however, at least in some areas of heritage involving physical work, is not popular among the young generation, and is thus under the risk of extinction. One respondent presented this challenge in the following way:

... there is a huge problem, the young generation doesn't want to choose a restorer's occupation, because it's laborious work. If it is, for example, work on paper, you can draw, but if it is a stucco in the church, nobody wants to choose this occupation, where you need to bend your head. [IDILIT2]

Young people joining NGOs could support ongoing activities and gradually take over the leadership in the organisations. They can offer different viewpoints, add a fresh perspective on all the operational and content-related aspects (“need for generational exchange, because we really need to have a younger generation that can complement our advice” [RTSL1]).

Need for Long-Term Financial Support

Funding and financial stability remains a major concern, but in the survey it is ranked slightly lower than networking and education (only seven indications in the survey), indicating that while financial resources are critical, NGOs are probably looking beyond immediate funding challenges and seeking more strategic, long-term solutions. In the interviews, a clear need was formulated: NGOs should have access to long-term funding opportunities, instead of most common one-year grants, which, due to the nature of the budgetary hand, are actually much shorter.

This funding scheme could provide more stability for the organisation and in this way allow for better performance, as well as space for creativity and growth. The postulate was voiced in various countries:

... the introduction of three-year grants could support our activities, give a sense of greater, more long-term action. ... a good example is EU grants, which often last for three years. ... they are demanding at the level of thinking creatively about what to do, but if you already get such a grant, it gives you the opportunity to spread your wings. [RTPL2]

The state should make it easier for NGOs to access long-term funding, rather than forcing them to apply for short-term grants every year. [RTLIV2]

Linked to funding issues is the question of supporting NGOs to offer their services effectively in the market. This requires a change in the social perception of NGOs, which, even if they benefit from the support of grants and public subsidies, have to think about selling their products and services in order to sustain and develop themselves. This also links to the professionalisation of activities in this area. Many organisations have no experience in the processes of conomisation, hence the need to promote good practices and training support. The following statement sums up this issue:

The third sector needs support in the processes of economisation, so that it does not have to reinvent everything all the time. There are organisations that have already gone down this road, we also share our experience, conduct study visits and show our way so that someone can learn from it. ... [Public] funds are scarce, but I have a very faint optimistic perception that there will be more, that suddenly someone will say that culture is so important, that there will be an extra stream of money flowing here, so maybe supporting yourself with market presence and selling certain services, not just products, is the way forward for NGOs. [RTPL2]

The focus on policy and legal frameworks, though less frequently mentioned in the survey, highlights the need for institutional support and regulatory changes to facilitate the work of heritage organisations. The need for more organisational aid was voiced in individual and group interviews, ranging from facilitating the day-to-day running of the organisation and project administration to establishing a forum or even an institutional body – either a nationwide body that could become an umbrella for the sector and facilitate collaboration with state authorities, or even be part of the state administration (“I guess it would help the NGOs more if they had their own ministry or some kind of national umbrella” [RTCZ1], “to create sections in some specific ministry, which the association is concerned with, especially the Ministry of Culture, as advisory bodies where those associations could come to ask questions”. [RTSL2])

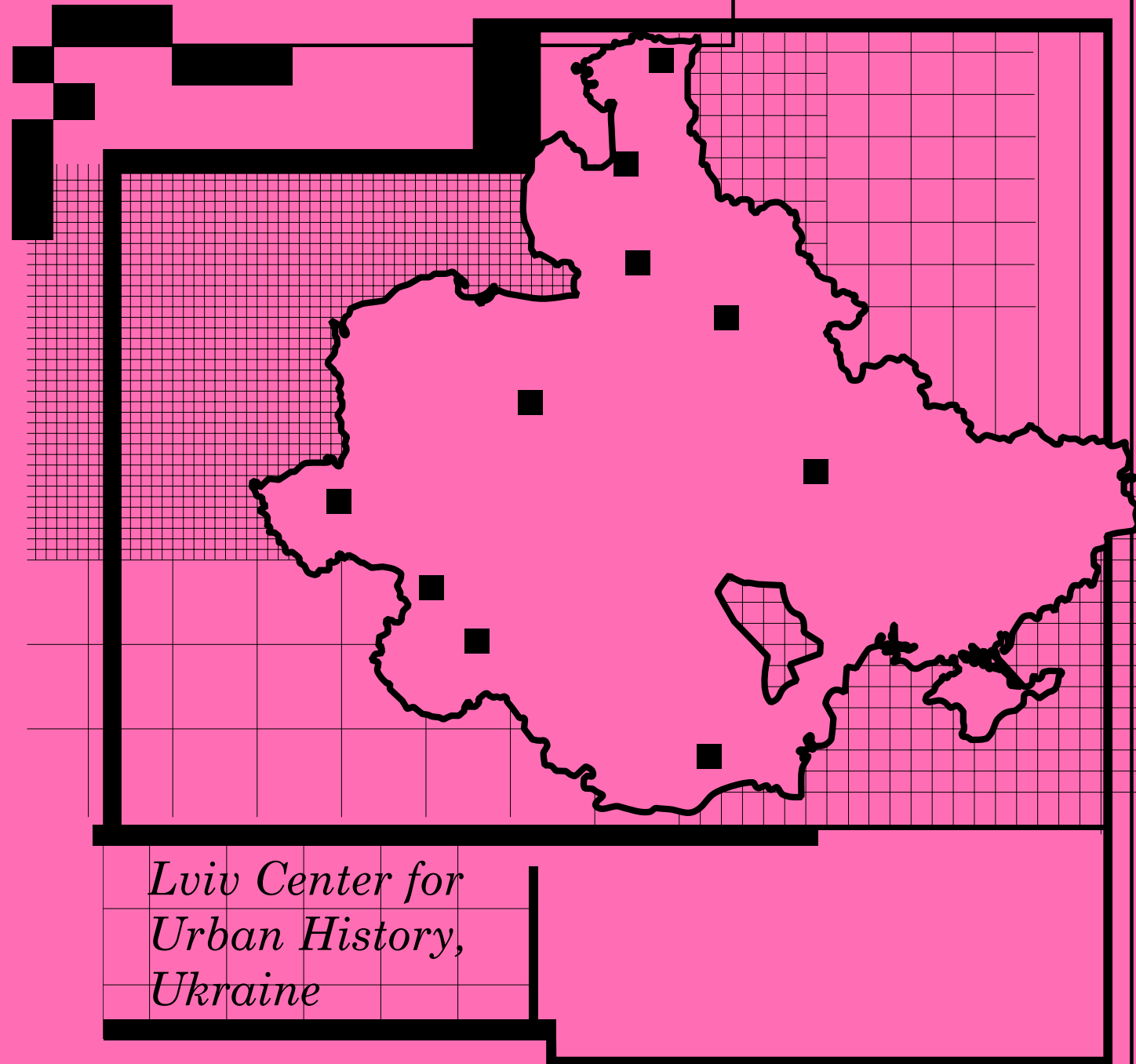
Some NGOs also emphasise infrastructure and headquarters, underlining the importance of having a stable physical base for their operations. This suggests that while financial support is necessary, many organisations also need structural and policy-level changes to enhance their resilience and long-term impact.

Need for Support with Marketability and Monetisation Processes

Need for Administrative and Structural Support

HERITAGE NGOS FROM

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: SNAPSHOTS



A minority of 13% of respondents of the survey decided also to share some optimistic views concerning positive changes in the future they see. Their responses could be divided into the following categories:

- heritage and cultural interest – a growing public interest in cultural heritage, traditional architecture, and local identity (the most frequently mentioned opportunity)
- community engagement and networking – significant opportunities are seen in expanding NGOs’ networks, collaborating with other organisations, and engaging with local communities.
- international cooperation – opportunities seen in cross-border collaboration, global networks, and participation in international projects.
- youth and education – observed increasing involvement of young people, educational activities, and training as key future opportunities.
- funding and financial stability – securing stable funding, finding donors, and benefiting from European grants are recurring themes.

Lviv Center for Urban History

il. 20. Home Movie Day in
Lviv, Kopernik cinema, 2020.

Photo from the Lviv Center
for Urban History archive



The Center for Urban History is an independent organisation which researches synergies at the cross-section of public history and digital media, as well as providing public outreach programmes. The Center was founded in 2004 by Dr Harald Binder, a Swiss academic based in Vienna, with the organisation moving into their headquarters in Lviv two years later. The Center is actively working in the area of digital history, and one of its first projects was the “Urban Media Archive”, an online resource of around 100,000 images, videos and films, oral histories, maps, as well as other digitised documents of cultural significance.

Over the years, the institution has set up and run a number of initiatives, notably a project entitled “Un-archiving Post Industry” which was run in cooperation with St. Andrew’s University, UK, in 2019. The project was granted a European Heritage Award/ Europa Nostra Award in 2023.

In an interview during a study visit to Lviv in April 2024, Dr Iryna Sklokina, a historian at the Center for Urban History, told the Europa Nostra Heritage Hub for Central and Eastern Europe:

This project was undertaken in cooperation with St Andrews University, UK. Despite Covid restrictions, we still managed to initiate a lively discussion, not only between our countries, but also between different regions. The idea was to digitise, to collect, and to give a second life to the photographs and amateur films. And also to collect oral history interviews connected to life in industrial communities, specifically Donbas, an eastern region of Ukraine which is very well known for its coal mining.

Unfortunately, as of 2014 it is also a war-affected area. But back then, in 2019–2021, when the project was implemented, these places were relatively safe. So we organised a summer school in the city of Pokrovsk, which was a very lively place, and people were very willing to share their experiences and objects with us.



il. 21. Ruslan Bondar,
student from the Ukrainian
Printing Academy, restoring
the wallpapers from
Kostiantynivka Bottle Plant
at Stefanyk Library in Lviv,
2021.

Photo from the Lviv Center
for Urban History archive.

The project also took place in Kramatorsk and Mariupol, as well as across the United Kingdom, where we addressed individuals and communities in post-industrial areas in Scotland and Wales. And very interestingly, people found a lot of similarities, and we were very interested in engaging in the digitised heritage of each other’s communities.

I think what is most important about this project is to give people an understanding of the value of what they own, things which they consider to be very ordinary, very repetitive, and very often reminiscent of old Soviet propaganda. Because as you well know, especially today, Ukraine actually is trying to get rid of its Soviet heritage, and a lot of objects are “decommunised”, i.e. destroyed, and not so often “museumified” or preserved.

Our idea was to give a second life to all of these things. We digitised 30,000 items and more than 100 amateur films from the Soviet era. A part of it is available online on our [website](#).

The summer school engaged both scholars and artists who worked with these digitised materials in very different formats, such as essays, articles, art objects, and we produced an exhibition. We continue our cooperation to this day with close colleague Victoria Donovan from St. Andrew’s University, with whom we’ve maintained a very good relationship for many years. ...

During this hard period of full-scale invasion, I think this previous experience was crucial for us to now engage in, for example, documentation of the war, and also to help in rescuing the archives which are under fire now. ...

I think this understanding of the value of this heritage has become crucial in how people behaved with this full-scale invasion. For example, one of the participants of the project, Dmytro Bilko, a local historian from Druzhkivka and Kramatorsk, joined the army as a soldier and he defended and even took part in the liberation of certain areas which he had researched during the project. So first you know your native land, then you engage deeper with your heritage, and then you really understand what you are fighting for. ...

Documentation of daily life and of heritage today seems to be the crucial thing, because this is how you can basically store the memory of places that may no longer exist now or in the future.

Notably, the Center archived social media posts and popular media platforms to document the outbreak of the full-scale invasion by Russia. In 2024, “Telegram Archive of the War” project released a two-year report and stopped due to the overwhelming amount of materials on social media pertaining to the war.

The Center also provided shelter for refugees at the start of the war, opening their offices up to refugees at their offices in Lviv.

Our office turned into a shelter, and we hosted people from so many affected areas. People from the Kyiv region: Bucha, Irpin, but also Mariupol, Kharkiv, Kramatorsk... People from all over Ukraine started to arrive here and stayed with us for several days sometimes, to go further abroad, or sometimes they stayed for longer, and we felt it’s really necessary not only to provide shelter and food, but also to really talk to these people, and the 26 February 2022 was the date of our first interviews. We first focused on refugees, later we started also archiving social media, including Telegram channels, which I think will be a crucial resource in the future: it really is new media, which is crucial for spreading information about this war, for organising things, for connecting people.

However, among its many initiatives, the Center continues to monitor, document and digitise various aspects of the full-scale war with Russia, leading to the co-launch in 2025 of the [Catalogue of Documenting Initiatives](#), an online platform collating almost 100 various cross-media initiatives within the public and private domains in Ukraine.



il. 22. Video interview with Vira and Mykhaylo Habalevych, workers from the Lviv based “Poliaron” plant.

Photo by Myroslava Liakhovych.



il. 23. Summer School of “Un-archiving Post Industry” project in Pokrovsk Historical Museum, Donetsk region, 2021.

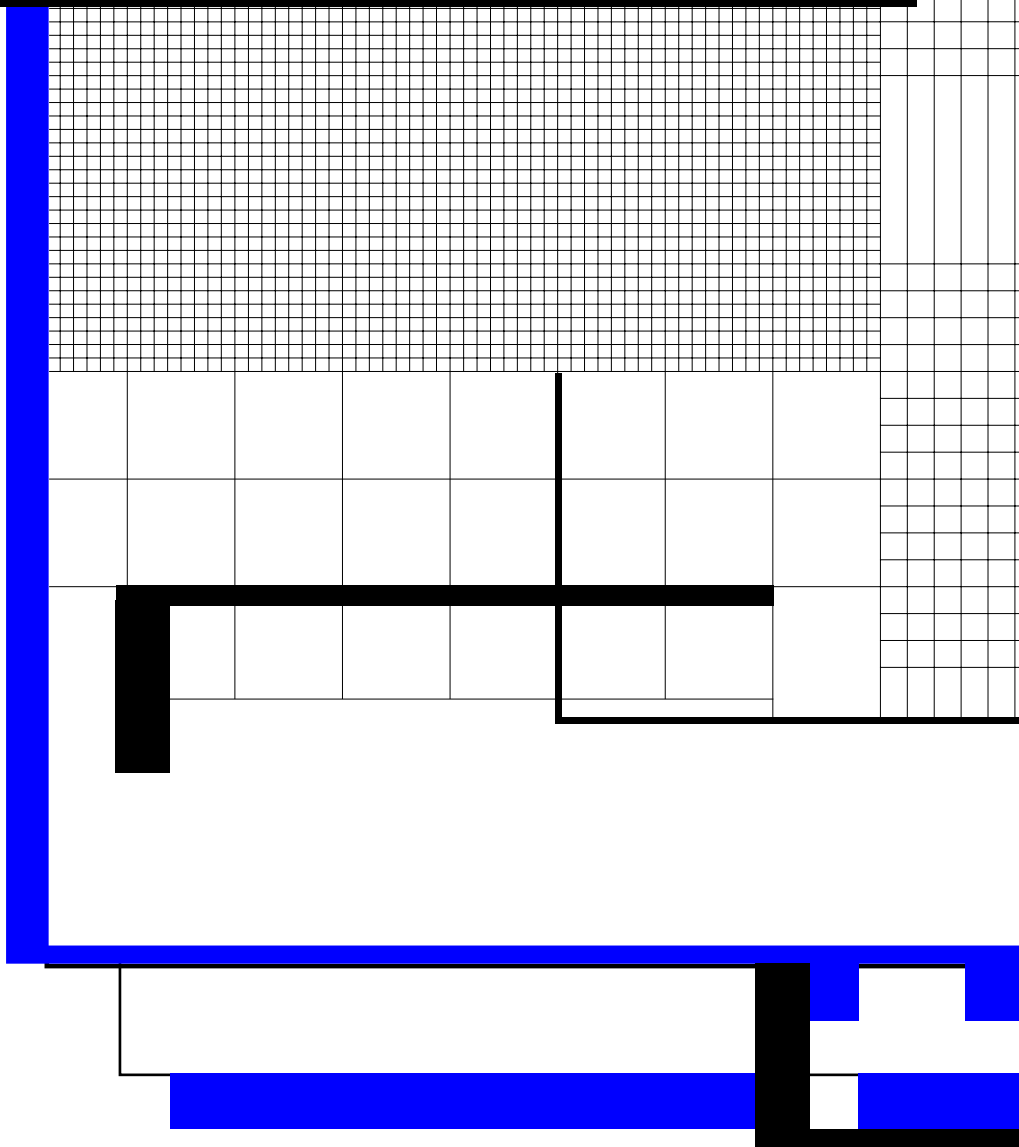
Photo from the Lviv Center for Urban History archive.



il. 24. Seminar “To the Bings: Research – Writing – Retreat” in West Lothian, talk with the former oil miner Jimmie, 2022.

Photo by Victoria Donovan.

5. TRIPLE TRANSFORMATION



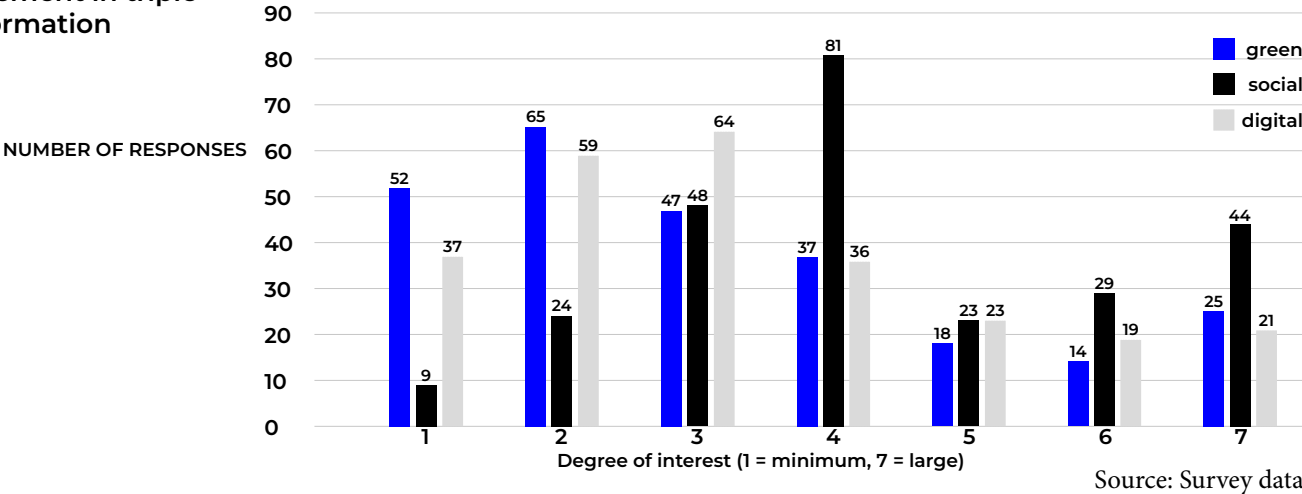
The contemporary world is changing at an unprecedented rate, posing a number of challenges related to climate change, new technologies, migration, and many other pressing issues facing today’s society. To describe the challenges we are facing, the European Union uses the term “triple transformation”, emphasising the areas of change we need to embrace with responsibility in order to face contemporary problems with success. The term “triple transformation” has been situated at the core of the European Heritage Hub’s activities and, thus, this report examines how heritage organisations deal with this issue and support Europe’s social, digital and green transformation through cultural heritage.

By social transformation we mean using cultural heritage as: a contribution to inclusivity and social cohesion; a factor enhancing the overall well-being of communities and their sense of belonging, and; a source of inspiration and creativity. This can happen through the preservation of heritage sites, community engagement activities around material and intangible heritage, participatory and educational projects, creative reuse of heritage, as well as a wide variety of other types of activities.

By digital transformation we mean adopting digital technology or digital thinking to significantly transform how a heritage organisation operates while being faithful to its mission; its ability to use, manage, create, understand and reflect on the potential of digital tools and review this digital practice in an informed way. This can happen through implementing a set of digital tools that serve the organisation and its stakeholders, developing a digital strategy, appointing a digital officer, etc.

By green transformation we mean actions which support sustainable solutions in production, conversion to a circular economy, reducing pollution or protecting the environment. In the heritage sector, this could translate into projects which deal with adaptive re-use of historic buildings, promoting traditional construction as well agricultural skills and products (including traditional local cuisine), producing and promoting high quality sustainable artisan products or mitigating overtourism in the field of heritage.

Figure 5.1: NGO engagement in triple transformation



Based on the responses from the survey, we can estimate the engagement and interest of NGOs in triple transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. Generally speaking, the triple transformation receives mediocre attention from the NGOs in the region (see Figure 5.1). On average, social transformation received the highest score, with 81 people declaring their interest at level 4 (using the Likert scale from (from 1 (minimum) to 7 (large)). Moreover, 43 respondents declared a large degree of interest (7). Both green and digital transformation score lower overall, with responses clustered toward the lower-middle end of the scale. When grading their interest in green transformation, most NGOs rated themselves around 1–3, with only 25 giving a 7. Digital transformation is slightly more popular with responses clustering around 2-3 – yet only 20 respondents declared a large degree (7) of interest in this subject.

This suggests these areas are either seen as less central to NGOs’ missions or present challenges in implementation – possibly due to limited resources, technical expertise, or clarity about how these transformations relate to heritage work. Notably, the digital transformation area also had a significant number of very low scores, which may indicate a digital divide or lack of strategic focus on digital tools and innovation in the sector. The higher scores for interest in the field of social transformation can be explained by an actual alignment between NGOs’ community-oriented missions and the goals of social transformation, such as inclusivity, equity, and societal wellbeing. The relatively high scores in this area could suggest many NGOs see social transformation not only as important but as something already embedded in their everyday operations and values. However, the results from the qualitative study indicate that to many respondents, the term remains unclear and doesn’t immediately translate into a specific set of strategies or activities. It could be argued that some of them actually are working in the field of triple transformation but they do not put such a label on it.

The scores differ if compared with the country of registration of the NGO. Overall, the highest scores (signifying the highest interest in triple transformation as such) belong to NGOs in Belarus (average score of 4.8) and Latvia (4.5) (see Table 5.1). The latter is the country that is most interested in green transformation as compared to other analysed countries. However, its interest in digital transformation is rather low (2.8). Quite a contrary situation is seen in the case of Belarus. The country that seems to have the lowest interest in the subject of triple transformation is Czechia (2.9 average score).

| Country | Green | Social | Digital | Average Score |
|---------|-------|--------|---------|---------------|
| Belarus | 3.43 | 5.57 | 5.43 | 4.8 |
| Czechia | 2.85 | 3.23 | 2.62 | 2.9 |
| Estonia | 3.75 | 4.5 | 2.88 | 3.7 |
| Hungary | 3.34 | 4.07 | 2.93 | 3.4 |
| Latvia | 5.2 | 5.4 | 2.8 | 4.5 |

Table 5.1: Average triple transformation scores of NGOs by country

| | | | | |
|-----------|------|------|------|------------|
| | | | | |
| Lithuania | 3.59 | 4.79 | 3.3 | 3.9 |
| Poland | 2.96 | 4.23 | 3.37 | 3.5 |
| Romania | 3.6 | 5.0 | 3.95 | 4.2 |
| Slovakia | 3.33 | 3.8 | 2.27 | 3.1 |
| Ukraine | 2.44 | 4.33 | 3.56 | 3.4 |

Source: Survey data

Looking at the results from a statistical point of view, one can verify whether there are any significant differences in NGO engagement with each type of transformation based on country of origin. It turns out that for green transformation, the responses are fairly similar overall (no statistically significant difference)¹⁶. For social¹⁷ and digital¹⁸ transformations, there are significant differences between countries. This suggests that a national context (e.g. policy environment, infrastructure, funding availability) may influence how NGOs engage in these areas. The largest difference (the only statistically significant one)¹⁹ is between Slovakia and Belarus where NGOs in Belarus are significantly more engaged in digital transformation than those in Slovakia.

In the following sections, we dive into different areas of the triple transformation and analyse the data from interviews and roundtable discussions.

5.1 The non-governmental heritage sector in the context of social transformation

The social role of heritage-related NGOs was summarised independently by respondents as an **indispensable element of societies** which helps understand and comprehend processes which are taking place around us:

NGOs are the link between the past and the future, helping people to understand where they come from and what kind of society they want to build. [RTL2]

For the past several years, we've been observing the local community that is closest to our activities, and it's a community facing many problems. The town itself is struggling, so we have tried to analyse it, diagnose it in some way, and respond to the questions that arise. ... And this is absolutely very important to us, because of course it's also about writing books and leaving something behind in the library, but we believe that it's also about building a so-called better world and greater awareness among residents who will later look at certain issues differently, react differently, and also see, through a different lens, the problems that, for example, politicians are grappling with. [IDIPL2]

¹⁶ Kruskal-Wallis Test, H-statistic = 12.81, p-value=0.234.

¹⁷ Kruskal-Wallis Test, H-statistic = 23.23, p-value=0.0099.

¹⁸ Kruskal-Wallis Test, H-statistic = 23.41, p-value=0.0093.

¹⁹ Dunn's post-hoc test results (with Bonferroni correction), corrected p=0.0101.

The social aspect of the functioning of heritage NGOs is **omnipresent** and is perceived as a key driver for remaining active. The majority of activities which are undertaken by the organisations have a social component, sometimes additionally encompassing other areas – digital, green, or both – but it can also be a standalone area. The value of unity, getting together, acting jointly was underlined. Nevertheless the term social transformation is not in general use, and respondents usually had difficulties with defining it. The term is usually known to those members of the sector who have some experience with writing European grant applications. Some other terms are in use as well, such as “community revitalisation” [IDIRO2]. People also have their own way of reading the term of social transformation, which adds a personal aspect to official EU definitions, for example:

For me, social transformation means speeding up our lives, adapting to changes, and finding our place in these changes while working toward a better place for all of us to live. [IDIBL2]

Social transformation starts with making people realise that their past and their history matter – that what we do is not about some distant events, but about their own community, their own town. [IDIPL1]

Social transformation is seen broadly, not limited to one specific aspect of heritage, but interconnected with various areas of culture:

We do not want our activities to be limited to the conservation of monuments – art, literature, and theatre can also be tools for social change. [IDIPL2]

In a more narrow understanding, social transformation refers to the subject of ethnic minorities and actions which are undertaken by NGOs to integrate them with local communities. See the [Box](#) below.

In our villages, we have large Roma minorities and often there are problems. ... There are often grants for the Roma minority, but we cannot apply because they don't want to be considered as Roma. They wanted to be considered as citizens like we all are. We respect this. I always speak about them as 'the new community', this is my term, not the Roma community, because it is very delicate. You have to be very, very sensitive to it because they have a lot of traumas, which luckily we don't have. They don't have the trust or belief that they can do something because of many hundreds of years of denigration. I'm so proud when I see Roma ladies who have restaurants, guest houses, they are business women. I'm very proud. [IDIRO2]

Change is an inherent aspect of heritage, although it also needs a nurturing of understanding in communities, especially when it comes to intangible heritage, that adaptation to the contemporary world is part of the evolution of these practices:

Social transformation is not something to resist, but something to understand – we need to study how people adapt their traditions to new realities. [IDICZ1]

The social responsibility of NGOs is underlined as crucial for saving heritage and transmitting its values to the next generations. It is notable that heritage is widely seen as much more than

monuments and built heritage, and that people are situated in the centre of the process:

Buildings or built heritage are not in the centre of our work anymore. They are the people. Because the people, the community have built this heritage and they preserve it. So it depends on the community if the heritage will be able to be transferred to the next generation or it will be destroyed. [IDIRO2]

What we do is not just about preserving monuments – it’s about changing people’s thinking about their own history and where they live. [IDIPL2]

NGOs play an important role in **building agency** in societies and communities, to not only feel respect for their heritage, but also take action:

The work of NGOs is about empowering people to take responsibility for their environment, their heritage, and their communities. [RTLTV2]

Our activities promote inclusive participation, ensuring that different social groups – especially in rural areas – have a voice in decision-making. [RTLTV2]

The basic role of many organisations working in the heritage field is “bringing the community together or keeping it together” [RTES2]. NGOs are usually immersed in the social environment, building long-term bonds with communities, getting first-hand understanding of their needs, expectations, challenges, and potential, and being able to use this knowledge in developing projects. Many respondents raised this contribution of NGOs:

... the heritage sector owes a great deal to NGOs in terms of finding a new language for this work. It can involve innovation, but also, and above all, such commitment to this work, and the longer one undertakes such activities with a particular community, with a particular place, the more one has the opportunity to go deep and carry out this work with the kind of energy, with the kind of language and with the kind of ways that are most appropriate for a particular place and for a particular community. [RTPL1]

Our NGO was created with the aim of uniting all those civic societies and small cultural protection movements and personalities. We wanted to unite them and to make it more powerful for protection of cultural heritage in Ukraine, and Kyiv, and other cities. [IDIUK2]

However, the long-lasting aspect is connected to time: working with communities, making an impact, and realising that change is not something instant, but requires slow, constant and regular activities:

The biggest challenge is that social transformation takes time, and NGOs often work with very limited resources. [RTLTV2]

Not all NGOs operate within their own remit, but they also reach out to other communities, where the first challenge is getting to know the locality. The following statement addresses a situation where an NGO works in a specific locality only for a short period of time:

We are not part of the communities we work with – it’s a challenge, because we have to gain their trust, but we also have to know when to step back and let them operate on their own terms. ... If the sites we are working on are to be this vehicle of memory, are to remain alive in the sense that their existence is not summed up by the opening of a particular monument, but

that it exists within that community, especially when these sites have been completely neglected, abandoned, destroyed, then this aspect of interacting with the local community is crucial. [IDIPL1]

Through building bonds, organisations contribute to the **strengthening of civil society**, and this way their status as an indispensable element in societies is confirmed (though not always understood by decision makers, as is demonstrated above in [Chapter 4.1](#)). This is further expressed in the following statement:

... we organise theatrical performances, also involving the local community, ordinary, everyday people who live in the area. That way, we also build solidarity between them and we build civil society, because all of that together is what builds the community. [RTLTV1]

Heritage is part of people’s identity, and NGOs working in this area contribute to – as one of the respondents remarked – developing **patriotic attitudes**. This involves keeping and cultivating memory, developing identity, and staying together as a group. This was voiced particularly strongly with reference to Belarus, from where many heritage professionals needed to flee due to the political situation (as is developed in [Chapter 2](#)):

There is a big demand for identity, for emigration among Belarusians, or at least there is more than there was previously. It is not extremely visible, but it is there. People want to preserve at least something Belarusian. In this respect, cultural heritage is a source of patriotism, a source of identity. [RTBL2]

Nevertheless, the understanding for involving communities is not particularly widespread yet. Older generations may not understand its importance and despite undertaken actions, generational change is needed to overcome this reluctance. The following statement is illustrative of this situation:

Whenever I reach for any European money, always the community and heritage is very closely connected. ... in our association, there are many members who are from the older generation and they were working in the times before the European Union, when the voice of the community was practically zero. So basically all decisions were made by professionals, by architects, restorers, by governmental institutions, pure professionals. ... I understand both sides and I can see the older generations who hate the community heritage and communities like enemies because they simply don’t understand. They are really ignorant. They are not knowledgeable enough to understand and they are just, you know, gossiping. And then the younger generation is really working on that. So yes, I think, you know, ten years are needed, then there will be very much a community voice here. [IDILIT2]

Heritage is **attractive for at least part of the young generation** (challenges regarding involving young people are mentioned in [Chapter 4.1](#)), who are interested in seeking knowledge on their roots and preserving their family heritage. Heritage becomes a linking element in communities where people gather around preservation of their local heritage. See the [Box](#) below.

Young generations, younger people than me or my age also, they are facing now more towards their roots than we did when we were 20 or 25 years old. They're coming back to the roots, they want to invest. Quite a number of people are trying to preserve their family values, like grandmother's house or some other small things. Even people are starting to buy the manors, which were in a bad condition, and restore them. They also organise volunteer events where you can come and help to preserve it, to clean it, and so on, by also bringing the society or the community which is around the objects together. [IDILT1]

Inviting communities to participate in cultural events and **involving** them in the programme is an important strategy of civil society organisers. Personal engagement translates into better **understanding** of NGOs' activities and the importance of heritage, as well as builds **connection and support**. One representative of the NGO indicated that it is important

to invite them to present their communities in the festival, to come and participate, and maybe even to do some kind of workshops which are important for their communities. Reaching out and trying to get a personal contact, because then when you talk with a person, it's always way better than sending an email. [IDILT1]

We tried to find these inclusive forms, like crowdsourcing old photos, digital projects, and city festivals – so that people can share what they know and feel that this history is part of their own history. ... We tried to find inclusive ways to engage people. For example, we organised city festivals where people could share their knowledge publicly. ... We crowdsourced old photos from local people to connect them with the history of their place. [IDIBL2]

Without the communit – local, but also the national community that supports us – we wouldn't have been able to do anything here ... And also for us, it's very important to involve them hands-on and also be part of this larger educational process. ... Many people are very old, the kids left for bigger cities and so on. And they don't really understand why some things are very slow, why you should intervene like this on some heritage sites, why you should perhaps have a concert in an abandoned space. They don't necessarily understand. So we try as much as possible to communicate and to involve them. [IDIRO1]

People tend to be shy and reserved when initially regarding their heritage; **they do not believe in the value of what they have** and are distrustful as far as intentions are concerned. However, after overcoming their resistance and gaining trust, it turns out that their local heritage is extremely important to them and they act to preserve it. A story around a book regarding a Latvian castle is an illustrative example – see the [Box](#) below.

When we started with castle stories for the first time, I asked local people: "Maybe you have some photographs, stories from the time?" [The answer was:] "No, no, no, nothing, nothing, nothing". ... The first edition of the book was sold in two weeks and we needed to do a second edition. When we started to work on a second edition, they all were prepared. They came to my mum, who is local and lived in this area, and said: "We have materials, you need to include this and this". Before they didn't have these materials. And now when we are in the finishing phase with the third book, we can't finish, because every week I receive something from locals. And they are saying: "Hi, I didn't know that you were doing this, but I live nearby, and I have memories, and I do this and this, and I was nearby railway station, and I have a story for you". [IDILV2]

NGOs are catalysts in the process of recognising the values of one's heritage. Once initiated later communities and individuals are able to continue developing activities that are built on the recognition of local heritage. The following example presents this process:

We have thousands of meetings, sometimes with big groups, sometimes with one family or one person. I always think that if we make this family aware that they can work in their village and earn enough money, then they won't leave to go abroad. Our aim is to give as many people as possible the opportunity to work at home and to see the opportunities around them. Because of this, I think communism destroyed our minds. We have done local action plans and visions with five villages. And they all dream of having their village to be nicer, to have the opportunities for the children after they study to come back and work in their village. So this is their dream. So they start to dream, which is good, and the dreams will come true. [IDIRO2]

5.2 The non-governmental heritage sector in the context of digital transformation

Cultural heritage NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe are adopting digital technologies at varying scales and speed, as well as for different purposes. To many organisations, the digital realm remains a supplement to their core activities, perhaps a potential technological enhancement to their key areas of interest. Some integrate it, among others, to preserve and share their rich histories, to document their activities, or simply to modernise internal workflows and communication channels and formats. Others resent a coherent and systematic blending of all things digital into their daily operations as they do not see its value, or they do not have the resources (money, skills, etc.) to do so. To a specific group of organisations, the digital side of heritage constitutes their core business.

Organisations which are willing to encompass digital tools and solutions in their work (unless their sole focus and activities are already built around digital) often face numerous challenges in the process. **Limited financial resources**, and mostly project-based funding, make it difficult to invest consciously in advanced digital tools, software, and infrastructure, leaving many organisations reliant on outdated or piecemeal solutions. In such an ecosystem, there is simply no

space for implementing a fit digital strategy, matching the needs and aims of the organisation:

The biggest challenge is funding – digital technologies are expensive, and we do not have the resources to implement them on a large scale. [IDIPL2]

Digital literacy gaps among staff and volunteers further hinder progress and influence how digital is embraced, as specialised skills are needed to have digital solutions introduced responsibly and managed further when, for example, running digital archives, creating virtual exhibitions, and/or implementing AI-driven analysis. Digital technologies require specific knowledge. This starts with digital literacy and the ability to distinguish and select the right tools and formats so that they match with needs and objectives, through to recognition of advanced technologies offering mature scenarios for heritage preservation and access.

[Is digital transformation relevant?] Sometimes yes, but we don't have the time and energy for that. We would need some expert who could help us, I think. Even for free or ...that would be a great thing if we knew where to apply for this kind of assistance. Because all of us, we are art historians, architects, et cetera. [IDIHU2]

Additionally, many NGOs in the region struggle with **sustainability** and this impacts, among others, the creation and maintenance of a coherent digital strategy. The uncertainty about the future may cause data preservation issues, and stop from ensuring long-term access to digital resources. Dependence on short-term funding and project-based grants also threatens the sustainability of digital initiatives.

Many NGOs lack the technical expertise or financial resources to build and maintain effective digital platforms. [RTL2]

Digital transformation goes beyond technology – it also involves **mindsets and individual capabilities**. While a positive mindset can turn even a small organisation into a tech-savvy actor knowing which digital tools and formats to use deliberately and successfully, a negative mindset can be a significant obstacle for NGO heritage professionals in adopting digital technologies. Resistance to change, a lack of skills, combined with a fear of technology, or scepticism about its value, especially when juxtaposed with “real-life” activities, can prevent organisations from fully embracing the digital transformation.

We are still in the process of adapting to digital tools, and not everyone in our field is comfortable with these changes. [IDICZ2]

Some professionals see digital tools as unnecessary or too complex, believing that traditional methods, relying on personal interactions, are more reliable.

And then what we are doing, we go to your village. Door to door. People, invitations... And it's like paying tribute that they give you information. [IDILV2]

A telling example is one from Lithuania which demonstrates a considerable financial and work-force effort which gave a very poor result regarding the number of people using the technological solution. The reasons for dissatisfaction may be more complex, e.g. poor promotion, however it illustrates a trend where one failed approach to a digital solution may refrain from making another one in future. See the [Box](#) below.

It's a beautifully restored castle, but it's totally empty. It's a modern art gallery, but 90% of people are coming to see the castle. So we decided to make a virtual reality tour. You get an iPad and you're walking in the castle and you can see how the rooms are furnished with the furniture. You can listen to stories about education, the culture of the nobility, about dining culture. ... We asked six scholars to prepare texts with illustrations. And it was very nicely done with an animation with a knight, a nobleman ... the statistics are bad. Nobody wants to come to the castle and take iPads and those glasses. Children want to run in the garden. They want to do activities. People want to listen. Audio guides are exceptional because the audio guide is a story. But if we talk about the super virtual technological advantages, I think heritage must speak as heritage and it must be a silent contemplation. ... Now I'm getting a bit sceptical because I see statistics and the money we invested, it's too big money and gets outdated so quickly. In our case, this virtual reality was not successful. I mean, it's working, people are using it, but our expectations are not fulfilled. [IDILIT2]

Others worry that digitisation could replace human expertise or diminish the authenticity of heritage work. Additionally, a lack of confidence in practitioners' own digital skills can lead to hesitation in learning and experimenting with new technologies. This mindset can slow down innovation, limit outreach opportunities, and make NGOs less competitive in securing funding. However, overcoming these barriers requires fostering a culture of openness, providing training, and demonstrating the tangible benefits that digital tools can bring to the heritage experience.

On a positive note, for some cultural heritage institutions the dynamically evolving use of digital technologies is one of the **key factors impacting the sector**, offering new opportunities, as well as addressing existing challenges.

As I understand it, the digital transformation basically started during Covid, because people couldn't go to museums, they couldn't reach any kind of place related to cultural heritage. And then a lot of websites were really bad at that time, compared with businesses, for example. And people started to invest into websites, into their education, they started to do videos, audio materials, and so on. So what we had before, it really wasn't very much. But now you can reach a lot of interesting things, even in museums, you can walk in a free 3D tour, or you can even have some kind of education on YouTube, for example. [IDILT1]

Digital technologies, new forms of communication, and changing lifestyles are reshaping the way people relate to their heritage. [IDICZ2]

There should be more. This is a very simple blog spot, because you don't have the money to have a home page, which would be much better. Okay, so that's the problem. But as professionals, we use the audio digital archives, which is huge, it's a super possibility for a researcher. We have very good digital archives in Hungary. [IDIHU2]

Digitisation leading to digital preservation and digital access to artefacts and knowledge is undoubtedly mentioned as an **essential solution in times of crisis**, such as the ongoing invasion in Ukraine or political turbulence in Belarus. A digital ecosystem offers presence and access to data beyond geographic borders, safeguards endangered content and allows for its further exploration and dissemination. However, digitisation comes at a cost, requiring large investments, access to electricity, etc. – something which may be beyond easy access in a warzone.

The non-governmental heritage sector in the context of green transformation

There are various levels and ways of understanding the concept of green transformation among the representatives of the non-governmental heritage sector in the region. From perceiving it as including more sustainable practices and approaches into existing activities, to treating it as an all-encompassing shift – it is an area which has made organisations rethink traditional practices in cultural heritage, integrating sustainability into every facet of organisational work, and actively involving the community in addressing environmental challenges. Examples of what this can mean in practice varies, from obtaining green museum certificates to installing renewable energy systems and fostering community education. While NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe are exploring a wide range of strategies to blend heritage preservation with ecological and social sustainability, there are multiple challenges they face when trying to put it into practice.

The diverse perspectives on green transformation can be divided into more **technical** and more **philosophical** approaches: while some focus on concrete measures (renewable energy installations, digitisation, sustainable materials), others discuss green transformation in more abstract terms; as a fundamental shift in how we relate to our environment and cultural memory. There is also an approach to green transformation that we could call **community-centric**, which emphasises local involvement and community education. In particular if the NGOs perceive themselves as catalysts for broader societal change, heritage sites and cultural organisations are understood as ones that can serve as community hubs for promoting sustainability and green practices.

Green transformation in the NGO sector can be understood in various ways, depending on the mission, profile, focus and capacity of a given entity. In some cases, the implementation of green transformation principles is understood as the holistic integration of a more sustainable approach to all operational areas. Therefore, green transformation is not as a standalone project but an integral aspect of overall organisational practice; from exhibition planning and restoration to day-to-day operations. Other respondents perceive the green transformation more narrowly, stressing the importance of a climate and environmental focus, with a clear emphasis on addressing climate change.

Green transformation means that it helps to stop climate change. And there will be more and more trees in the towns and villages, because we really can't live in them during the summer anymore. [IDISL1]

This can translate into a focus on the need to reduce the carbon footprint, increase energy efficiency, and boost environmental resilience. There is also an approach in which heritage is seen as a potentially sustainable practice, an inherently “green” act because it reuses existing structures rather than constructing new ones. In this view, maintaining and adapting historical buildings is a sustainable alternative to new development.

[Ukrainian heritage organisations] don't have the possibility to buy laptops, computers, printers or scanners. So our partners buy such technical equipment, office equipment, and I distribute it among the museums. And, you know, even power stations and power banks are very much in demand, especially now in Kharkiv, where they don't have electricity. They use our power banks for security reasons and also for work. And even lamps, LED lamps, we gave them and they said that they couldn't work without them. So a lot of things have become beneficial in this respect. [IDIUK2]

It is not a commonly shared belief among organisations in the region that the digital transformation is a means to reshape an organisation's operations and value delivery. However, some acknowledge that a digital presence and maturity can help them achieve their mission in this new, contemporary realm, meet stakeholder expectations and create new engagement with their communities, especially those of the younger generation.

New technologies will help NGOs communicate better with their audiences and reach more people, but they require investment. [RTL2]

Digital archives allow us to preserve fragile materials while making them available to a wider audience. ... Through digitisation, we can connect people to cultural heritage regardless of where they are. [IDICZ1]

Additionally:

They are also part of this new grant application. You always have to include this part. I don't know if we are doing it only to earn more points. But there is also a real need to adapt to this. For example, in our planting project, we have used [digital tools]. [IDIRO2]

The digital factor is also perceived as one playing a crucial role in re-positioning respondents' own organisations as modern, forward-thinking entities, thus remaining up to date and relevant, offering new, engaging and immersive experiences.

This is also what we did when we understood that we need to have a digital platform as well, we need to connect people, not only physically, but also digitally. We made the platform, and we applied for funding, and we got it to make a specialist database. We also wanted to do videos, but we didn't get funding for that. But what I see now, that the museums, or the activities in NGOs, they are thinking more widely now. They are not only thinking about the physical happening, they also are thinking about how to have something online. That what we are doing could be prolonged and last longer, and people could find information after that. [IDILT1]

Despite obstacles linked to the limited availability of resources (finances, knowledge, and infrastructure), for many organisations the embracing of digital tools remains an essential issue and a desired path for increasing visibility, engaging new audiences, and fostering international collaboration. However, without strategic support, training, and sustainable funding, many cultural heritage NGOs in the region risk being left behind in the digital transformation.

When we focus on heritage, then what's going on here is energy efficiency. And the whole heritage preservation is actually green, because you don't construct new structures. [IDISL1]

Similarly, the green transformation is also seen as a social process involving a reconnection with nature, engaging communities, and rethinking how cultural heritage and natural landscapes interact.

I think that humanity in general has lost the connection to the environment, to the natural environment and to other stakeholders, non-human stakeholders of the earth... And we need to re-establish this connection to understand each other again. [IDIHU1]

Last but not least, the green transformation is also a perceived link between digital transformation and digitisation as such – going paperless (digital invitations, electronic documentation) and reducing unnecessary physical material (e.g. less printing) – which is seen as a practical step toward sustainability. However, the challenges related with sustainability of technologies themselves are rarely taken into account.

There are challenges NGOs meet when exploring the potential for implementing the green transformation into their everyday practices. As in other areas of activities, these challenges are often related to **funding and policy pressures**. A recurring theme is external funding (often from European grants) and the increased demands that NGOs include green components in their projects. However, the strict conditions attached – such as maintenance requirements in restoration projects – are perceived as too strict or potentially working against long-term ecological goals. Other challenges are related to the **cost of implementation and overall economic feasibility of green transformation** for a given NGO. While respondents are aware of innovative, eco-friendly technologies (such as advanced heating systems or large-scale solar projects), the fact that their implementation often comes with high upfront costs, it is feasible for organisations only with dedicated external funding which is not always easy to secure. There is also a need for **more integrated policy approaches** bridging the gap between environmental policies and cultural heritage initiatives. Several voices call for closer collaboration between these fields so that sustainable practices become a natural part of heritage management.

When attempted to be put into practice, the green transformation takes on different forms that result from the way it is understood, the profile of an organisation, the possibilities it has (funding opportunities, organisational capacity, etc.) and the way it navigates the challenges as described above. The results of the study show various forms in which it can manifest itself, from attempts to get a more formal recognition of sustainable shift (e.g. some organisations in the museum sector are applying for certifications e.g. the green museum certificate via ICOM committees) and incorporating eco-friendly guidelines into training and operations [IDIES2]), through implementing sustainable technological solutions, to educational programmes linking culture and ecology. They might coincide, though not always.

Among the forms in which green transformation manifests itself in practice in the NGO sector in Central and Eastern Europe on the basis of the results of the study we can name four: Sustainable event and activities management; Energy and infrastructure initiatives; Landscape and urban revitalisation projects, and; Community and educational engagement.

Sustainable event and activities management which usually entails organising events, programmes and activities that reduce use of resources – such as reducing paper usage, digitising guides, and rethinking maintenance (e.g. adjusting grass cutting frequency to save fuel).

Quite a long time ago we actually stopped sending invitations on paper. We do it via email, which is not so posh, but it's environmental. And these little things... we try to print less if it's not necessary. [IDISL1]

Energy and infrastructure initiatives which can take up the form of technological improvements such as installing solar panels, solar batteries, and other renewable energy systems at heritage sites (as seen in the project at Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra [IDIUK2] and examples of zero-emission houses [IDISL2]) as well as ecological building practices, e.g. using traditional and local materials (avoiding materials like plastic or non-sustainable concrete), modernising heating systems with renewable options, and creating sustainable sewage or water purification systems.

There was a project ... where we organised assistance in installing the solar batteries at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. And now a lot of museums ask about this because of the problems with electricity supply, some museums ask to provide them with maybe small or movable such solar batteries or solar panels. And we are thinking of this. [IDIUK2]

We are a zero emission house. We have thermal pump heating. We don't have any coal or gas equipment in the house. We have retention, we have this rain retention system. We have water for the garden. We are collecting the rainwater. We have solar systems. [IDISL2]

It was from the beginning in 2000 a big issue for us, even if we have not called it maybe like this, using handmade tiles and bricks while integrating in nature after their life is finished. I have done 49 presentations in one year in villages to convince people to not use plastic windows exactly for this reason, because when a window or a door is finished, life deteriorates. You can burn it, no? But if it is plastic, it will never integrate in nature. [IDIRO2]

Landscape and urban revitalisation projects which include restoring parks and historic landscapes with non-invasive, nature-harmonising methods, creating memorials or memorial gardens and parks (the idea of *green commemorations*) and open spaces that serve both heritage and recreational functions.

We were the first in the region to start restoring heritage areas, clearing away the layers and all the other things that had accumulated here over time, promoting it among the local community, organising seminars to tell them how they can live in a cleaner, greener environment. This included one event where we cleaned up the riverside and also attracted the whole local community. [RTL1]

Putting up concrete or sometimes stone monuments there [in forests] doesn't make sense. It feels unnatural. ... Nowadays, ... when, for example, witnesses of the Holocaust or witnesses of other historical events from several decades ago pass away, ... we have to learn how to speak about these places differently. This search for language and the introduction of soft, impermanent, ephemeral, green forms of commemoration also has an incredible element of humility, because they are intended to last only for a relatively short time. They won't be carved in stone or cast in concrete, so perhaps time itself will blur them, putting to the test the approach we're now trying to find. [IDIPL1]

HERITAGE NGOS FROM

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: SNAPSHOTS

Community and educational engagement projects in which NGOs integrate green thinking into educational programmes and community workshops, using culture as a bridge to ecological awareness.

The education projects, and these are especially the green issues we have incorporated into this new modular international educational programme. We focused on the green issues quite a lot, especially on energy efficiency. [IDISL1]

I think it's about being more conscious of climate consequences, environmental changes, and the impact of human actions on nature. It's about considering how our projects influence the environment and how we relate to climate change in our work. For me, culture and heritage are tools; they are not fixed, unchangeable things. We can use and transform them in ways that contribute to green transformation. [IDIBL2]

Although green transformation is not understood in the same way among NGOs in the region and approaches to how it can be implemented vary, with no clear guidelines to follow, in general the level of awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability is high. However, the engagement with this particular aspect of triple transformation is still relatively aspirational in the sector. While some NGOs do implement projects and measures that fit into the framework of green transformation, there is more untapped potential, as well as ideas and openness in the sector to be explored and supported.



Heritage
of Saxon
villages
by Mihai
Eminescu
Trust

The **Mihai Eminescu Trust Foundation** was established in 2000 in the Transylvanian village of Viscri as a continuation of activities undertaken by the Mihai Eminescu Trust London, established in 1987 to counter Ceauşescu’s systematisation plan and to save thousands of Romanian villages. The foundation operates in the specific context of Saxon villages, which after the 1989 revolution became largely depopulated thanks to the mass emigration of its former inhabitants to Germany, as well as full of heritage sites in need of restoration and revitalisation.

Caroline Fernolend, President of the Mihai Eminescu Trust, explains two reasons behind establishing the foundation:

The traditional community left for Germany and the new community had no connection to this existing heritage. So, this was the decision not to leave like all the others and to try preserve this heritage for the next generation. Also there was the need of the community members to have an income. So the reasons were to preserve heritage and create a better life for the local community.

During its 24 years of operation, the Foundation realised over 1,300 projects of different sizes. The concept that stands behind the foundation’s activities is called the “Whole Village”. It is a holistic approach which aims to revitalise local communities and improve their quality of life through responsible projects maintaining and emphasising value of cultural and natural heritage, involving local human resources, as well as the use of traditional knowledge, tools and techniques.

Caroline Fernolend recalls:

We started with very simple projects to lime wash, to restore the façades of the houses, because this had a very big impact on the community members and on the visitors. The image of the village changes and is the source of pride to local people. We saw in my village of Viscri that it was successful; community members wanted to learn how to do it because they can have income. ... Then we started to grow and to go to more villages. Today, the Mihai Eminescu Trust has worked in forty five villages throughout Transylvania.



il. 25. Village of Viscri.
Photo from the Mihai
Eminescu Trust archive.

The central element is to empower members of the local communities, offering them traditional craftsmanship techniques and skills, and introducing market oriented activities. Caroline Fernolend comments the situation:

In communist countries, people forgot how to work with traditional materials, with lime. After six months lime is like cream, so good for use. You mix it with three parts of sand and one part of clay, and then it becomes the healthiest plaster. In the beginning, specialists from the UK came to train people who wanted to learn, later also specialists in wood came from Germany.

I asked people: Do you want to learn a skill? Do you want to be a carpenter or plasterer? And then they came. And so we offered two-week long unofficial trainings. During this time we made a selection of people who could become professional. When we had about forty-fifty people, we hired a company to undertake an official training programme. It lasted six months



il. 26. Opening of the first
ecological waste water
purification system for
the village of Viscri with
HRH Prince of Wales in 2011.

Photo from the Mihai
Eminescu Trust archive.

and included theoretical and practical parts. It was always very difficult to make trainers understand that they have to teach participants about traditional materials. At the end they had an exam, and with an official diploma they could have their own business. Actually, I forced them to open their own business, because otherwise I could not pay them.

And we always took 10% from their money, which they had to receive for a year as a guarantee of good work. So they were very interested in doing a good job. There was a situation when I was really amazed. We had a new architect coming, it was October, and he told one of our Roma craftsmen: you have to finish this façade and do this plaster. And he said: “No, I will not do this now. The cold season will come, the plaster will fall off and people in the village will laugh. If I don’t do good work I will not get my money, my 10%.”

I was proud that they became responsible. I think that during communism this responsibility was taken from us here in Romania.

In our training we give people an understanding of how to work with traditional materials so that they can be proud of this heritage which they have inherited, even if it had not been their ancestors who created this heritage.

The showcase of the Mihai Eminescu Trust is Viscri village, which became a laboratory of restoration done for and with local residents. The Trust participated in the restoration of the Saxon fortified church dating back to 1100 and around fifty façades, barns, walls and buildings. In 2010, the Foundation also managed the installation of sewerage and mains water purification in the village.

It contributed so much to the well-being of the community, raised the living standards of the community members. I still consider that of all these projects for my village, this was the most important because it gave the opportunity to everybody to have running water and to raise the standard of living.

– comments Caroline Fernolend.

Viscricame a major Transylvanian tourist destination after its inscription to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1999 as “Villages with Fortified Churches in Transylvania”. The village also attracted the attention of King Charles (then the Prince of Wales), whose foundation restored and opened one of the village’s traditional homesteads for visitation (2021).

In 2024, restoration of the Saxon Church in Alma Vii was awarded the Grand Prix of the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards, as well as the Public Choice Award. The project, realised in this Transylvanian village, started in 2008 and lasted for fifteen years, focusing on building bonds with local communities, offering long-term engagement, developing identity and pride, and this way securing its sustainability and viability. Conservation of the fortified Saxon church dating back to the 14th century (stones) and 16th century (bricks) saved this historic site from ongoing decay, however, regeneration of the walls was equally important as regeneration of the community. The minimal, reversible interventions using traditional local building materials and techniques was performed by skilled architects, engineers, and builders experienced in historic restoration, and now has an exemplary character.



il. 27. Viscric houses Nos. 138, 139 and 140. Photo presents the first authentic community space in a Transylvanian village. In 2004 the Mihai Eminescu Trust renovated the façade of the house No. 139 and since then the owner has continued the work himself. The façade is only made of lime and natural colour, this is why it needs to be redone every four-five years. House No. 140 (light green) is a big Mihai Eminescu Trust project entitled “Our house Viscric No. 140”. It was initiated in 2025 and aims to turn the building into a public multifunctional space for the community and for visitors.

Photo from the Mihai Eminescu Trust archive.



il. 28. Viscric house No. 57 is situated on the Church Street – the most beautiful street leading to the fortified church – since 1999 on the UNESCO World Heritage List. It was completely restored by the owner.

Photo from the Mihai Eminescu Trust archive.

6. DIAGNOSIS:

**WHAT IS NEEDED
FOR THE CIVIL
SOCIETY HERITAGE
SECTOR?**

The quantitative and qualitative research led to the formulation of a diagnosis regarding the needs of the non-governmental heritage sector, which could at a later stage become grounds to formulate recommendations targeted to European, national and municipal decision makers. Several conclusions also refer directly to the NGO heritage sector, which could introduce particular bottom-up solutions.

6.1 Strengthening recognition

Activities of the heritage non-governmental sector need wider recognition at all levels of governance as a sector of professionals who complement public institutions in all areas of heritage. These organisations contribute substantially to the protection and conservation of cultural assets, heritage education and skills transmission, participatory communication, community-based management, and the democratisation of heritage access. The awareness of the heritage value in local development may play a pivotal role here as well.

A key aspect of strengthening recognition is shifting the public and institutional perceptions of NGO activities away from a voluntary or amateur perspective to a professionally-grounded and economically legitimate one. NGOs should not be criticised for offering paid services – such as training, consulting, or conservation work – but instead acknowledged as professional entities providing value-added expertise. When their services are framed within the broader economy of cultural work, and when their contributions to the public good are more widely understood, NGOs can be seen not as competitors to public institutions, but as strategic collaborators enhancing the resilience, diversity, and relevance of the heritage sector.

6.2 Revising and improving funding models

While we see a high level of awareness of benefits and potential impact of the triple transformation among the NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe, some limitations in implementing these changes are tied to the funding models. NGOs in the region are dependent on project-based – and often short-term – funding to implement activities related with digital and/or green transformation. At the same time, successful processes of both the digital and green transformations require time and continuous investment and are not one-off changes. This affects the way the digital and green transformations are implemented, resulting in fragmented and/or limited changes. Revision of funding models to support the digital and green transformations are advised.

1. **Shift towards multi-year funding** for transformation funds: shift from short-term, project-based funding to multi-annual grants could allow NGOs to implement sustainable social, digital, and green transformation strategies. Specific funding streams for long-term social,

digital, and green transformation projects could be established to ensure continuity beyond project cycles, provide continuity and stability to people working in the sector.

2. **Incentivise collaboration and shared infrastructure:** collaborative digital and green initiatives could be supported, such as shared platforms, tools, and services, to maximise impact and cost efficiency as well as investments in training NGO staff in digital skills and sustainability practices to ensure effective transformation efforts.
3. **Reward measurable impact and long-term commitment:** tie funding to demonstrable progress in digital and green transformation rather than short-term deliverables, as well as allowing flexibility for adaptive grant structures that enable NGOs to reallocate funds as their transformation needs evolve.
4. **Facilitate cross-sector partnerships:** support funding models that encourage collaboration between NGOs, governments, and businesses to leverage expertise and resources and promote blended approaches, e.g. mix of public grants, private sector investment, and philanthropic contributions to provide sustainable funding options.
5. **Simplification of organisational and financial rules** related to the operation of the non-governmental sector and support to actors in organisational and legal terms.
6. **Development of tax-relief schemes** following solutions existing in various Western countries: such as tax deductible donations (individuals and corporations can deduct donations made to qualified NGOs, including charities, from their taxable income), gift aid (a scheme applied, for example, in the UK, that allows charities to claim back the basic rate tax already paid on donations by the donor), corporate tax deductions (in some countries, such as Austria, corporations can deduct a percentage of their taxable income when they donate to eligible charities), or VAT exemptions (on goods and services purchased by NGOs, reducing their operational costs).²⁰

6.3 Investing in wellbeing and combating professional burnout

To answer the growing sector’s need to create a set of protections allowing it to deal with daily challenges, stress and lack of stability, more focus on the wellbeing of the staff needs to be in place.

1. **Establish dedicated wellbeing programmes** aimed at dealing with stress management, supporting mindfulness training, and access to mental health resources.
2. **Implement professionalisation practices, including workload management strategies,** such as the prioritisation of tasks and delegation of responsibilities, and promotion of the use of technology to streamline administrative tasks and reduce manual labour.

²⁰ While some of these schemes already exist in some of the countries of the region, others need to be lobbied for.

3. **Provide access to reskilling and upskilling programs for NGOs** that enable staff to keep up with current trends (especially with regard to technology and environmental challenges).

6.4 Generation shift

The heritage NGO sector, while rich in expertise and driven by long-term dedication, faces a growing need for generational renewal to ensure its sustainability, relevance, and capacity for innovation.

1. **Create youth leadership programmes and mentorship and succession planning** with clear pathways for young professionals to become engaged.
2. **Offer fair-paid early-career opportunities**, not just voluntary roles. This is very much dependent on the financial situation of NGOs and their funding options.
3. **Partner with universities and heritage education programmes to attract talent**, by offering internships and/or short-term collaboration opportunities.

6.5 Focusing on capacity building and knowledge exchange

To support cultural heritage NGOs in embracing social, digital and green transformation, capacity-building efforts should be strengthened at both the national and pan-European levels. By implementing these support mechanisms, NGOs will be better equipped to navigate social, digital and green transformation, ensuring their long-term resilience and impact.

1. **Targeted funding programmes** – Governments should provide long-term grants and subsidies specifically for NGOs to invest in digital tools, sustainable technologies, and staff training.
2. **Training and digital literacy initiatives** – National institutions should offer workshops, mentorship programmes, and online courses to equip NGO professionals with essential digital and green skills.
3. **Capacity-building through practical training:** Workshops, hackathons, and on-the-ground training sessions should focus on real-world applications, ensuring that NGOs gain not just theoretical knowledge but also hands-on experience in using digital tools and sustainable practices.
4. **Infrastructure and technical support** – Access to shared digital infrastructure, IT support, and open-source tools would enable NGOs to adopt technology without excessive financial burdens.

5. **Regulatory and policy guidance** – Clear national policies should support NGOs in implementing digital and environmental standards, ensuring compliance with evolving regulations. These should be enriched by practical guidelines, sharing of case studies as well as success stories and failures.
6. **Cross-border knowledge exchange** – EU-wide platforms should facilitate collaboration, best-practice sharing, and networking between NGOs across countries.
7. **Harmonised funding mechanisms** – European funding programmes (such as Horizon Europe or Creative Europe) should allocate dedicated streams for NGOs working on digital and green initiatives.
8. **Innovation hubs and support networks** – EU-funded innovation centres could provide NGOs with access to expert advice, digital tools, and sustainability solutions. They could also run capacity building initiatives, establish European-wide certification schemes for digital and environmental competences which would incentivise NGOs to upskill.

6.6 Supporting NGOs in turning ideas into practice

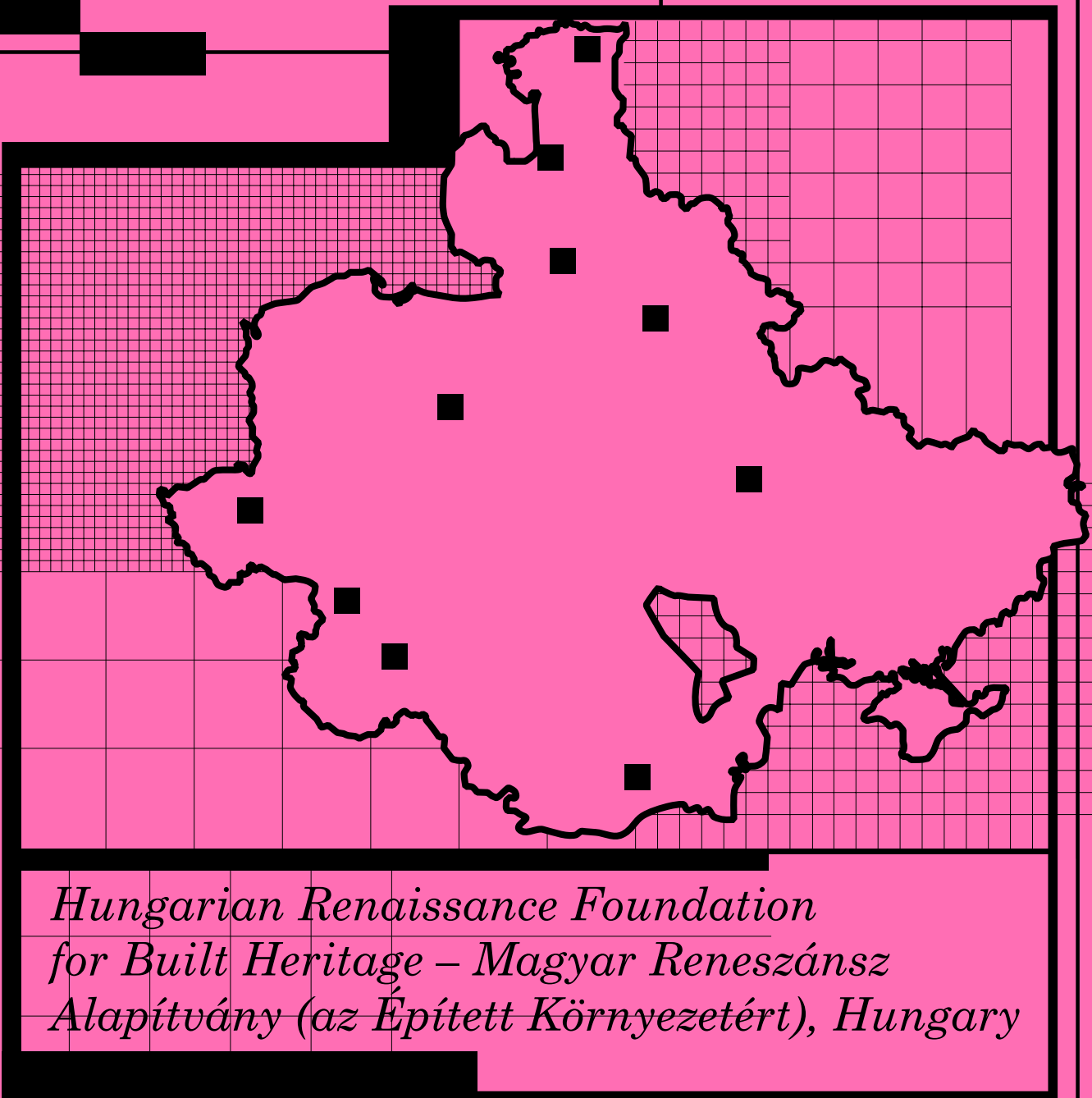
While many NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe recognise the importance of digital and green transformation, they often struggle to move from ideas to the implementation stage. To bridge this gap, targeted support is needed at both the national and pan-European levels to provide NGOs with the resources, skills, and practical tools necessary for execution.

1. **From strategy to action:** NGOs need hands-on guidance in creating and later on translating their digital and sustainability strategies into concrete, achievable projects. This includes advisory services, toolkits, and mentorship programmes that offer step-by-step support.
2. **Pilot programmes and testing grounds:** Access to funding for small-scale pilot projects would enable NGOs to experiment with digital and green solutions before committing to full-scale implementation. This would reduce risk and build confidence in new approaches.
3. **Collaboration with experts and industry partners:** NGOs should be connected with tech companies, sustainability experts, and research institutions that can provide practical insights, co-develop solutions, and help troubleshoot challenges. These cross-sectoral collaborations are essential to responsibly address current challenges.
4. **Streamlined access to funding and resources:** Many NGOs have innovative ideas but lack the financial means to implement them. Simplified grant applications, tailored funding schemes, and resource-sharing platforms would enable them to take action more effectively.

HERITAGE NGOS FROM

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE:

SNAPSHOTS



*Hungarian Renaissance Foundation
for Built Heritage – Magyar Reneszánsz
Alapítvány (az Épített Környezetért), Hungary*

Hungarian Renaissance Foundation for Built Heritage – Magyar Reneszánsz Alapítvány (az Épített Környezetért)

il. 29. “Innovations In Built Heritage Preservation INCREAS / VI-TRAIN Projects Professional Event”, 22 September 2022, Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Center, Walter Rózsi-villa. Workshop welcome, entrance to the Walter Rózsi-villa.

Photo by Graham Bell.

The **Hungarian Renaissance Foundation** (MRA) is an NGO founded in 2007 and is based in Budapest. Graham Bell, a UK-based cultural heritage expert, acts as the foundation’s director, in addition to his work in the UK and as a Board Member of Europa Nostra, among other activities.

The MRA was set up on the same model at the UK organisation which is run by Graham Bell when a risk arose in the old Jewish quarter of Budapest that a number of old buildings would be demolished with consent given by the district mayor. Following on from that experience, Graham Bell set up an organisation based in Hungary which would become a voice of cultural heritage in the country.

There was a local community group trying to oppose that demolition, who I would describe as being secular Jews. This was a community. This was not a religious initiative. This was about a group of people who valued what the area meant to them socially, historically. And I was asked to intervene. But it became apparent that doing so as a European cultural heritage specialist, an individual, was of interest, but it carried no weight. That led to the suggestion that if I was to do anything in Hungary that could contribute to cultural heritage, it needed an organisation.

– says Graham Bell.

The Hungarian Renaissance Foundation was established not just in response to that initiative, but in recognition that in Hungary generally, there was no strong heritage voice to support



il. 30. “Innovations In Built Heritage Preservation INCREAS / VI-TRAIN Projects Professional Event”, 22 September 2022, Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Center, Walter Rózsi-villa. Hungarian and international participants, presenters and project partners, Walter Rózsi-villa.

Photo by Graham Bell.

communities and to look at Hungarian cultural heritage within a broader European, international perspective. In 2010 the MRA collaborated with the British Embassy to bring then Prince Charles (now King), to Pécel on the edge of Budapest. Prince Charles had previously set up an NGO in Romania and wanted to know why there was not an equivalent in Hungary.

Over the years, MRA has collaborated principally with the Hungarian state, complementing the state’s legislative statutory role, but recognising that there was considerable scope for education, learning and training to develop capacity of the NGO sector within Hungary. And then by 2015, MRA started to collaborate in Heritage Europe, Erasmus and other European consortium initiatives, which enabled Hungary to have a voice alongside a wide range of other organisations to share expertise, but also to learn from other organisations.

The MRA is mainly funded through Horizon Europe and other EU project grants, as well as personal donations (which are tax-deductible in Hungary through a special scheme).

According to Graham Bell, there are still not very many cultural heritage NGOs in Hungary. Some concentrate on museums, e.g., improving the visitor experience or education, interpretation. Others that concentrate on community engagement with traditional skills and heritage values; “that’s been our role,” Bell underlines.

Barbara Fogarasi from the MRA states that heritage protection in Hungary has been completely reorganized over the years, and the “institutional background” has changed a lot. So when we speak about the state being a stakeholder, it is difficult to set up long lasting partnerships. Previously, Hungary had a single institution that was responsible for heritage protection, but this is no longer the case.

So now professionals are dispersed into several institutions, some are research institutions, and many of them are now tentatively included within the government offices. The whole

issue of heritage protection has become very political. And that's why I think the role of similar organisations is increasing, and also the role of MRA is increasing.

– Barbara Fogarasi says.

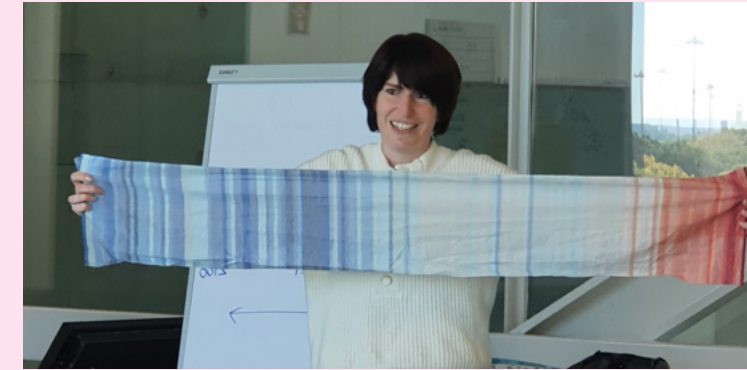
Hungarian government agencies dealing with cultural heritage have changed since 2007, says Bell, but the MRA has had some dialogue with each of those organisations. Even though they've changed, "we've continued and we've kept trying to emphasise the importance of standards of conservation in an international sense and how those could apply to not only protect but celebrate Hungarian cultural heritage," comments Bell.

The MRA is not a membership-based organisation, being essentially run on a project needs basis. It collaborates with cultural heritage bodies, museums, universities and other NGOs, including ICOMOS Hungary, which is the major voice for cultural heritage protection in the country. According to Bell, "ICOMOS Hungary is a National Committee of a global organisation, whereas MRA is a Hungarian national organisation with a European perspective."

One of MRA's longest collaborations has been its ongoing working relationship with the Institute of Advanced Studies in Kőszeg (iASK) on the border with Austria, which is a UNESCO Chair in Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainability. Graham Bell has been a course mentor, researcher and conference speaker.

il. 31. "Innovations In Built Heritage Preservation INCREAS / VI-TRAIN Projects Professional Event", 22 September 2022, Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Center, Walter Rózsi-villa. Participant trying the Virtual Reality training tool in traditional skills for remote learning.

Photo by Graham Bell.



The MRA mainly concerns itself with educational projects aimed at popularising and training in traditional skills and crafts. Most recently the MRA has undertaken an Erasmus+ project which involves digital training for endangered traditional crafts, which was held in a mostly hybrid format due to Covid-19.

One of the reasons for looking at virtual training – which sounds like a contradiction to be promoting traditional skills, which are very much about the feel of the material and the tools – was linked to the socio-economic context. If we had one centre, whether it's in Budapest or on the edge, how realistic is it for young people from around Hungary to be able to travel to Budapest to take part in a course? Is the combined cost of travel, accommodation and training affordable for young people? The idea of using digital technology was to 'take the training to the people' rather than the people having to do the travelling to the centre. They would still need to come, they would still need to do physical training, but it was an exploration of the principle that with the development of virtual and augmented reality, was there something we should be considering there?

– asks Graham Bell.

Traditional crafts projects have led the MRA to seek out the possibility of establishing a training centre in Hungary. "Such centres exist around Europe, offering either vocational, formal or informal training to encourage the next generation to take up skills, because it's a common problem across Europe that there is a growing shortage of young people taking up traditional skills," says Graham Bell.

il. 32. PRO-Heritage "Train the Trainer" workshop, 4 November 2021, Museu Nacional dos Coches (Portuguese National Museum of Coaches), Lisbon. Participant holding the global warming graphic showing rising annual global temperatures from 1850–2017; this was to illustrate the increasing impact of climate change on the performance of historic buildings, requiring informed maintenance and management.

Photo by Graham Bell.

MAPPING OF THE CENTRAL

HERITAGE SECTOR

AND EASTERN EUROPEAN

NON-GOVERNMENTAL



Annexes

1. SURVEY FORM

Basic data

1. Do you represent a non-governmental organisation (NGO) / are you an NGO?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

2. Specify the country of registration of your NGO

- ☐ Belarus
- ☐ Czechia
- ☐ Estonia
- ☐ Hungary
- ☐ Latvia
- ☐ Lithuania
- ☐ Poland
- ☐ Romania
- ☐ Slovakia
- ☐ Ukraine
- ☐ other

3. We define a heritage NGO as a multidimensional civil steward of heritage; a non-governmental organisation in the field of heritage whose activities make an important contribution to the protection, management, and promotion of cultural and natural heritage, tangible, intangible and digital, on a local, national, international, or intercultural level. Its multifaceted efforts extend across various domains, from restoration and documentation, research, education, and capacity building, developing heritage values awareness, and guarding of cultural identity, (re-)interpreting and using heritage, engaging and empowering communities to advocacy, broking, and rallying support for heritage policy changes. Do you feel that your NGO falls into this category?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

4. What is the legal status of your NGO?

- ☐ association
- ☐ foundation
- ☐ other

5. Please specify the legal status of your NGO (e.g. informal network, informal initiative):

.....

6. Where does your NGO mainly work?

- ☐ city of more than 1 million residents
- ☐ city of 500 000 – 1 million residents
- ☐ city of 100 000 – 499 000 residents
- ☐ city of 50 000 – 99 000 residents
- ☐ city of less than 50 000 residents
- ☐ village/rural area

7. How long has your NGO been operating?

- ☐ 0–2 years
- ☐ 3–5 years
- ☐ 5–10 years
- ☐ more than 10 years

8. How many people work in your NGO in an average year?

| | 0 | 1-5 | 6-10 | 11-25 | 26-50 | over 50 |
|--|---|-----|------|-------|-------|---------|
| employees (paid collaborators) full time | | | | | | |
| employees (paid collaborators) part time | | | | | | |
| volunteers | | | | | | |
| interns | | | | | | |

9. What is the mission of your organisation?

.....

10. Does your organisation have a written strategy?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

Size of the non-governmental heritage sector

11. How many, in your estimation, are there heritage NGOs in your country?

.....

Activities of the non-governmental heritage sector

12. How would you specify the type(s) of heritage that your NGO mostly deals with?

- ☐ natural
- ☐ cultural

13. If your NGO deals with cultural heritage, what kind of heritage is it most often?

- ☐ tangible and immovable (e.g. monuments)
- ☐ tangible and moveable (e.g. works of art)
- ☐ intangible
- ☐ digital

14. Which heritage domain is of most interest to your NGO?

- ☐ archaeological heritage
- ☐ architectural heritage
- ☐ audiovisual heritage
- ☐ community heritage (e.g. community archives, oral histories, local histories, public history)
- ☐ cultural landscape
- ☐ cultural memory (collective memory, experience, whether it be lived or imagined, related mutually to culture and memory)
- ☐ difficult heritage (dealing with death, suffering, and disaster, whether battlefields, concentration camps, or notorious sites of disaster such as Chernobyl)
- ☐ contested/dissonant heritage
- ☐ gastronomy (traditional cuisine, regional/local diet)
- ☐ GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives, museums) heritage

- ☐ industrial heritage
- ☐ knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- ☐ maritime and underwater heritage
- ☐ minority (e.g. Jewish, Roma) heritage
- ☐ oral traditions and expressions, including language
- ☐ rural heritage
- ☐ religious heritage
- ☐ traditional craftsmanship, handicraft
- ☐ traditions, social practices, rituals and festive events
- ☐ traditional performing arts (e.g. folk or ethno music, dances, songs)
- ☐ urban heritage
- ☐ digital-born heritage
- ☐ digitised heritage
- ☐ other

15. If you chose “other”, please, specify:

.....

16. Which of the following types of activities/areas best describe your NGO’s activities?

- ☐ advocacy and policy
- ☐ awareness raising and community empowerment
- ☐ communication and promotion
- ☐ conservation and restoration
- ☐ curation and exhibition production
- ☐ documentation, archiving
- ☐ education and capacity building (workshops, trainings, educational programmes)
- ☐ festivals and other cultural events
- ☐ heritage tourism (tourist guiding, touring)
- ☐ knowledge exchange
- ☐ management of a physical (e.g. historical site or monument) or digital (e.g. online repository) site
- ☐ publications

- ☐ research
- ☐ other

17. If you chose “other”, please specify:

.....

18. Who is the main target group (addressee) of your NGO’s activities?

- ☐ local residents
- ☐ national tourists
- ☐ foreign tourists
- ☐ children
- ☐ youth/students
- ☐ seniors
- ☐ experts/professionals in your field
- ☐ other

19. If you chose “other”, please, specify:

.....

20. Who are the participants of your NGO’s activities? Who has been taking part in them?

- ☐ local residents
- ☐ national tourists
- ☐ foreign tourists
- ☐ children
- ☐ youth/students
- ☐ seniors
- ☐ experts/professionals in your field
- ☐ other

21. If you chose “other”, please, specify:

.....

22. What thematic areas is your NGO mostly interested in when thinking about expanding your activities/knowledge/collaborations in the future

Motivation for working in the non-governmental heritage sector

23. For you, as an employee/collaborator of the NGO, what is the main motivation driving your work in the non-governmental heritage sector? How much are your motivations driven by the following factors:

- **Leisure:** My main driver for being engaged is associated with pleasure, enjoyment and spending quality time coming from the fact of being part of a heritage-focused NGO.
- **Social interaction:** I am involved because I want to associate with other people, create a network of contacts, and spend time in a group of people sharing similar interests.
- **Identity:** I am involved because I identify with the institution and with the ethical/social values it embraces, or feel an urge to feel connected with a group, project or values.
- **Personal well-being:** I engage in activities that bring me personal satisfaction, help me relate to a particular group.
- **Community well-being:** I engage as a team player. It brings me satisfaction to see our group cooperating together, supporting each other and caring and thus also contributing to positive change.
- **Professional interaction:** I am involved to use and/or share my knowledge and skills to support the institution and/or its project on a professional basis and create a network of professional contacts.
- **Knowledge:** My main driver is acquiring new knowledge/skills, and having a chance to self-improve.
- **Creativity:** I am involved because I want and like to create new goods, services or ideas.
- **Economic:** My main motivation is to help the institution make profits, gain benefits, improve efficiency, and attract new audiences.

| | not at all | a little | a lot |
|--------------------------|------------|----------|-------|
| leisure | | | |
| social interaction | | | |
| identity | | | |
| personal wellbeing | | | |
| community wellbeing | | | |
| professional interaction | | | |
| knowledge | | | |
| creativity | | | |
| economic | | | |

Challenges and opportunities

24. In your view, what are the most significant challenges your NGO is facing right now?

- ☐ lack of enough staff/collaborators
- ☐ lack of experience
- ☐ lack of sufficient and stable funding
- ☐ limited technical and/or organisational capacity
- ☐ non-satisfactory management
- ☐ no strategic planning
- ☐ legal restrictions/procedures
- ☐ poor networking
- ☐ little collaboration with other organisations/institutions
- ☐ lack of sustainability of organisation’s operations
- ☐ other

25. If you chose “other”, please, specify:

.....

26. What are the three key opportunities (positive factors) that you already see on the radar that may positively impact your future activities?

.....

27. What are the priority needs of your NGO for the future?

.....

Triple transformation

The contemporary world is changing at an unprecedented rate, posing a number of challenges related, for example, to climate change, new technologies, migration and many other factors. The European Union has coined a term, the “triple transformation”, which provides a roadmap to successfully face the challenges of the future. We are interested in how heritage organisations deal with this issue and support Europe’s green, social and digital transformation through cultural heritage.

By **social transformation** we mean using cultural heritage as: a contribution to inclusivity and social cohesion, a factor enhancing the overall well-being of communities and their sense of belonging, a source of inspiration. This can happen through preservation of heritage sites, community engagement activities around material and intangible heritage, participatory and educational projects as well as a wide variety of other types of activities.

By **digital transformation** we mean adopting digital technology or digital thinking to significantly transform how a heritage organisation operates, its ability to use, manage, create, understand and reflect on the potential of digital tools and review this digital practice in an informed way. This can happen through implementing a set of digital tools that serve the organisation and its stakeholders, developing a digital strategy, appointing a digital officer, etc.

By **green transformation** we mean actions that support sustainable solutions in production, conversion to a circular economy, reducing pollution or protecting the environment. In the heritage sector this could translate into projects that deal with adaptive re-use of historic buildings, promoting traditional construction as well agricultural skills and products (including traditional local cuisine), producing and promoting high quality sustainable artisan products or mitigating overtourism in the field of heritage.

28. To what degree does your NGO address the problem of the triple transformation, as defined above, in its activities?

| | 1 (minimum degree) | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 (large degree) |
|------------------------|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| social transformation | | | | | | | |
| digital transformation | | | | | | | |
| green transformation | | | | | | | |

Networking, international cooperation and partnerships

29. Is your NGO a member of any network or larger organisation (e.g. Europa Nostra, Europeana)?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

30. What is the scope of activity of this network?

- ☐ global
- ☐ European
- ☐ national
- ☐ regional
- ☐ local
- ☐ other

31. If you chose “other”, please, specify:

.....

32. What network(s) is your NGO a member of? Please, list them:

.....

33. What is the benefit of such a membership?

- ☐ networking
- ☐ funding opportunities
- ☐ collaborative projects
- ☐ knowledge exchange
- ☐ other

34. If you chose “other”, please, specify:

.....

35. Are you involved in any international projects conducted with international partners?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

36. Who are you mostly interested in starting new cooperation with?

.....

Sources of funding

37. What are the sources of funding/financing for your organisation?

- ☐ credit
- ☐ crowdfunding
- ☐ donations
- ☐ equity
- ☐ membership fees
- ☐ private grants
- ☐ public grants (from national or international institutions)
- ☐ sponsorship
- ☐ other

38. If you chose “other”, please, specify:

.....

39. What percentage of your NGO’s budget comes from national (including local and regional) sources (please, provide **a rough estimate**)

- ☐ 0–10%
- ☐ 11–30%
- ☐ 31–50%
- ☐ 51–80%
- ☐ 81–100%

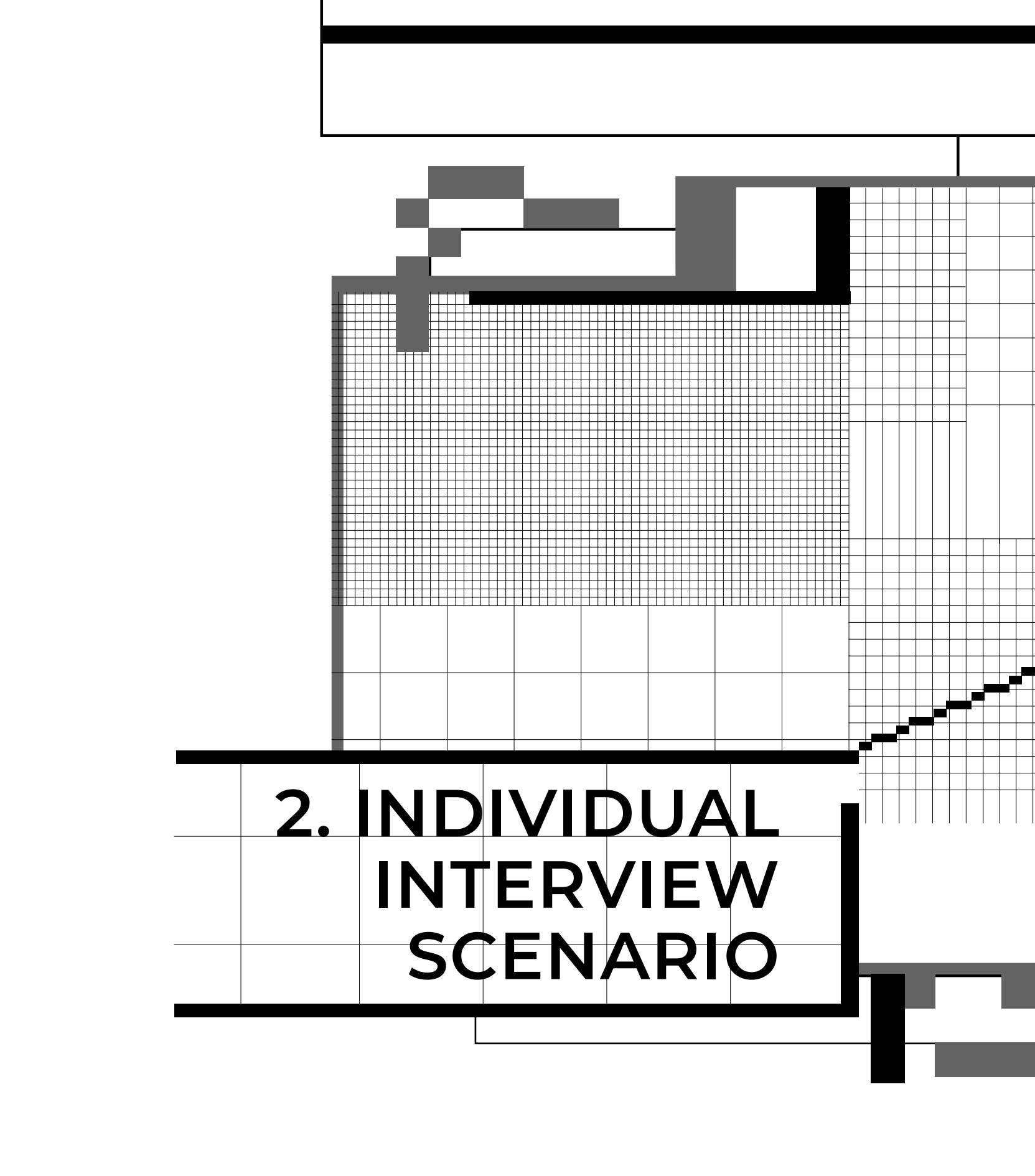
Additional data

40. Is there anything you would like to share with us about the heritage NGO sector in Central and Eastern Europe?

.....

41. If you wish to be up to date and/or cooperate with the Europa Nostra Heritage Hub for Central and Eastern Europe in Kraków and its partners (including this mapping project and be informed about its results), please leave the name of your organisation and your contact details (e-mail address):

.....



2. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCENARIO

| Section | Question | Instructions for the moderator | Time |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|--------|
| Welcome & introduction | | | |
| Welcome | <p>Good morning/Good afternoon. My name is.... and I will be conducting this interview on behalf of the Europa Nostra Heritage Hub.</p> <p>The purpose of the study is to map the Central and Eastern European non-governmental organisations of heritage sector.</p> <p>Our meeting is being recorded. All recordings will be available only for us, as a form of a note. There is no way that anyone else can use the recorded material. I record our meeting because I would not be able to note down everything during our meeting, and thanks to the recording I will be able to come back to important issues if necessary.</p> <p>Today's meeting is confidential and anonymous, so you might be sure that your views will not be disseminated.</p> <p>The meeting will be devoted to a conversation about your organisation in the context of the wider sector and its transformation.</p> <p>The interview will take up to 1 h.</p> | Moderator introduces himself/herself and reminds shortly the purpose of the study. | 1 min |
| Respondent's NGO & its wider context | | | 17 min |
| Your NGO | <p>Describe your NGO and its work</p> <p><i>[make sure that the following areas are covered, if not – ask for them specifically]:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the mission, goals, the scope of the activities (incl. heritage domain and the ratio of heritage-related activities to other types of activities (e.g. tourism, general culture, education, community engagement etc.)) target group of the NGO's activities key stakeholders, partnerships with other organisations and networking (Part of any professional network? Which one? What are the benefits? Do you feel NGOs compete with one another (over what?) or rather collaborate?) international cooperation (interested in? tried it? with whom?) funding (main sources?, what part of the budget comes from public sources?) | <p>Important: make sure this part <u>does not last more than scheduled!</u> People have a tendency to talk a lot about themselves. If they do, tell them that such details and examples will be excellent answers to next questions, and/or ask for www where we can learn more later (so as not to dismiss them too abruptly).</p> | 6 min |
| National context of the NGO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How would you situate your organisation within the heritage sector of your country? How big is it compared to other organisations? Are your activities overlapping with other institutions and organisations? | You can ask additional questions listed in bullet points if the answers to them haven't been voiced in the answer to the first general question. | 3 min |
| Looking into the future | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In your view, what are the most significant challenges your NGO is facing right now? What are the priority needs of your NGO for the future? What plans/hopes do you have for your activity in the upcoming years? | | 8 min |

| | | | |
|------------------------|--|--|--------|
| Triple transformation | | | 31 min |
| Social transformation | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How do you understand the term “social transformation”? Is community engagement a relevant part of your organisational approach? If yes, how does your NGO ensure meaningful community engagement in its activities? Can you provide examples of specific initiatives or projects your NGO has undertaken to involve or support communities (e.g. by increasing their overall well-being and sense of belonging)? Does your NGO have specific strategies in place to ensure that your activities centred around cultural heritage have social impact, e.g. effectively inspire and empower community members? If yes, please give a few examples. | <p>By social transformation we mean using cultural heritage as: a contribution to inclusivity and social cohesion, a factor enhancing the overall well-being of communities and their sense of belonging, a source of inspiration. This can happen through preservation of heritage sites, community engagement activities around material and intangible heritage, participatory and educational projects as well as a wide variety of other types of activities.</p> | 10 min |
| Digital transformation | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How do you understand the term “digital transformation”? Does the integration of digital technologies impact the daily operations of your organisation within the heritage sector? If yes, how? Please give a few examples. Can you provide examples of specific digital tools or strategies that your organisation is using to support its operations? Are there any challenges your organisation faces in adopting digital transformation initiatives within the context of your actions? If yes, what are these? How do you see the role of digitisation with regard to the cultural heritage sector? Does it play a relevant role? What about AI? Is there something specific particularly in the Central and Eastern European region? In what ways do you think digital transformation can contribute to addressing the sustainability and future success of heritage organisations in the region? | <p>By digital transformation we mean adopting digital technology or digital thinking to significantly transform how a heritage organisation operates, its ability to use, manage, create, understand and reflect on the potential of digital tools and review this digital practice in an informed way. This can happen through implementing a set of digital tools that serve the organisation and its stakeholders, developing a digital strategy, appointing a digital officer, etc.</p> | 10 min |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|--------|
| Green transformation | <ol style="list-style-type: none">How do you understand the term “green transformation”?Do you think the heritage sector can play a role in mitigating the results of the climate crisis? If so, how do you see this role and how it translates (or can translate) to concrete activities?Does your organisation take into account the environmental impact of its daily activities? If so, in what ways? Please, give a few examples.Is there anybody (it can be a person or a team) at your organisation taking care about this aspect of your operations? Are there any relevant documents that serve as guidelines in the process? | By green transformation we mean actions that support sustainable solutions in production, conversion to a circular economy, reducing pollution or protecting the environment. In the heritage sector this could translate into projects that deal with adaptive re-use of historic buildings, promoting traditional construction as well agricultural skills and products (including traditional local cuisine), producing and promoting high quality sustainable artisan products or mitigating over-tourism in the field of heritage. | 10 min |
| Triple transformation | Does your organisation implement projects in which components of social, digital and green transform are present? | | 1 min |
| General reflections of the respondent | | | |
| Condition of the sector | <ul style="list-style-type: none">How would you characterise the condition of the non-governmental heritage sector in your country? How many organisations in your country deal with heritage (your estimation)? What are the most significant challenges that heritage NGOs in your country face today (in your opinion)? What are the gaps, needs and expectations for the NGO heritage sector in your country? What are its opportunities?What would make functioning NGOs in the area of heritage easier? | For question 2: respondent can refer to legal, organisational, financial solutions, policies, etc. | 10 min |
| Closing of the interview | | | |
| | Thank you for your time. This has been a very valuable input to our study. The results of it will be accessible in the form of a report, which will be ready in mid-2025. | | 2 min |



Toy Museum in Kraków by The Sosenko Family Collection Foundation

il. 33. “Toy Clinic” exhibition (2021/2022). Primary school pupils visit the exhibition hosted by Marek Sosenko, founder of the Sosenko family collection. All group and individual visits at the exhibition were hosted by one of the collectors to ensure an exceptional experience of stepping into the “cabinet of curiosities”.

Photo by Katarzyna Jagodzińska.

il. 34. “Toy Clinic” exhibition (2021/2022). Founder of the toy collection, Marek Sosenko, as the head of the clinic, and curators of the exhibition as doctors: Mateusz Okoński, Katarzyna Sosenko and Katarzyna Jagodzińska.

Photo by Wojciech Sosenko.

The Sosenko Family Collection Foundation gathers and manages one of the largest, most comprehensive and cross-disciplinary private collections of material culture in Poland. Its numbers and quality exceed those held by many public museums. This magnum opus of the founder Marek Sosenko, a renowned collector and antiquarian, is continued by his daughter Katarzyna and supported by other family members. Despite the lack of a permanent exhibition space, the Foundation conceptualised a successful project – **The Toy Museum in Kraków** – which raises topical issues of the climate crisis and social wellbeing.

The Sosenko family toy collection presents Polish and foreign toys from the 16th century to the present day. Among others, there is a 16th-century nativity scene owned by Queen Bona Sforza, building blocks used by the children of Prussian Kaiser Wilhelm II, and a toy fortress belonging to Polish literary and visual artist Stanisław Wyspiański. Toys from the collection were presented in many exhibitions and were also used as props in a number of films: *Schindler’s List* by Steven Spielberg, *Three Colours* by Krzysztof Kiesłowski, and “Pan Tadeusz” by Andrzej Wajda.



The collection has been continuously growing since the 1970s, and in 2008 the Sosenko family collection gave birth to the Sosenko Family Collection Foundation which protects, manages and builds exhibition and educational programmes around historical objects of material culture. The Foundation’s aim is to present culturally important objects that spark debate on the condition of the modern world through the contextualisation of this tangible heritage, while demonstrating its relevance for us today through a search for contemporary meanings and uses. The Foundation takes care of thousands of objects representing diverse fields, of which the most numerous is a collection of historic postcards amounting to 800,000 items, while its collection of historic toys numbers over 40,000 items.

Despite constant struggles with space and insufficient financial resources necessary to secure and preserve objects, the collectors tirelessly and persistently develop their collection and aim to acquire a permanent space which would allow the collections’ presentation and the realisation of a public programme.



il. 35. “Toy Showcase” project (2021–2022). Community curators during the process of selecting items for the exhibition – Edition #3 in the Szolayski House.

Photo by Katarzyna Jagodzińska.

The idea to create a museum dates back to the early 1990s, however due to financial constraints and a lack of space it remained an unrealised dream, with the collection remaining hidden from public view in storage. However, in 2021, collectors started programming activities not in the form of an institution, but as a nomadic project known as the Toy Museum in Kraków, in temporary locations, based on the philosophy of a participatory museum: co-created by the public, inclusive, and open.

The museum has since become an active player in public debates on topical issues of the contemporary agenda – including climate change, sustainability, migration, equality – by raising awareness, animating discussions, indicating possible solutions or activities which could be implemented in everyday life. Historic toys are presented not as objects which present a childhood narrative, but invoke ideas in a much broader conversation and joint action.

The project of the Toy Museum also engages in the discussion on responsibility of contemporary museums and their broader missions. Should museums be involved in the issues of health and

wellbeing? Should climate action be in the arena of a museum? According to the Foundation, the answer is an unequivocal ‘Yes’.

The major challenges for the Foundation are a lack of space and insufficient funding. These have been the key obstacles in establishing the museum as an institution. The costs of storage, conservation and acquiring objects are covered from private resources, and all programme activities are based on voluntary work of family members and friends. However, these challenges have turned out to be a catalyst for creative thinking and inspired the initiation of programme activities without a space and with only basic funding for individual initiatives. In 2020, the collectors teamed up with a museologist who introduced a progressive, participatory and activist philosophy based on values of social responsibility. The current format is a formula without a comfort zone, which is usually provided by a large building, where everything has its place and everything is based on routine.

il. 36. “Toy Showcase” project (2021–2022). Community curators in the process of arranging items for the showcase – Edition #1 in the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka.

Photo by Katarzyna Jagodzińska.



il. 37. “Toy Showcase” project (2021–2022). Showcases filled with historic toys installed in the windows of the Szolayski House – available from the street 24/7 and inside in the non-ticketed area.

Photo by Wojciech Sosenko.



This model of operation in temporary spaces (currently it is temporarily located in the Pharmacy of Design – a cluster of creative organisations in Kraków’s Wesola district) allowed the building of a brand and to gain visibility among residents, tourists, and the authorities. However, it is not viable in the long run: struggles with insufficient space and constant moving have affected the small team. Moreover, it has been impossible to find a stable source of funding, and programme activities rely only on small grants won for the realisation of individual projects.

The Sosenko Family Collection Foundation has the ambition to transform the Toy Museum in Kraków into an institution with a permanent seat, which would allow the organisation of the collection, a permanent exhibition and an offering of public workshops. The project has been a laboratory of various museum practices and a test whether the public would be interested in such activities – high quality participatory and engaging museum projects, not just presentation of old toys or mere entertainment. This experiment proved to be very successful: it attracted the interest of the public and caught the attention of the media, public opinion leaders and city authorities which supported the project financially and organisationally.

Concurrently, the Foundation undertook a digitisation project of the collection which has become available on-line, and the publication of the problem-oriented on-line books presenting articles of the collection, interviews, and photographs of the objects.

The Foundation creates a meeting place for people from various backgrounds. After the outbreak of war in Ukraine, it created a workshop space for refugee families in the “Toy Clinic” (2022) exhibition space which had closed for visits. Continuation of work with this group was the “Toy Clinic #2: Difficult Questions” where toys were used as a starting point for conversations focusing on well-being and emotions. The two-year long participatory project “Toy Showcase” (2021–2022) was designed to accommodate families with children, one part was especially prepared for people with special needs, while one was held in English and addressed to expats living in Krakow.

In the Toy Museum’s inaugural project “Toy Showcase” (2021–2022), 68 community curators were empowered to take on the roles of curators and build exhibitions of the historic collection according to their tastes. Katarzyna Sosenko, director of the Toy Museum, comments this 18-month-long project:

The idea for the “Toy Showcase” project was born as a need to open up to the public. The experimental form of collaboration became a kind of public consultation tool. We were curious about different ways of interpretation, looking at objects from a different perspective, redefining them in a new context and in a non-standard way.

By putting the collection in the hands of Cracovians, we gave up what a collector likes best; a personal, autonomous, authorial approach to presenting his or her own collection. This is because the collector has an in-depth knowledge of the subject, an awareness of the strengths of the collection and the ability to create layers of communication as an artistic concept.

Through socialising the process of working with the collection, we have created democratic exhibitions. Different voices and interests began to resonate in the subjective selection of social curators. Everyone involved in the project learned about each other’s perspectives. People involved with collecting and museums were interested in learning about the collection and the history of the toy. Parents with children were focused on the function of the toy. Those with

special needs, on the other hand, paid attention to the accessibility of the exhibits and the elimination of barriers.

Another aspect of the “Toy Showcase” was the formula of cooperation with the hosts of Kraków’s institutions and the motif of presenting the collection in showcases. The exhibits in the showcases were to become a kind of visiting card for the Toy Museum. Here there was an image aspect and a question: how to show the beauty of the collection in such conditions? Giving the public a voice, we had to change our approach. No longer did quantity, quality, history, correctness and canon count, but emotions, personal experiences, sentiments and imagination took central stage.

In the final, the project showed a wide variety of expectations of the public. It taught us that there is no one right way to interpret the collection. Each will stand up for itself, because each has cognitive value. Thus, beyond the material, historical and cultural value of the collection, new meanings and values emerged.

– says Katarzyna Sosenko in a catalogue accompanying the exhibition.²²

Organised simultaneously, the “Toy Clinic” (2021–2022) exhibition showed how to repair toys, contrary to the prevailing practice of automatically replacing broken items with new ones (curators coined the term “fast toys” to describe toys made of poor materials, cheap, imported from afar, which usually break quickly). The exhibition included shows of repairing old toys, a clinic where one could get tips on repairs, and contemporary art which inspired not throwing away unnecessary or broken toys.

²² Sosenko, Katarzyna. 2022. *Przedmowa*. In Katarzyna Jagodzińska. *Witryna z zabawkami. Testowanie muzeum partycypacyjnego*. Kraków: Muzeum Zabawek Kraków and Towarzystwo Miłośników Historii i Zabytków Krakowa, p. 6.

3. GROUP PANEL DISCUSSION (‘ROUND TABLE’) SCENARIO

Round table discussions are planned for a maximum of 120 minutes (if needed this time can be extended if participants are keen to continue conversation).

Discussions are conducted in a national language and moderated by the facilitator.

The role of the facilitator is to give the floor to every participant to answer each question of the scenario (suggested maximum time per person is 3 minutes). The same question is asked to every participant, and after a full round of questions an exchange of reflections between participants is welcome.

After full rounds of every question from the scenario, which are foreseen for around 90 minutes, the moderator is welcome to continue a group discussion asking questions that are most relevant for a given country or which refer to issues raised during earlier discussion.

Discussion questions – identical for each country

1. What, in your view, is the biggest contribution of non-governmental organisations working in the field of heritage in your country for development of the society, economy and environment?
2. What, in your view, are the greatest challenges of non-governmental organisations working in the field of heritage in your country?
3. What, in your view, needs to change to provide greater efficiency for non-governmental organisations working in the field of heritage in your country? (e.g. in terms of organisational, legal, financial, social factors).
4. Despite challenges, obstacles and problems, why do people continue working in the heritage non-governmental sector? (based on participants own experience and general knowledge of the sector).

4. TEMPLATE FOR PROVIDING STATISTICAL DATA

| 1. GENERAL INFORMATION | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Entities collecting statistical data – scope of collected data | | | |
| Type of the entity | Name of the entity | The scope of collected data on the heritage NGOs | |
| Public entities collecting statistical data on the NGO sector* | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| Non-governmental organisations collecting statistical data on the NGO sector* | | | |
| | | | |
| Other entities (e.g. a university) collecting statistical data on the NGO sector* | | | |
| | | | |
| Legal forms of NGOs – legal basis for their operation – recording entity/institution | | | |
| Legal form (name in the national language/translation into English) | Legal basis for operation (name of the legal act in the national language, date of adoption, name in English) | Name of the entity/ institution registering/ recording NGOs operating in a given legal form | Number of NGOs operating in a given legal form – total (indicate the year for which the data is provided) |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| NGOs with special status/rights | | | |
| Name of the special status/rights (in the national language, translations into English)* | Legal basis for granting the special status/rights (name of the legal act in the national language, date of adoption, name in English) | What special rights/ obligations/privileges this status offers? (list in points) | Number of NGOs operating in a given legal form – total (indicate the year for which the data is provided)** |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

| General statistical data for the country*** | | |
|---|------|----------------|
| Data provided for the year of: | | |
| Type of data | Data | Source of data |
| Population of the country | | |
| Area of the country | | |
| Total number of NGOs (all, regardless of their legal status, type or field of the activity) | | |

*Please add as many rows as needed to provide all the data.

**Please specify which year or years.

***If you are providing data on NGOs from different years, please, duplicate this part and fill out separately for every year.

| 2. DETAILED DATA ON HERITAGE NGOS# | | | |
|---|-----|----|--|
| Legal form of NGO (in national language, translated into English) | | | |
| The name of the category that is the most accurate approximation of the heritage NGO population (in the national language, translated into English) | | | |
| Number of organisations in a given category | | | |
| Source of data (institution/entity) | | | |
| Name of the publisher/record/www | | | |
| Data for the year of | | | |
| Is it collected periodically? (please mark the answer) | Yes | No | Collected on a continuous basis (modified on an ongoing basis in the database) |
| If data is collected cyclically - at what time interval is it updated? | | | |
| Comments on the source, the data, including information on the reasons why it was chosen etc., important from the point of view of statistical analysis (e.g. information on the base incompleteness, measurement error, timeliness, other – descriptive) | | | |

#Please duplicate the table for each type of non-governmental organisation

The background features a large, light gray grid. Overlaid on this grid are several geometric elements: a thick black horizontal bar at the top; a series of gray and black rectangular blocks of varying sizes in the upper left; a thick black L-shaped line in the upper right; a thick black horizontal bar spanning the width of the page below the grid; and a series of black and gray rectangular blocks and lines in the bottom right corner.

5. COUNTRY REPORTS BASED ON COLLECTED QUANTITATIVE DATA

Executive Summary

This section provides a comparative overview of non-governmental organisations involved in cultural heritage activities across ten countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Compiled through contributions from national facilitators, the country reports present both statistical data and methodological notes on how heritage-related non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were identified and counted. The analysis is based on a shared template and focuses on national registers, legal forms, available classifications, and key limitations.

Key Findings

- Lack of standardisation and data apps: In all participating countries, there is no single comprehensive registry that categorises NGOs specifically by “heritage” or “cultural heritage” activity. Existing public databases (often maintained by Ministries of Justice, Interior, or Statistical Offices) do not provide thematic filtering beyond broad classifications such as “culture” or “arts and recreation”.
- Manual identification and estimation: Because of the limited categorisation within official registers, manual keyword searches and expert estimations were required in most countries to isolate NGOs working in the field of heritage. These approaches introduced a level of subjectivity and inconsistency across countries.
- Legal diversity of heritage NGOs: NGOs engaged in heritage-related work operate under a variety of legal forms, including associations, foundations, non-profit institutions, public benefit organisations, and charitable organisations. In some countries (e.g. Slovakia, Lithuania, Romania), specific subcategories exist that allow for more precise tracking. In others, like Ukraine and Hungary, political or legal restrictions severely limit data access.
- Public benefit status and other special designations: Several countries (e.g. Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania) maintain registers for organisations with public benefit status or similar legal designations, often tied to tax benefits or eligibility for public funding. However, these are not consistently aligned with heritage-related activities and do not support cross-thematic analysis.
- Fragmented and incomplete data sources: Many countries rely on multiple, unlinked data sources, some of which are public (e.g. open data portals, tax registers), while others are institutional or research-based (e.g. academic studies, NGO reports, or civic tech platforms such as YouControl in Ukraine or Lursoft IT in Latvia).
- Estimated numbers of heritage NGOs: Despite methodological differences, the reports collectively identify thousands of NGOs across the region working in fields related to tangible and intangible cultural heritage. These estimates, while incomplete, provide a foundational baseline for understanding the geographic and organisational diversity of the sector.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this annex highlight the urgent need for better classification systems and integrated data infrastructures that allow for the identification of heritage-related civil society actors. The current reliance on indirect or incomplete methods hampers the ability to assess the scope, impact, and support needs of heritage NGOs.

Nevertheless, this report offers the most cohesive cross-national snapshot currently available and lays down important groundwork for future policy recommendations, cross-sector cooperation, and targeted funding strategies aimed at sustaining cultural heritage through civic engagement.

Introduction

This annex presents the detailed results of a cross-national effort to map and quantify the presence of NGOs engaged in cultural heritage activities across Central and Eastern Europe. Developed as part of a broader research initiative, it draws upon data gathered by national facilitators who collaborated to compile country-specific reports based on a common template. These reports aim to address the persistent challenge of limited, fragmented, and inconsistently categorised statistical information on heritage NGOs in the region.

The annex includes information for each country structured along four main components:

- sources of data on NGOs, including official registries and institutions responsible for maintaining data (both governmental and non-governmental);
- quantitative statistics on heritage NGOs, including legal forms, registration figures, year of data, and criteria used for identifying heritage-relevant organisations;
- NGOs with special legal status, where applicable, including rights and responsibilities linked to such designations;
- relevant legal frameworks governing NGO operations.

The report reveals widespread limitations in the ability to systematically identify heritage NGOs within national databases, as registries rarely provide thematic categorisation (e.g. a “heritage” tag). As a result, data collection often relied on keyword searches, expert estimations, and proxies such as organisations classified under “culture” or “arts and recreation”. These methodological constraints pose significant challenges for consistency and cross-country comparison.

Another common issue is the dispersal of data across multiple institutions – such as ministries of justice, culture, regional administrations, and statistical offices – often without interoperability. Furthermore, many countries face additional difficulties, including: outdated or irregularly updated databases, inability to distinguish active versus dormant NGOs, and limited access to data due to political or legal restrictions. In countries like Belarus, Ukraine, and Hungary, restrictive legal and political environments further complicate data gathering, often resulting in incomplete or suppressed records.

Despite these challenges, this annex provides the most comprehensive available overview of the heritage NGO landscape in the region. While the figures presented should be considered

minimum estimates due to data limitations, they serve as a critical starting point for future policy, research, and capacity-building efforts aimed at strengthening civil society’s role in cultural heritage preservation. The findings also underscore the urgent need for coordinated reforms in data collection practices and classification systems to better reflect the diversity and contributions of heritage NGOs.

Belarus

Sources of data on NGOs

In Belarus, data on the NGOs sector is collected by several public entities. These include the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus, the Main Departments of Justice in each region (oblast) – Minsk, Brest, Vitsebsk, Homel, Hrodna, and Mahileu – and the Minsk City Council, in accordance with the country’s territorial division. These bodies are responsible for the registration of associations, unions of associations, and foundations, which may operate at the national or regional level. In addition, international organisations with subordinate structures in Belarus are also registered.

The registry maintained by these entities provides general statistics, legal regulations, names of registered and liquidated entities, and their registration or liquidation dates. More detailed data **are available** through the Unified State Register of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs (USR) web portal, including information on the place of registration, type and code of activity, and details about the presence or absence of outstanding debts. However, the portal does not allow for the extraction of aggregated statistical data; information is accessible only when the specific name of an organisation is known.

In Belarus, associations that work in the field of heritage typically fall into two main categories: (1) professional associations, such as those of conservators or museum workers, which focus on professional development and advocacy; and (2) civic associations formed by individuals interested in the preservation and promotion of specific sites, cities, or types of heritage (e.g. forest beekeeping or the Kreva Castle). Despite their relevance, it is not possible to automatically generate a list of such organisations using the available registries. Similarly, foundations are often established to raise funds for heritage-related activities, such as the restoration of specific sites or support for particular heritage initiatives. As with associations, there is no automated system to identify or list foundations involved in such activities. While the Ministry of Justice maintains up-to-date lists of registered entities, these are not searchable by thematic focus. Since 2014, the lists have been published as Word documents organised chronologically by registration date and separated by region, along with a separate list of national-level (republican) organisations. These documents are updated on a continuous basis.

Additional information on NGOs is collected by the Republican Center of National Cultures, a governmental body that provides general data and a detailed list of registered ethnic associations. This list partially overlaps with Ministry of Justice records and includes names, registration dates, addresses, director contact details, and the number of participants. In this context, “ethnic associations” refer to organisations representing ethnic cultures other than Belarusian.

The Commissioner for Religious and National Affairs also maintains information on religious organisations and communities by region. A religious community is typically defined as a registered parish affiliated with a specific religious denomination. If a church building is recognised as a cultural heritage site, the parish is responsible for its maintenance in accordance with heritage conservation legislation. As a result, some religious communities also engage in cultural promotion, fundraising, and volunteer mobilisation.

Given the increasingly difficult environment for NGOs in Belarus, any analysis of heritage-focused NGOs must be contextualised within the broader landscape of civil society organisations. Relevant information is provided by Lawtrend Belarus, an NGO that describes itself as “a group of professionals who work together using legal research and education to effectively protect human rights and freedoms”¹. Lawtrend regularly publishes overviews of the state of civil society in Belarus through its “Lawtrend Monitor” series and other reports. For instance, in March 2024, it published a report highlighting ongoing challenges for Belarusian NGOs. An excerpt reads:

*The situation regarding the freedom of association and the status of Belarusian NGOs in Belarus remains poor. Instances of searches, detentions, summons for «conversations,» initiation of administrative and criminal cases, and the use of legislation to counter extremism as a tool to pressure civil society organisations and activists, including the initiation of criminal cases related to donations to solidarity funds and other structures, continue to be documented. Legislation on special (in absentia) proceedings against activists who have been forced to leave the country is increasingly being utilised.*²

The cited document also provides important information on the issue of the numbers of NGOs in Belarus, and in fact the problems of determining the actual number of operating (registered) organisations. As the document notes:

*The number of these organisations may vary within several dozen due to the ongoing liquidation process and the lack of official generalised information on registering NGOs of various forms.*³

The process of NGO liquidation in Belarus warrants further attention. Liquidation may occur in two ways: forced liquidation or self-liquidation Making this distinction draws attention to the twofold impact of government power on the NGO sector⁴:

- Forced liquidation refers to the removal of NGOs via lawsuits initiated by registration authorities or through administrative exclusion from the USR. According to Lawtrend, as of March 2024, forced liquidation proceedings were underway for 997 NGOs;
- Self-liquidation is often prompted by indirect pressures such as harassment of NGO staff and members, an increasingly hostile legal environment, and the broader socio-political context.

¹ “Lawtrend Monitor” from 30.04.2024.
² *Monitoring of the situation with freedom of association and the status of civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus March 2024.*
³ Ibidem.
⁴ Ibidem.

Lawtrend maintains separate lists of both involuntarily and voluntarily liquidated organisations. These lists have been updated since 2021, when widespread politically motivated dissolutions of NGOs began. The lists are organised chronologically, not thematically, and include the date of each entity’s liquidation.

The state’s efforts appear aimed at constraining the activities of NGOs, particularly those with broad (national-level) mandates. In 2023, additional legal restrictions were introduced under the Law on Public Associations, complicating the process of establishing republican public associations. Among the most problematic requirements is the obligation to maintain formal organisational structures – including offices – in each of the country’s regions. This has created both logistical and financial burdens, such as increased operational costs and difficulties securing premises, as property owners often refuse to rent to such organisations.⁵

Detailed quantitative data

Table A1: Detailed quantitative data in Belarus

| Legal form | Data for the year of | Total number of NGOs operating in a given legal form | The name of the category that is the most accurate approximation of the heritage NGO population | Number of organisations in a given category | % of heritage NGOs |
|---|----------------------|--|--|---|--------------------|
| Associations and unions of associations (Общественное объединение и союзы) | 2023 | 1 973 including: – 177 international; – 572 national; – 1 224 regional. | The registry does not provide categories. The figure was obtained by the facilitator mechanically adding organisations thematically falling under the “heritage” category according to their names. | 40 – registered in the official Registry (2024) 61 – liquidated voluntarily and involuntarily since 2021 | 2.0 |
| Foundations (Фонд) | 2023 | 118 | The registry does not provide filters by purpose. The figure was obtained by the facilitator mechanically adding organisations thematically falling under the “heritage” category according to their names. | 18 – liquidated since 2021 | incalculable |

| | | | | | |
|--|------|-------|--|----------------------------|--------------|
| Private establishments (Частное учреждение) | 2023 | 451 | The registry does not provide filters by purpose. The figure was obtained by the facilitator mechanically adding organisations thematically falling under the “heritage” category according to their names. | 17 – liquidated since 2021 | incalculable |
| Religious communities (Религиозная община) | 2023 | 3 419 | Indirect statistics – based on the category of “religious heritage” from the <i>List of historical and cultural valuables of the Republic of Belarus</i> . | ~700 | 20.5 |
| Total | | 5 961 | | incalculable | incalculable |

Source: Own elaboration based on the following:

For associations and unions of associations:

- registered: regional organisations: Main Departments of Justice in six regions and Minsk; republic organisations: Data of the Ministry of Justice [Available here](#) and [available here](#)
- liquidated: List of involuntarily liquidated organisations, Lawtrend [Available here](#); list of voluntarily liquidated organisations, Lawtrend [Available here](#).

For foundations:

- Lawtrend [Available here](#); List of involuntarily liquidated organisations, Lawtrend [Available here](#).
- List of voluntarily liquidated organisations, Lawtrend [Available here](#).

For private establishments:

- Lawtrend [Available here](#).
- List of involuntarily liquidated organisations, Lawtrend [Available here](#).
- List of voluntarily liquidated organisations, Lawtrend [Available here](#).

For religious communities:

- Total amount – Commissioner for Religious and National Affairs [Available here](#); Heritage NGO – National Library of Belarus, Bank of information on the historical and cultural heritage of the Republic of Belarus [Available here](#).

⁵ Ibidem.

Additional relevant information

It is currently not possible to determine the exact number of active heritage organisations in Belarus based on available statistical data. Comprehensive and up-to-date lists of such organisations are not publicly accessible; instead, only aggregate figures for all registered entities are provided. To estimate the size of the heritage NGO sector, the national facilitator conducted a manual review of relevant databases – primarily those maintained by Lawtrend – using keyword-based searches related to heritage themes. Based on this analysis, the facilitator estimated that, as of 2021, heritage NGOs accounted for approximately 5% of the total number of NGOs in Belarus, or around 300 organisations. The absence of detailed and disaggregated data also prevents the calculation of key indicators such as the number of heritage NGOs per 10,000 inhabitants or per unit of national territory.

Regarding religious organisations, the figure of approximately 700 entities was derived from the category of “religious heritage” as listed in the official *List of Historical and Cultural Valuables of the Republic of Belarus*. This list includes 722 entries; however, it must be noted that some of these refer to ruins without active parishes, and not all functioning churches have an associated registered parish. Conversely, many historic churches and chapels that are in active use are not officially designated as heritage sites but are nonetheless treated as such by local communities. Consequently, the available data may both underestimate the actual number of functioning religious heritage sites (by excluding informal or undesignated sites) and overestimate it (by including inactive or abandoned sites). The identification of religious heritage organisations thus involves a degree of uncertainty and approximation.

Additionally, the analysis includes entities registered as private establishments – non-commercial legal entities officially recognised as companies rather than NGOs. This legal workaround has emerged in response to restrictive policies that have made it increasingly difficult to register traditional NGOs. The registries of private establishments are maintained by regional and city executive committees (e.g. in Brest, Vitsebsk, Homel, Hrodna, Minsk, and Mahileu). Although these entities do not possess the legal capacity to represent public interests, they are allowed to carry out educational and cultural functions. In practice, their scope of activity often mirrors that of public organisations, including the preservation of heritage sites and professional development in heritage-related fields. According to the facilitator’s observations, the number of such establishments has increased in recent years, as cultural initiatives have increasingly opted for this form of registration due to administrative barriers to establishing public organisations.

NGOs with special status

n/a

Basic legal acts that determine the operation of NGOs in the country

- Закон Республики Беларусь «Об общественных объединениях», 4 октября 1994 г. № 3254-xii, последняя редакция - 14.02.2023 [Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Public Associations”]
- Положение «О создании, деятельности и ликвидации фондов в Республике Беларусь», Указ Президента Республики Беларусь 01.07.2005 №302, последняя редакция - 11.06.2009 [Regulations “On the creation, activities and liquidation of foundations in the Republic of Belarus”]

- Декрет Президента Республики Беларусь от «О государственной регистрации и ликвидации (прекращении деятельности) субъектов хозяйствования», 16.01.2009 г. №1 [Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus “On state registration and liquidation (termination of activities) of business entities”]
- Закон Республики Беларусь “О свободе вероисповеданий и религиозных организациях” от 31.10.2002 г. № 137-3 [Law of the Republic of Belarus “On freedom of religion and religious organisations”]

Czechia

Sources of data on NGOs

In Czechia, the Czech Statistical Office (Český statistický úřad – ČSÚ) serves as the primary public authority responsible for collecting and disseminating comprehensive data on non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The data include information on organisational size, legal structure, fields of activity, and financial indicators, and are updated biennially. Among the thematic areas covered are culture, heritage, and social services, with data available at national, regional, and local levels⁶. While the majority of reports are published in Czech, key examples relevant to this study include: *Neziskové organizace v České republice* (Non-Profit Organisations in the Czech Republic, 2023); *Vývoj a struktura neziskových organizací podle ekonomických ukazatelů* (Development and Structure of Non-Profit Organisations by Economic Indicators, 2022); and *Statistika kultury a kulturního dědictví v regionech ČR* (Statistics on Culture and Cultural Heritage in Czech Regions, 2021). These reports provide valuable insights into the structure and operational environment of the NGO sector in the country.

The Czech Statistical Office also maintains an English-language open-access platform, Statistika: *Statistics and Economy Journal*, a quarterly publication that offers analytical perspectives on a broad spectrum of economic, environmental, and social issues, including the non-profit sector.

In terms of legal structure, the most common organisational form for community-based heritage NGOs in the Czech Republic is the association (*spolek*), which replaced the former civic association following the implementation of the new Civil Code in 2014. Associations are characterised by a membership-based structure committed to pursuing a defined public benefit goal. Another widely used legal form is the foundation (*nadace*), which is typically established with endowed assets to support heritage-related projects, such as the restoration of historic sites. Unlike associations, foundations are asset-based legal entities with a long-term or, in the case of endowment funds, temporary mandate to support non-profit purposes.

Official data on NGOs by legal form is also compiled by various ministries: the Ministry of the Interior oversees associations (*spolky*); the Ministry of Justice is responsible for foundations (*nadace*), institutes (*ústavy*), and public benefit corporations (*obecně prospěšné společnosti*), updating data approximately every three years; while the Ministry of Culture supervises church and charitable organisations (*církevní a charitativní organizace*).

Specialised data on cultural and heritage NGOs is collected by the National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture (NIPOS), a public institution tasked with gathering and publishing

⁶ [Available here](#)

statistical information on cultural organisations, including NGOs. NIPOS produces regular reports on the cultural sector that include both quantitative data and interpretative analyses of NGO activity, funding, and societal contribution. Examples of relevant publications ([available here](#)) include the *Annual Statistical Reports on Culture* (e.g. *Základní statistické údaje o kultuře v České republice*), which assess trends in areas such as institutional attendance, funding sources, and the effects of external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These reports provide comparative data across years and are a useful resource for assessing recovery and transformation in the cultural sector. Other NIPOS publications include reports focused specifically on the impact of NGOs and cultural heritage, including visitor statistics to museums and heritage sites. Selected editions of these reports are also available in English, such as *Culture Statistics in the Czech Republic 2022* and *Statistics on Culture 2018. Basic statistical data about the activities of cultural facilities in the Czech Republic*.

In addition to public institutions, several ministries – including the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Regional Development – administer European Union funding programmes for NGOs and collect data related to funded projects.

Among non-governmental data providers, Neziskovsky.cz is the leading NGO support platform in the Czech Republic. It offers training, consulting, advocacy, and data collection services for the sector. The platform maintains a publicly accessible NGO database and regularly publishes research reports and surveys on the status, needs, and challenges facing NGOs, although heritage-specific data are generally only available in Czech.

The Czech Council of Children and Youth (*Česká rada dětí a mládeže*) is another organisation that monitors youth-focused NGOs active in the cultural and heritage sectors. It collects data on membership, educational programmes, and regional initiatives aimed at promoting cultural heritage among younger generations.

Academic research also plays a role in documenting and analysing the NGO sector. [The Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University in Prague](#) has conducted several studies on civil society, including NGOs operating in the cultural and heritage domains. Research is carried out by specialised centres such as the [Culture and Communication Research Centre](#) (CULCORC), which investigates the relationship between cultural communication, heritage, and societal values – often in cooperation with European institutions. Another notable academic institution is the Centre for Cultural Heritage Studies, which develops projects focused on cultural heritage education, community sustainability, and collaborative networks involving museums, schools, and heritage practitioners. While quantitative data from these academic entities are limited, their qualitative research contributes valuable insights into the functioning and impact of heritage NGOs across the Czech Republic.⁷

⁷ [Available here](#)

Detailed quantitative data

Table A2: Detailed quantitative data in Czechia

| Legal form | Data for the year of | Total number of NGOs operating in a given legal form | The name of the category that is the most accurate approximation of the heritage NGO population | Number of organisations in a given category | % of heritage NGOs |
|---|----------------------|--|---|---|---------------------|
| Associations (<i>Spolky</i>) | 2023 | 50 000 | Not indicated <i>The amount calculated manually by the facilitator</i> | 2 500 | 5 |
| Foundations (<i>Nadace</i>) | 2023 | 1 500 | Not indicated <i>The amount calculated manually by the facilitator</i> | 400 | 26.7 |
| Institute (<i>Ústavy</i>) | 2023 | 700 | No selection by purpose available | - | incalculable |
| Public Benefit Corporation (<i>Obecně prospěšné společnosti</i>) | 2023 | 3 000 | Not indicated <i>The amount calculated manually by the facilitator</i> | 300 | 10 |
| Church and Charitable Organisations (<i>Církevní a charitativní organizace</i>) | 2023 | 750 | No selection by purpose available | - | incalculable |
| Total | | 55 950 | | incalculable | incalculable |

Source: Own elaboration based on The Czech Statistical Office, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture.

As of 2023, the total number of registered NGOs in the Czech Republic was approximately 103,000.⁸ However, for the purposes of this study, only those legal forms under which heritage-related organisations are typically registered were included in the statistical calculations presented above. Legal forms associated primarily with other sectors – such as humanitarian aid, environmental protection, education, healthcare, sports, and professional associations – were excluded from the analysis.

Due to structural limitations in the national NGO registries, it is not possible to determine the precise number of active heritage organisations. The available data do not indicate the thematic or sectoral focus of individual NGOs, which prevents any reliable identification of those engaged specifically in cultural heritage activities. The lack of specified data does not allow for calculating the number of heritage NGOs per 10,000 residents and per country area. Moreover, inconsistencies in reporting practices across different sources – particularly regarding the criteria used to define “active” status or primary area of focus – may lead to variation in estimates. Some

⁸ [Available here](#)

NGOs with special status rights

organisations that are formally registered may be inactive or dormant, yet are still included in official totals, contributing to discrepancies in sector-specific datasets.

In the Czech Republic, there are two recognised forms of public benefit organisations. The first, Obecně prospěšná společnost (Public Benefit Corporation – PBC), is a distinct legal entity alongside associations and foundations, subject to specific legal requirements regarding the use and reinvestment of profits. The second, Veřejná prospěšná organizace (Public Benefit Organisation – PBO), is not a separate legal form but rather a status that can be granted to existing NGOs, signalling their orientation toward the public good. While both forms emphasise public benefit, the PBC structure entails stricter legal and financial oversight.

For the analysis of public benefit organisations in the following section only information on the PBOs is used, since this type corresponds to the characteristics of public benefit organisations adopted in the guidelines for the preparation of country reports. It is primarily sourced from the Ministry of Justice’s Public Register which presents several limitations. Incompleteness is a common issue, as some organisations fail to update their records or submit required financial reports, leading to gaps in the dataset. Measurement errors may arise from inconsistent accounting practices or data entry mistakes, particularly among smaller organisations. Some data often requires extensive preparations before they can be use in the large-scale analysis

The types of organisations with a special status are described in the table below. Only the VPOs meet the criteria of this research.

Table A3: The types of organisations with a special status in Czechia

| | Public benefit corporation (Obecně prospěšná společnost) | Public benefit organisation (Veřejná prospěšná organizace) |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Legal basis | Act No. 248/1995 Coll. | PBO is a designation, not an organisation form. It is governed by other laws rather than a standalone act. |
| Purpose | Providing public benefit services in various fields such as education, health, culture, or social services | PBO status can be granted to entities that demonstrate significant societal contributions in public welfare areas (such as charitable, cultural, or educational initiatives) |
| Structure and control | A defined management structure with a director, board of directors, and supervisory board, each with specific duties | Depending on a legal form (e.g. foundation, association) |
| Profit making | OPSPs can generate profit – it must be reinvested in their public benefit activities (no distribution of profit among funders nor members) | Depending on a legal form (e.g. foundation, association) – any profit must be reinvested in the NGO public welfare activities |

| | | |
|--------------|--|--|
| Transparency | Required to maintain transparent financial records, often monitored by the Ministry of Justice, to ensure that funds serve public benefit objectives | The Ministry of Justice or other relevant authorities grant PBO status, often contingent on transparency, accountability, and the organisation's alignment with recognised public welfare purposes |
| Benefits | Specific tax benefits | Typically eligible for additional tax benefits (such as tax exemptions), public grants, and priority in government tenders |

Source: Own elaboration based on the information provided by the facilitator and relevant documents listed below.

In 2023, according to the Ministry of Justice, the total number of NGOs having PBO status in the Czech Republic was 2,500. The facilitator estimates that approximately 20% of PBOs deal with culture or cultural heritage.

As far as special rights are concerned, organisations that manage buildings with the monuments status (Registered Cultural Monuments – Registrované kulturní památky) are eligible for some rights/privileges, including building protection under state law, eligibility for state funds for restoration and preservation, exemption from some local taxes.

- Zákon o sdružování občanů č. 89/2012 Sb. [Civil Code No. 89/2012]
- Zákon č. 89/2012 Sb., občanský zákoník [Civil Code No. 89/2012]
- Zákon č. 248/1995 Sb. [Act on Public Benefit Corporations No. 248/1995]
- Zákon č. 3/2002 Sb. o církvích a náboženských společnostech [Church and Religious Societies Act No. 3/2002]
- Zákon č. 231/2010 Sb. Zákon, kterým se mění zákon č. 248/1995 Sb., o obecně prospěšných společnostech a o změně a doplnění některých zákonů, ve znění pozdějších předpisů [Act on Public Benefit Corporations No. 231/2010]
- Zákon o státní památkové péči č. 20/1987 Sb. [Act on State Monument Care No. 20/1987]

Additional relevant information

Estonia

Sources of data on NGOs

In Estonia, the main public institution responsible for the collection and dissemination of official statistics related to economic activity – including that of heritage-related NGOs – is Statistics Estonia. This body compiles fundamental data such as the number of active economic units, their size, location, legal status, and field of activity. However, the classification of sectors used by Statistics Estonia places heritage-related activities within a broad and heterogeneous category that includes arts, entertainment, recreation, and education, limiting the precision of analysis focused specifically on heritage NGOs.

The Land Registry and Registration Department (*Tartu maakohu registriosakond*), which maintains the national registry of legal entities, including a digital register, was also consulted. Nevertheless, this registry does not facilitate the identification of heritage NGOs as it groups governmental and non-governmental entities under the same classifications. Furthermore, the closest available category – “art, entertainment, free time” – is overly broad and encompasses

a wide range of activities and organisations, making it unsuitable for the specific identification of heritage-focused NGOs.

Some public institutions provide selected quantitative information relevant to heritage NGOs:

- The Ministry of the Interior supplies data on churches and parishes (most recently for 2023).
- The Ministry of Culture collects annual data on museums.
- The Estonian Tax and Customs Board provides information on public benefit organisations.
- The Cultural Endowment of Estonia maintains a continuously updated list of funded projects across all cultural fields.

A notable exception is the systematic collection and publication of data on folk amateur culture by Statistics Estonia. This is due to the cultural significance of such practices in Estonia, where folk song and dance traditions are inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list and supported across multiple levels of governance. These traditions are embedded in national identity, including being referenced in the Constitution. Nevertheless, while this data is collected annually and includes information on collectives operating in schools, preschools, and independently, it pertains to the nature of activities rather than the legal form of the entities engaged in them. Therefore, it does not provide direct insight into heritage NGOs.

Additional data sources include the Ministry of Culture, the National Heritage Protection Office (*Muinsuskaitseamet*), and Regional Cultural Heritage Protection Offices (*Kultuuriväärtuste Ametid*). These institutions maintain records on cultural heritage resources, such as archaeological sites, natural and artistic monuments, museums, and underwater heritage. Although these databases may reference the organisations managing these sites, including NGOs, their primary purpose is the documentation of the heritage assets themselves rather than the organisations involved in their stewardship. As such, no central public authority explicitly maintains a registry or comprehensive dataset of heritage NGOs in Estonia.

Local municipalities also contribute to partial data collection through project-based initiatives. For instance, the City of Tartu, in preparation for its role as European Capital of Culture in 2024, commissioned a study titled “**Tartu linna rahvakultuurikollektiivide uuring 2024**” (in Estonian only). Conducted by the city’s Cultural Department in cooperation with the think tank Creativity Lab, this two-stage study surveyed leaders of folk culture collectives and subsequently the legal entities managing them. While the focus was not exclusively on heritage NGOs, the study represents the first systematic overview of folk culture collectives (including song, dance, hobby theatre, and instrumental music) in Tartu. Despite its significance, this study is a one-off initiative responding to the specific needs of a local municipality and does not constitute a systematic national effort in data collection on the heritage NGO sector.

Partial data is also generated by NGOs that are not themselves necessarily active in the heritage field. For example, the Estonian Civil Society NGO (*Hea Kodanik*) – an umbrella organisation for civil society organisations – has conducted broader mappings of the NGO sector, which occasionally include heritage-related entities. Similarly, sector-specific organisations such as

Folklore Council (*Folkloorinõukogu*), ERRS (Union of Folk Dance and Song), and Heritage Protection Society (*Muinsuskaitse Selts*) possess significant knowledge of their respective fields

and members. However, their insights are anecdotal and not part of a systematic statistical effort.

Academic institutions also contribute to the knowledge base, albeit through non-systematic and typically qualitative research projects. These are often driven by individual scholars or project-based funding. An illustrative example is the University of Tartu’s participation in a study titled “**Pärnumaa ühingute nõustamisvajaduse kaardistamine**” which examined the needs of NGOs in the Pärnu region. This study collected data on organisational income, grants, donations, membership, activity areas, and target groups, as well as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. While the study provides valuable regional insights, it is not representative at the national level. Finally, it is important to mention that the Estonian Song and Dance Festival Foundation, which organises the national festival, maintains a non-public register of folk amateur culture collectives. This database is continuously updated and serves as an internal resource for managing the festival and related initiatives.

Detailed quantitative data

Table A4: Detailed quantitative data in Estonia

| Legal form | Data for the year of | Total number of NGOs operating in a given legal form | The name of the category that is the most accurate approximation of the heritage NGO population | Number of organisations in a given category | % of heritage NGOs |
|---|-------------------------------|--|---|---|--------------------|
| Associations (MTÜ – mittetulundusühing) | 2023 | 44 269 | Folk culture amateur groups (including choral folk music, folk music, folk dance, amateur theatre, handcraft) (<i>Rahvakultuuri kollektiivid</i>) | 1 743 | 3.9 |
| Foundations (SA – sihtasutus) | Total: 2023 Museums: 2022* | 701 | Museums | 45 | 6.4 |
| Associations (MTÜ – mittetulundusühing) and Foundations (SA – sihtasutus) other than indicated in above lines | 2023 | 44 970 ¹ | Heritage NGOs that are not museums, churches or congregations or folk culture amateur groups (calculated additionally by Facilitator) | 80 | 0.2 |
| Churches and congregations (Usulised ühendused) | 2023 | 500 | entire population | 500 | 100.0 |
| Total | | 45 470 | | 2 368 | 5.2 |

* Total number of associations and foundations repeated only to calculate the share of heritage NGOs of this type, but not included for the second time in the total number. Total number was calculated as the sum of: associations (44,269), foundations (701), churches and congregations (500).

Source: Own elaboration based on the following:

For associations:
Total amount – Statistics Estonia; Tartu Maakohtu Registriosakond (done mainly through E-Äriregister).
For heritage NGOs – [Available here](#)
For foundations:
Total amount – Statistics Estonia, Tartu Maakohtu Registriosakond (done mainly through E-Äriregister)
For museums:
Ministry of Culture – [Available here](#)
For churches and congregations:
Tartu Maakohtu Registriosakond (is done mainly through E-Äriregister) Ministry of the Interior – publishes data on churches and parishes – [Available here](#)
For additional calculation of heritage associations and foundations: MTÜ Kogukonnapraktika/ – [Available here](#) and MTÜ Eesti Kultuuriseltside Ühendus – [Available here](#)

Detailed quantitative data

Table A5: Detailed quantitative data in Estonia

| Data for the year of | Heritage NGOs per 10 000 population | Heritage NGOs per country area |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2023 | 17.34 | 0.052 NGO/km² |

Source: Own calculation based on Statistics Estonia (population), Eesti.ee (area)

The number of registered non-profit associations in Estonia appears disproportionately high when considering the scale of the population and the scope of heritage NGOs. This is largely due to the inclusion of over 20,000 non-profit associations, many of which are home-owner unions. These unions, which are legally required for the management of multi-apartment residential buildings in Estonia, are registered as non-profit entities but fall outside the scope of heritage-related activity.

A key component of the Estonian heritage sector is folk culture, which encompasses nearly 5,000 amateur groups according to data from Statistics Estonia. These groups are instrumental in sustaining traditions that culminate in the Song and Dance Celebration, a culturally symbolic event inscribed in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list. To estimate the number of third sector folk culture groups (i.e. those not affiliated with public, private, or state institutions), calculations were based on excluding all groups linked to such entities from the total number of registered amateur collectives (*rahvakultuuri kollektiivid*).

Additionally, churches and religious congregations across Estonia are commonly involved in heritage protection and preservation activities. Although there may be isolated exceptions, it was not possible to systematically identify which congregations are not engaged in such work. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, it was assumed that all churches and congregations contribute to heritage preservation and are thus included in the categorisation of heritage NGOs.

Given the limitations of existing public records and statistical data, the designation of heritage NGOs remains imprecise. To address this, the Facilitator introduced a supplementary category consisting of heritage NGOs that are not captured by conventional classification methods, such as those based on the Ministry of Culture’s heritage agenda or Statistics Estonia’s sectoral divisions. This category was defined through a process of elimination and expert identification.

Organisations within this group are often umbrella bodies representing multiple stakeholders in the heritage field – typically labelled as “societies” or “unions”. In Estonian practice, the term society traditionally refers to partnerships or non-profit organisations, while union denotes the collective nature of an organisation but carries fewer historical connotations. Although other naming conventions are also used, “society” and “union” remain the most prevalent descriptors for umbrella organisations in both the heritage and broader non-profit sectors.

Unlike the three main categories identified in this research – based on publicly available data – this additional category is unique in that it was developed using expert knowledge and multi-source cross-referencing rather than relying on statistical data from a single institution. It thus represents an essential qualitative supplement to the otherwise quantitatively limited dataset on heritage NGOs in Estonia.

Additional relevant information

NGOs with special status/rights

In Estonia, Public Benefit Organisations (PBOs) comprise a specific subset of the non-profit sector, including non-profit associations, foundations, churches, and congregations that are officially recognised as eligible for tax-related benefits. Inclusion on the official PBO list, maintained by the Estonian Tax and Customs Board, grants organisations access to a range of fiscal privileges, including:

***Basic legal acts
that determine the
operation of NGOs
in the country***

Hungary

***Sources of data
on NGOs***

- Exemptions from income tax on received donations and gifts;
- Reimbursement for certain costs related to public receptions;
- The ability to grant scholarships exempt from income tax, provided they meet regulatory criteria.

To qualify for PBO status, organisations must demonstrate a clear commitment to the public interest and a philanthropic orientation. This generally involves providing services, goods, or other benefits to the public predominantly free of charge and operating without a profit motive. The application process requires compliance with specific legal and operational standards, as well as adherence to continuous reporting obligations.

As of 2024, a total of 2,706 organisations in Estonia held official PBO status. From this number, 2,406 organisations were identified as heritage-related NGOs. This estimate was derived by the national facilitator through a process of data filtering and exclusion, based on the dataset provided by the Estonian Tax and Customs Board. Non-heritage organisations were systematically removed from the full PBO list to isolate those entities relevant to the heritage sector.

This approach highlights the usefulness of the PBO designation in identifying potentially relevant actors within the heritage NGO landscape, while also illustrating the limitations of existing classification systems that do not directly account for heritage-specific missions.

- Mittetulundusühingute seadus 06.06.1996 (Non-profit Associations Act)
- Sihtasutuste seadus Vastu võetud 15.11.1995 (Foundations Act)
- Kirikute ja koguduste seadus Vastu võetud 12.02.2002 (Churches and Congregations Act)
- PBO – Tulumaksuseadus – Vastu võetud 15.12.1999 (Income Tax Act)

The National Office for the Judiciary (*Országos Bírósági Hivatal – OBH*) serves as the primary public authority responsible for maintaining the official register of NGOs in Hungary. This register includes key information such as the organisations’ headquarters, date of establishment, operational scope (according to the International Classification of Non-Profit Organisations – ICNPO), and whether the entity holds the status of a Public Benefit Organisation (PBO). Data in the registry is updated on a continuous basis, with a mandatory re-registration process required every three years. The OBH provides public access to a searchable database of registered organisations⁹ through its official website. However, this tool does not facilitate comprehensive queries by organisational type or allow for the extraction of total figures by category. Instead, it only permits searches by specific organisational purposes or criteria.

⁹ [Available here](#)

A secondary official register is maintained by the Prime Minister’s Office (*Miniszterelnökség*). Since 2012, Hungarian NGOs have been legally required to submit identical data to both the OBH and the Prime Minister’s Office. The latter also offers a searchable **online interface**, although it shares similar limitations with the OBH’s system in terms of data aggregation and public accessibility.

Quantitative data on NGOs is also systematically compiled by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (*Központi Statisztikai Hivatal – KSH*). The KSH conducts annual data collection based on ICNPO classifications, gathering information on the number of members, employees, and volunteers within NGOs, as well as data on funding received, income, and expenditures. While this dataset is valuable for understanding the structural and financial dimensions of the sector, publication of the data is subject to delays; at the time of writing, the most recent available statistics were for the year 2022.

The KSH also periodically publishes analytical summaries and sectoral overviews. Notably, it has examined the implications of Act CLXXV of 2011 on the Freedom of Association, Nonprofit Status and the Operation and Support of Civil Organisations, which has significantly influenced the trajectory of the Hungarian NGO sector. One consequence of this legislation has been a decline in the number of PBOs since 2010. According to the law, NGOs that fail to submit annual financial reports may face legal proceedings initiated by the courts, leading to their dissolution or removal from the official registry. This legal mechanism has been employed annually since the enactment of the legislation. The most recent KSH publication covering NGO sector developments – issued for the year 2020 – confirmed a continued, though decelerating, decline in the number of registered NGOs (with a net loss of 217 organisations in 2020, compared to 601 in 2019).¹⁰

It is also important to acknowledge the broader political and legislative environment in which Hungarian NGOs operate. Over the past decade, the Hungarian government has introduced several measures that have been widely interpreted as efforts to restrict civil society activity. Among the most controversial was the Transparency Law on NGOs, enacted between 2017 and 2021, which required any organisation receiving foreign funding exceeding HUF 7.2 million (approximately EUR 20,500) to register with the courts.¹¹ Although formally presented as part of the government’s anti-money laundering efforts, this legislation was widely criticised – both domestically and internationally – for its potential to stigmatise foreign-funded NGOs and hinder their operations.

¹⁰ *The most important characteristics of the nonprofit sector, 2020*. Hungarian Central Statistical Office.

¹¹ Hein, Melanie. 2021. The Hungarian Government Takes Further Steps Against NGOs. 23/06/2021, “Centre for East European and International Studies Spotlight” 24.

Detailed quantitative data

Table A6: Detailed quantitative data in Hungary

| Legal form | Data for the year of | Total number of NGOs operating in a given legal form | The name of the category that is the most accurate approximation of the heritage NGO population | Number of organisations in a given category | % of heritage NGOs |
|--|----------------------|--|---|---|--------------------|
| Association (egyesület) | 2024 | 41 101 | Culture | 5 247 | 12.8 |
| Membership associations as aggregated category (incl. associations and other membership organisations) | 2022 | 41 682 (all membership associations) of which associations: 35 216 | Membership associations: Culture Associations: no possibility to determine the amount | 7 123 | 17.1 |
| Foundation (alapítvány) | 2024 | 17 335 | no selection by purpose | - | incalculable |
| Foundation (alapítvány) | 2022 | 19 196 | Culture and arts | 2 896 | 15.1 |
| Total (2022) | | 60 878 | | 10 019 | 16.5 |

Source: Own elaboration based on the following: total amount for associations – Prime Minister’s Office, data for heritage NGOs - National Office for the Judiciary, membership associations – Hungarian Central Statistical Office, foundations – 2022: Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2024: Prime Minister’s Office.

Additional relevant information

Table A7: Additional statistics in Hungary

| Data for the year of | Heritage NGOs per 10,000 population | Heritage NGOs per country area |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2022 | 10.43 | 0.108 NGO/km² |

Source: Own calculations based on:population, area.

In the statistical system of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (*Központi Statisztikai Hivatal – KSH*), the category of “membership associations” comprises aggregated data that includes multiple organisational forms: associations, public law associations, advocacy and professional organisations, trade unions, professional associations, and nonprofit enterprises. Importantly, the KSH does not disaggregate this data by the specific purposes of these entities, nor does it separate out associations with cultural heritage-related activities from the broader category. As a result, the available data does not allow for precise identification of heritage NGOs within this classification.

To address this limitation, the country facilitator undertook a targeted keyword-based search in available public databases to identify organisations with a high likelihood of operating in the field of cultural heritage (see Table A8)This method involved searching the National Office for the Judiciary (*Országos Bírósági Hivatal – OBH*) database using selected heritage-related keywords.

Table A8: Results of the keyword search within the OBH database in Hungary (as of 2024)

| Associations | Foundations |
|--|---|
| <div><div>–</div><div>Műemlék (monument): 11 organisations</div></div> <div><div>–</div><div>Örökség (heritage): 70 organisations</div></div> <div><div>–</div><div>Városvédő (townscape protection): 78 organisations</div></div> <div><div>–</div><div>Faluvédő (villagescape protection): 58 organisations</div></div> <div><div>–</div><div>Építészeti (architecture): 3 organisations</div></div> | <div><div>–</div><div>Műemlék (monument): 25 organisations</div></div> <div><div>–</div><div>Örökség (heritage): 84 organisations</div></div> <div><div>–</div><div>Városvédő (townscape protection): 0 organisations</div></div> <div><div>–</div><div>Faluvédő (villagescape protection): 3 organisations</div></div> <div><div>–</div><div>Építészeti (architecture): 15 organisations</div></div> |
| Total: 220 organisations | Total: 127 organisations |

Source: Own elaboration based on information provided by the facilitator.

Given the limitations of real-time data aggregation and categorisation, the most recent year for which comprehensive data on heritage NGOs was available in processed format was 2022. Although slightly outdated, this dataset was used in the current analysis to ensure consistency and comparability across different data sources.

Additional relevant information

NGOs with special status/rights

Until 2011, Hungarian legislation recognised two distinct legal forms for organisations engaged in public interest activities: public benefit organisations and prominent public benefit organisations. Following legislative reform, the latter category was formally abolished. Nonetheless, some entities continue to use the title “prominent public benefit organisation” in their communications and public-facing materials, despite no longer having legal standing.

The acquisition of public benefit status (PBO) is contingent upon the organisation’s engagement in activities that serve public interests. Hungarian law defines public benefit activities as those that

Sources of data on NGOs

The primary official body responsible for registering NGOs in Latvia is the **Republic of Latvia Enterprise Register** (*Latvijas Republikas Uzņēmumu reģistrs*), which also maintains records for business entities. This register provides basic information on each registered NGO, including their annual financial reports, which are accessible through its official website. However, the Enterprise Register does not conduct or publish aggregated statistical analyses or sectoral studies concerning NGOs.

The Enterprise Register contributes data to the **Open Data Portal**, managed by the Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development (*Viedās administrācijas un reģionālās attīstības ministrija*). This portal includes information on the fields of activity of associations and foundations as well as their financial statements. The data is updated daily based on the latest input from the Enterprise Register. However, the available data is presented at the individual organisation level without any aggregated statistical summaries, requiring users to extract and process the dataset themselves for analytical purposes.

Accessing detailed data directly from the Enterprise Register is possible upon request, but this constitutes a paid service in which users must purchase access time (priced by the hour). According to the facilitator, the cost of access poses a significant barrier for researchers and smaller organisations. Conversely, data from the open data portal can be downloaded free of charge, though users must export the complete dataset and manually extract relevant information.

An additional official source of information on NGOs is the **State Revenue Service** (*Valsts ieņēmumu dienests*), which collects data related to financial reporting and tax payments. This data is not publicly available but can be requested on demand, free of charge. It can be obtained based on various criteria such as:

- region;
- type of organisation;
- field of activity.

In terms of legal form, the vast majority of active NGOs in Latvia (94%) are registered as associations and foundations. Other legal forms – such as trade unions, churches, parishes, missions, professional and public organisations, corporations, and political parties – are governed by distinct legal frameworks as autonomous public law entities. Based on consultations with the facilitator, only associations and foundations were considered potentially relevant to the cultural heritage sector, as the primary objectives of the other legal forms typically lie outside heritage protection.

One of the society key actors in Latvia is the **Civic Alliance** – Latvia, the largest umbrella organisation representing the interests of the NGO sector. The Alliance currently unites 137 associations, foundations, and individuals¹⁵. It conducts research and monitoring on NGO activities and regularly publishes annual monitoring reports on the state of the sector, using data

¹⁵ Available here

directly or indirectly support the fulfilment of public tasks and, as such, contribute to meeting the shared needs of society and individuals.¹²

To qualify for and retain public benefit status, organisations are required to meet two sets of eligibility criteria annually – one financial and one related to social engagement.¹³ Financial requirements include indicators such as maintaining a minimum average annual income and ensuring that the organisation does not report a negative after-tax result. Social engagement criteria include, for instance, evidence that at least ten volunteers have supported the organisation on average over a two-year period. In addition, specific governance provisions must be codified in the organisation’s statutes¹⁴ to comply with the legal requirements for public benefit status.

Organisations granted PBO status become eligible for certain financial benefits, including enhanced access to public funding. However, Hungarian tax law currently provides tax incentives only for corporate donors, not individual entities. Corporate donors may deduct donations to public benefit organisations from their taxable income in the following ways:

- 20% of the value of a donation (or the book value of donated goods or services);
- an additional 20% if the donation is made under a long-term donation contract;
- deductions are allowed up to the amount of the donor’s pre-tax profit in aggregate.

According to the **Hungarian Central Statistical Office** (*Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*), in 2022 there were 6,088 foundations (out of 19,196 total) and 5,740 associations (out of 41,682 membership organisations) with recognised public benefit status. As of 2024, the Prime Minister’s Office reported a total of 6,201 organisations holding this legal designation. However, due to the limitations in sector-specific classification systems, it is not possible to determine how many of these organisations are active specifically in the field of cultural heritage.

Basic legal acts that determine the operation of NGOs in the country

- 2011. évi CLXXV. törvény az egyesülési jogról, a közhasznú jogállásról, valamint a civil szervezetek működéséről és támogatásáról [Act CLXXV. of 2011 on the right of association, non-profit status, and the operation and funding of civil society organisations]
- 1997. évi CLVI. törvény a közhasznú szervezetekről [Act CLVI of 1997 on. Public Benefit Organisations]
- 1996. évi LXXXI. törvény a társasági adóról és az osztalékadóról [Act LXXXI on Corporate and Dividend Tax] [the act concerning PBO funding]

¹² Nonprofit Law in Hungary. Country Notes. The Council on Foundations.

¹³ The most important characteristics of the nonprofit sector 2020.

¹⁴ Nonprofit Law in Hungary. Country Notes. The Council on Foundations.

provided by the State Revenue Service. The organisation’s website serves as a central hub for information, educational content, and resources for NGOs.

One of its flagship initiatives is the “Research on the Sector of Civil Society Organisations in Latvia, 2020–2024”, carried out in collaboration with external experts and funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway through the European Economic Area and Norwegian Grants 2014-2021 (Active Citizens Fund). The project aims to systematically collect and analyse data on the operations of civil society organisations in Latvia, identify trends in their development, and propose improvements to their legal and financial environment.

One of its flagship initiatives is the “Research on the Sector of Civil Society Organisations in Latvia, 2020–2024”, carried out in collaboration with external experts and funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway through the European Economic Area and Norwegian Grants 2014-2021 (Active Citizens Fund). The project aims to systematically collect and analyse data on the operations of civil society organisations in Latvia, identify trends in their development, and propose improvements to their legal and financial environment.¹⁶ For more in-depth information or custom analyses, Lursoft offers paid services.

Detailed quantitative data

Table A9: Detailed quantitative data in Latvia

| Legal form | Data for the year of | Total number of NGOs operating in a given legal form | The name of the category that is the most accurate approximation of the heritage NGO population | Number of organisations in a given category | % of heritage NGOs |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--|---|---|--------------------|
| Associations (<i>Biedrības</i>) | 2024 | 24 764 | Four activity categories: architecture and restoration (<i>arhitektūra un restaurācija</i>), library activities (<i>bibliotēku darbība</i>), museums (<i>muzeji</i>) folk art and intangible heritage (<i>tautas māksla un nemateriālais mantojums</i>) | 238 | 0.9 |
| Foundations (<i>Nodibinājumi</i>) | 2024 | 1 606 | | | |
| Total | | 26 370 | | 238 | 0.9 |

Source: Own elaboration based on The State Revenue Service; data prepared at the request of the Latvian Academy of Culture (LKA). Activities of associations and foundations: <https://data.gov.lv/dati/lv/dataset/biedribu-un-nodibinajumu-darbibas-jomas>.

Additional statistics

Table A10: Additional statistics in Latvia

| Data for the year of | Heritage NGOs per 10,000 population | Heritage NGOs per country area |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024 | 1.27 | 0.004 NGO/km ² |

Source: Own calculation based on Central Statistics Bureau of Latvia, (population), Central Statistics Bureau of Latvia, area.

Additional relevant information

For the purpose of calculating the size of the NGO sector in Latvia, only associations and foundations are included. Other organisational forms – such as trade unions, churches, missions, or political parties – are excluded due to their specific legal statuses and distinct regulatory frameworks, which typically place them outside the scope of cultural heritage activities. When identifying heritage-related NGOs, it is not possible to disaggregate the data to distinguish between associations and foundations. As such, the figures presented represent the combined total of these two legal forms.

A further methodological consideration involves the assessment of organisational activity. In 2023, only approximately 65% of registered associations and foundations submitted annual accounts, suggesting a significant number of formally registered entities may be inactive. Moreover, among those that did file reports, only 46% declared any financial activity, indicating a potentially lower level of operational engagement than raw registration numbers suggest.

To address these limitations, the facilitator utilised two independent data sources to estimate the number of heritage NGOs in Latvia. Where discrepancies between the sources occurred, the higher estimate was used in the final calculations, as it was deemed to provide a more comprehensive representation of the sector’s potential scale.

Detailed data on heritage-related NGOs in Latvia is available through two classification systems: the self-reported classification of activities used by associations and foundations, and the NACE (Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community) coding system (Table A11). Each presents a different picture of the sector due to variations in how organisations report their fields of activity.

¹⁶ [Available here](#)

Table A11: Estimation of the number of heritage NGOs in Latvia based on two classification systems

| | Self-reported classification of activities | NACE coding system |
|---|--|--------------------|
| Architecture and restoration (<i>Arhitektūra un restaurācija</i>) | 46 | 11 |
| Library activities (<i>Bibliotēku darbība</i>) | 4 | 15 |
| Museums (<i>Muzeji</i>) | 42 | 77 |
| Folk art and intangible heritage (<i>Tautas māksla un nemateriālais mantojums</i>) | 187 | |
| Total | 238* | 103 |

*totals are non-cumulative, as organisations may report multiple activities simultaneously

Source: Own elaboration based on the information provided by the facilitator.

The substantial discrepancy between the two classification systems, as seen in the Table above, is primarily attributable to differences in reporting practices. A significant proportion of organisations either do not indicate their NACE classification or report their activity under the broad category of “other activities”. Based on the facilitator’s analysis, it is estimated that approximately 35% of NGOs selected the “other” category due to the absence of suitable or sufficiently specific codes in the NACE system.

As a result, the actual number of heritage-related NGOs is likely underrepresented in the official NACE-based statistics. The figures presented above should therefore be regarded as minimum estimates, with the understanding that the true size of the heritage NGO sector is probably larger. However, due to data limitations, it is not currently possible to quantify the extent of this underestimation with precision.

NGOs with special status rights

In Latvia, NGOs may apply for Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) status (*Sabiedriskā labuma organizācijas*), which provides access to a number of legal and financial advantages.¹⁷ This status is available to associations, foundations, and certain religious organisations that demonstrate a commitment to public benefit activities as outlined in their statutes, constitutions, or bylaws. To qualify, these organisations must pursue non-commercial objectives and use their income exclusively to support activities of public benefit.¹⁸

Organisations with PBO status may benefit in several ways:

- Increased donor support, as corporate donors are eligible for tax benefits when making contributions to PBOs;
- Preferential access to municipal facilities, as many local governments offer favourable terms to organisations with PBO designation;
- Eligibility for the free use of public property, including buildings and land;
- Exemptions from real estate taxes on buildings and engineering structures;
- Enhanced access to certain European Union funding schemes, where PBO status is considered an asset in grant evaluations.

According to data provided by the State Revenue Service (*Valsts ieņēmumu dienests*), and compiled upon request by the Latvian Academy of Culture (LKA), there were 1,708 PBOs in Latvia in 2023 (compared to 2,036 in 2022). However, it is not possible to determine how many of these organisations are engaged specifically in cultural heritage activities. While there exists a general category labelled “promotion of culture” (n = 400), it is broad and includes a diverse array of organisations, making it unsuitable for accurately identifying heritage-focused NGOs.

It is important to note that PBO status represents an additional legal designation rather than a separate organisational type. Thus, organisations with PBO status are already included in the broader statistical counts of associations and foundations within the NGO sector.

Basic legal acts that determine the operation of NGOs in the country

- Biedrību un nodibinājumu likums [Associations and Foundations Law] [Saeima, adopted 30.10.2003.; in force: 01.04.2004.; published: Latvijas Vēstnesis, 161, 14.11.2003.; Latvijas Republikas Saeimas un Ministru Kabineta Ziņotājs, 23, 11.12.2003, <https://www.vestnesis.lv/ta/id/81050-biedribu-un-nodibinajumu-likums>]
- Sabiedriskā labuma organizāciju likums [Public Benefit Organisation Law] [Saeima, adopted: 17.06.2004.; in force: 01.10.2004.; published: Latvijas Vēstnesis, 106, 07.07.2004.; Latvijas Republikas Saeimas un Ministru Kabineta Ziņotājs, 14, 29.07.2004, <https://www.vestnesis.lv/ta/id/90822-sabiedriskā-labuma-organizāciju-likums>]

¹⁷ Information Report on the Activities and Development of Public Benefit Organisations. Ministry of Finance.

¹⁸ Public Benefit Organisation Law.

Lithuania

Sources of data on NGOs

The official registry of all legally registered organisations in Lithuania is maintained by the State Enterprise Centre of Registers (SECR). This nationwide register includes information on legal forms – such as associations, foundations, and public institutions – and records the date of registration for each NGO. The database also encompasses organisations active in the cultural heritage field. However, a significant limitation is the absence of any classification or coding that identifies the specific area of activity of an organisation. The register is updated on a weekly basis.

A particular feature of the Lithuanian NGO landscape is the legal inclusion of “public institutions” as a recognised organisational form within the non-profit sector. This differs from the conventional understanding of the term in many other countries, where “public institution” typically refers to state-owned bodies. According to the *Law on Public Institutions of the Republic of Lithuania*, a public institution is defined as a non-profit organisation established by private partners or owners, operating in the social, educational, scientific, cultural, or sports sectors, and offering services to the public. Importantly, under Lithuanian law, these institutions may be classified as NGOs if they are not state- or municipally-owned, or if public ownership constitutes less than one-third of their capital.

Religious organisations are not qualified as NGOs. According to the Republic of Lithuania Law on Development of Non-governmental Organisations (19 December 2013, No XII-717, Vilnius): “Non-governmental organisation shall mean a public legal entity, independent from state and municipal institutions and agencies, which acts on a voluntary basis for the benefit of society or its group, and which does not have the aim to seek political power or purely religious goals”.

The broader legal definition of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Lithuania is set out in the Law on the Development of Non-Governmental Organisations (19 December 2013, No. XII-717). It defines an NGO as a public legal entity, established on a voluntary basis, operating independently of state and municipal institutions, and pursuing the public good without political or exclusively religious aims. Based on this definition, religious organisations are not considered NGOs under Lithuanian law.

In addition to national registration, fragmented datasets on NGOs are maintained by various public bodies. One such initiative is the “Catalogue of Non-Governmental Organisations of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Vilnius County”, managed jointly by the Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO and the Vilnius Ethnic Culture Center (both state-supported budgetary institutions). This catalogue specifically lists NGOs involved in intangible cultural heritage and provides the following data:

- legal form (associations, foundations, public institutions);
- organisational type (e.g. professional creative unions, local communities, performance groups, ethnic communities, homeland associations, charity and support foundations);
- contact details;
- field of activity;

- year of establishment;
- description of activities and projects.

Additionally, municipalities¹⁹ collect and report statistics on NGOs operating within their territories. These lists don’t provide much information: NGO names, activities and, sometimes, contact details. The lists do not follow a consistent pattern, so they vary according to municipality, but the most common NGOs groups whose priority activities are as follows: Social; Health; Youth (working with young people); Culture (and leisure); Education. However, these records are inconsistent across municipalities and offer limited analytical value.

The most significant non-governmental initiative to collect and publish comprehensive data on the NGO sector is led by Transparency International Lithuania (TILS). Through the “**NGO Atlas**” project – funded by the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norway Grants – TILS compiles and publishes a public database of NGOs, including associations, foundations, public institutions, and charity organisations registered in Lithuania. The Atlas provides:

- legal form;
- contact information and location;
- field of activity;
- year of establishment;
- organisational profile (description of activities and projects);
- financial data (donations, financial statements);
- number of employees;
- information on volunteer engagement.

The NGO Atlas covers the entire territory of Lithuania and is currently the only publicly accessible register that allows users to search NGOs by field of activity. However, cultural heritage is not explicitly listed as a searchable category. The most relevant available fields are “Culture and Leisure” and “Strengthening Local Communities.” Although the platform receives baseline data from the SECR, full organisational profiles are generated only when an NGO actively participates in the initiative. As a result, the database is incomplete, and some listed organisations lack up-to-date or detailed entries. The database is updated daily, provided that new data is made available.

¹⁹ There are two types of municipalities – city municipality and district municipality. Bigger cities have both: Vilnius city municipality and Vilnius district municipality; smaller cities have just district municipalities.

Detailed data
on heritage NGOs

Table A12: Detailed quantitative data in Lithuania

| Legal form | Data for the year of | Total number of NGOs operating in a given legal form | The name of the category that is the most accurate approximation of the heritage NGO population | Number of organisations in a given category | % of heritage NGOs |
|--|----------------------|--|---|---|--------------------|
| Public institution (Viešoji įstaiga) | 2024 | 877 (NGO Atlas) | Culture and leisure (Kultūra ir laisvalaikis) | 456 | 52.0 |
| Public institution (Viešoji įstaiga) | 2024 | 1 195 (Register) | no selection by purpose | - | |
| Association (Asociacija) | 2024 | 1 243 (NGO Atlas) | Culture and leisure (Kultūra ir laisvalaikis) | 680 | 54.7 |
| Association (Asociacija) | 2024 | 2 594 (Register) | no selection by purpose | - | |
| Foundation (Paramos ir labrados fondai) | 2024 | 94 (NGO Atlas) | Culture and leisure (Kultūra ir laisvalaikis) | 26 | 27.6 |
| Foundation (Paramos ir labrados fondai) | 2024 | 419 (Register) | no selection by purpose | - | |
| Total | | 2 205 | | 1 162 | 52.7 |

Source: Own elaboration based on Transparency International Lithuania (TILS) – Data from NGO Atlas, Register of Legal Entities.

Additional statistics

Table A13: Additional statistics in Lithuania

| Data for the year of | Heritage NGOs per 10,000 population | Heritage NGOs per country area |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024 | 4.02 | 0.018 NGO/km² |

Source: Own calculations based on Official Statistics Portal, <https://osp.stat.gov.lt> (population and area)

Additional relevant
information

For the purposes of this study, the primary dataset used to estimate the number of heritage NGOs in Lithuania was derived from the NGO Atlas, as it is the only available source that enables filtering by the declared purpose of an organisation. However, the voluntary nature of registration in the Atlas presents a significant limitation. Inclusion in the database is contingent upon an organisation’s decision to actively submit and maintain its profile, which results in incomplete sectoral coverage. Comparative assessments indicate that the Atlas includes approximately 50%

of the NGOs registered in Lithuania, when measured against data from official sources such as the State Enterprise Centre of Registers. Therefore, while the Atlas provides valuable insights into the functional and thematic orientation of NGOs, the figures it reports should be treated as minimum estimates. It can reasonably be assumed that the actual number of NGOs engaged in heritage-related activities exceeds the number captured in the Atlas. However, due to the lack of comprehensive, activity-specific data in official registries, it is not possible to determine the extent to which the heritage NGO sector is underestimated in the available data.

NGOs with special
status/rights

In Lithuania, certain NGOs may obtain the legal designation of Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) (*NVO su paramos gavėjų statusu*), which grants access to specific legal and financial benefits. Organisations with this status may be eligible for exemptions from property taxes, provided that the property in question is not used for commercial purposes.

Additionally, PBOs are entitled to receive a designated share (1.2%) of personal income tax from individual taxpayers. This mechanism allows citizens to allocate a portion of their annual income tax to a registered PBO of their choice when filing their tax returns, thus offering a direct form of financial support from the public.

Beyond tax-related advantages, PBOs may also be eligible for state or municipal funding, which can be allocated to support general organisational development or the implementation of specific projects aligned with their mission.

According to data from the **Register of Legal Entities**, a total of 4,267 NGOs held PBO status in 2024. However, due to the lack of sectoral classification by field of activity within the registry, it is not possible to determine how many of these organisations are specifically active in the field of cultural heritage.

Basic legal acts
that determine the
operation of NGOs
in the country

- Lietuvos Respublikos viešųjų įstaigų įstatymas [Nr. I-1428], 1997-07-03 [Republic of Lithuania Law on Public Institutions]
- Lietuvos Respublikos asociacijų įstatymas [IX-1969], 2004-01-22 [Republic of Lithuania Law on Associations]
- Lietuvos Respublikos labdaros ir paramos fondų įstatymas [Nr. I-1232], 1996 m. kovo 14 d. [Republic of Lithuania Law on Charity and Sponsorship Foundations]
- Lietuvos Respublikos nevyriausybinų organizacijų plėtros įstatymas [Nr. XII-717] 2013-12-19 [Republic of Lithuania Law on Development on Non-governmental Organisations - Act concerning PBO]
- Lietuvos Respublikos labdaros ir paramos įstatymas [Nr. I-172], 1993-06-04, [Republic of Lithuania Law on Charity and Sponsorship] [the act concerning PBO]

Poland

Sources of data on NGOs

In Poland, the registration and oversight of NGOs is dispersed across multiple public institutions and administrative levels, depending on the organisation’s legal form and scope of activity. The processes of NGO registration and deregistration are conducted on an ongoing basis and are regulated by different authorities.

- Registered associations – i.e. those possessing legal personality – are recorded in the National Court Register (*Krajowy Rejestr Sądowy – KRS*), a unified national registry. This database allows for filtering by PKD codes (Polish Classification of Activities) and by location of an organisation’s headquarters. However, it does not support searches based on the organisation’s stated purpose or field of activity. Moreover, the reliability of searches by PKD codes is limited, as many organisations do not fill in this field comprehensively.
- Ordinary associations (which possess de facto legal personality but have limited legal capacity) are recorded by the district authorities (*starosta*) competent for the organisation’s seat. These registers are maintained at the local level (380 districts) and, while they are supposed to include the organisation’s purpose of activity, the quality and detail of the data vary significantly. Consequently, it is not possible to extract reliable national-level data on ordinary associations operating in the cultural heritage field.
- Foundations are also included in the National Court Register, which, as with associations, does not allow filtering by declared purpose. The utility of PKD codes for identifying heritage-focused foundations is similarly limited due to incomplete data entries.
- Farmers’ Wives Associations have been recorded in a dedicated register maintained by the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture since the enactment of the Act on Farmers’ Wives Associations (9 November 2018). This National Register of Farmers’ Wives Associations allows searches by name and geographic location but not by purpose or area of activity. Before 2018, these organisations were registered under general categories, depending on their legal form.
- Religious organisations and faith-based entities are included in collective datasets published by Statistics Poland (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny – GUS*). Additional data is provided by the Institute for Catholic Church Statistics, which publishes aggregated information from church records and national statistics.

Some specialised records are maintained under sector-specific legal provisions. In the case of heritage NGOs, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage oversees a dedicated Register of Supervised Foundations, which includes foundations whose statutory objectives relate to the preservation and promotion of tangible and intangible national heritage. This register provides basic information such as the name of the organisation, its KRS number, and its operational status (active, suspended, or liquidated).

Another supplementary source is the register maintained by the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development (*Narodowy Instytut Wolności – Centrum Rozwoju Społeczeństwa Obywatelskiego*). This database records NGOs that have obtained Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) status and includes information on their legal form, public benefit sphere, and location (by voivodeship, county, and municipality). The database allows filtering by category

but only for PBO annual reports, which are published with a delay – typically by October of the following year. As of early 2024, the most recent full dataset available was for 2022.

The primary institution responsible for producing official NGO statistics in Poland is Statistics Poland. It publishes data on NGOs by legal and organisational form (e.g. registered associations, foundations, volunteer fire brigades, social religious organisations, farmers’ wives associations). This information is published biennially in comprehensive reports such as *The Non-Profit Sector: Associations, Foundations, Social Religious Entities, Economic and Professional Self-Governments* (most recently published in October 2022), and in preliminary publications such as *Activities of Associations and Similar Social Organisations, Foundations, Social Religious Entities and Self-Governments in 2022 – Preliminary Results* (published December 2023).

Statistics provides sectoral data by primary area of activity, with the most relevant category for identifying heritage NGOs being Culture and Arts. Within this, the subcategory *Protection of Monuments and Places of National Remembrance; Maintenance of National, Regional, and Cultural Traditions* is used. However, only the primary purpose of each organisation is recorded, potentially omitting entities that list cultural heritage as a secondary or tertiary objective. While GUS offers methodologically sound and continuous data, its publications are infrequent and often outdated/delayed.

Additional insights into heritage-related civil society activity have been gathered by the National Heritage Board of Poland, notably through its study *Survey of the Number and Activities of Social Custodians of Monuments and the Degree of Implementation of District Governors’ Duties Regarding Their Appointment*. This report includes statistics on the number of social monument custodians, some of whom are part of NGOs. Although the report does not specify what proportion of custodians are formally organised as NGOs, it indicates that 46.3% of social custodians collaborate with NGOs.²⁰

Beyond public institutions, important contributions to data collection and research on the NGO sector are made by civil society organisations, most notably the Klon-Jawor Association. This organisation maintains www.ngo.pl, the most widely used national database of NGOs, providing searchable information by:

- area of activity;
- type of organisation (legal form);
- operational status (active, in liquidation, or dissolved).

In addition to maintaining the database, Klon-Jawor regularly publishes analytical reports on the NGO sector. Notably, it has released studies focused on heritage-related activities, such as the report titled *Activities of Non-Governmental Organisations and Local Governments in the Area of Cultural Heritage: Cooperation, Needs, Volunteer Engagement*.²¹

20 Onyśków, Wojciech, Pierzchała, Marcin, and Ulatowska, Roksana. 2023. *Badanie liczebności i aktywności społecznych opiekunów zabytków (SOZ) oraz zakresu realizacji zadania własnego starostów powiatowych polegającego na ustanawianiu społecznych opiekunów zabytków. Raport końcowy*. Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa.

21 Adamiak, Piotr and Charycka, Beata. 2015. *Działania organizacji pozarządowych oraz samorządów w obszarze dziedzictwa kulturowego: współpraca, potrzeby, zaangażowanie wolontariuszy*. Warszawa: Klon/Jawor.

Finally, data on heritage NGOs in Poland occasionally appears in academic research, although such studies are often qualitative in nature²² and limited in geographic or temporal scope. One example of partial statistical analysis is the study by Dominika Hołuj (Krakow University of Economics), titled *Heritage Spaces as an Object of Interest for Public Benefit Organisations* (*Przestrzenie dziedzictwa jako przedmiot zainteresowania organizacji pożytku publicznego*). This publication includes data on the number of heritage NGOs with PBO status, disaggregated by voivodeship and by location (provincial capitals vs. rural areas) for the years 2019 and 2020.²³

Detailed data on heritage NGOs

Table A14: Detailed quantitative data in Poland

| Legal form | Data for the year of | Total number of NGOs operating in a given legal form | The name of the category that is the most accurate approximation of the heritage NGO population | Number of organisations in a given category | % of heritage NGOs |
|--|----------------------|--|--|---|--------------------|
| Registered and ordinary associations (Stowarzyszenia rejestrowe i stowarzyszenia zwykłe) | 2022 | 68 900 | Culture and arts of which: Protection of monuments and places of national remembrance, maintenance of national, regional and cultural traditions | 7 100 | 10.3 |
| | | | | 2 800 | 4.06 |
| Foundations (Fundacje) | 2022 | 19 300 | Culture and arts of which: Protection of monuments and places of national remembrance, maintenance of national, regional and cultural traditions | 4 100 | 21.24 |
| | | | | 900 | 4.66 |

22 Murzyn-Kupisz, Monika, Hołuj, Dominika, and Działek, Jarosław. 2022. *Dziedzictwo kulturowe w badaniach. Tom III: Społeczno-ekonomiczne oddziaływanie dziedzictwa kulturowego. Stan badań oraz perspektywy i potrzeby badawcze w kontekście polskim*. Warszawa-Kraków: Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa, Instytut Geografii i Gospodarki Przestrzennej, Uniwersytet Jagielloński, pp. 46-47.

23 Hołuj, Dominika, 2023. "Przestrzenie dziedzictwa jako przedmiot zainteresowania organizacji pożytku publicznego." *Prace i Studia Geograficzne* 68(1), pp. 43–63, DOI: 10.48128/pisg/2023-68.1-03.

| | | | | | |
|---|------|---------|--|----------------|----------------|
| Farmers' Wives Associations (Koła gospodyń wiejskich) | 2022 | 11 300 | Culture and arts of which: Protection of monuments and places of national remembrance, maintenance of national, regional and cultural traditions | 2 500 1 400 | 22.12 12.39 |
| Social religious entities (Społeczne podmioty wyznaniowe) | 2022 | 2 000 | Culture and arts of which: Protection of monuments and places of national remembrance, maintenance of national, regional and cultural traditions | 100 14 | 5.00 0.70 |
| Total | | 101 500 | | 13 800 | 13.6 |

Source: Own elaboration based on the following: [2023] “Activities of associations and similar social organizations, foundations, faith-based charities, country housewives associations as well as business and professional associations in 2022 – preliminary results.” *News Release* 19.12.2023. Warsaw: Statistics Poland.

Additional statistics

Table A15: Additional statistics in Poland

| Data for the year of | Heritage NGOs per 10,000 population | Heritage NGOs per country area |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2022 | 3.65 | 0.044 NGO/km² |

Source: Own calculations based on [2022] “Area and population in the territorial profile in 2022.” *Statistical Information*. Warsaw: Statistics Poland (population and area).

Additional relevant information

The representation of heritage NGOs within specific organisational forms, particularly Farmers’ Wives Associations, appears to be underestimated in official statistics. Although the activities of these organisations are often closely aligned with cultural and heritage preservation, this is not adequately reflected in data published by Statistics Poland. A likely explanation is that the statistical categorisation process considers only the primary stated purpose of an organisation, thereby overlooking secondary or complementary heritage-related objectives. According to Article 2(3) of the Act on Farmers’ Wives Associations (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2023, item 1179), these organisations may engage in a variety of activities, including social, educational, and cultural engagement within rural communities, as well as the development of folk culture, particularly local and regional traditions. Thus, the actual number of Farmers’ Wives Associations involved in cultural heritage is likely higher than official classifications suggest.

A similar discrepancy exists with regard to foundations supervised by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. As of March 2024, the Ministry’s register included 8,413 foundations, a significantly higher figure than that recorded in official statistics. Although the discrepancy is partly due to differing classification criteria and the reference year of data collection, it is notable that heritage-related foundations constituted 27.21%²⁴ of all foundations supervised by the Ministry in 2024. This indicates a strong presence of heritage-oriented organisations that may not be fully captured by national statistical datasets.

In the case of social religious entities, particularly those affiliated with the Catholic Church, existing statistics fail to capture the full extent of their contributions to heritage preservation and cultural activity. According to the Institute for Catholic Church Statistics, there were approximately 65,500 parish-based Catholic organisations operating in 2018. These entities – classified by Statistics Poland as unregistered organisations, similar to ordinary associations – are not systematically reflected in NGO datasets. Notably, in 2020, 4% of Catholic parish-based organisations (n = 2,620) identified “Culture and the Arts” as their main area of activity.²⁵

The scale of Catholic Church involvement in cultural heritage is further underscored by the number of heritage assets under its care. As reported in *The Church in Poland 2023*, the Church owned 33,932 immovable parish monuments and over 200,000 movable objects registered as cultural heritage in 2021²⁶. These figures suggest that a purely numerical comparison of social religious entities to other heritage NGOs does not reflect their actual significance in heritage conservation.

Additionally, the total number of NGOs by organisational form presented in the dataset (101,500) differs from the total used in the calculation of the percentage share of heritage NGOs within the broader NGO sector (103,400). This variation results from the inclusion, in the percentage calculation, of only those organisational forms that are represented among heritage NGOs.

Historical comparisons of heritage NGO statistics must also be approached with caution. In the report *Activities of NGOs and Local Governments in the Field of Cultural Heritage: Cooperation, Needs, Involvement of Volunteers*, published by the Klon/Jawor Association, it was estimated that in 2014, approximately 7,000 NGOs in Poland were involved in tangible and intangible cultural heritage.²⁷ However, this figure is not directly comparable to current estimates due to changes in classification frameworks, methodological differences, and the availability of new datasets that impose different scopes for identifying relevant organisations.

24 National Court Register (online registry).

25 [2022] *The non-profit sector in 2020. Associations, foundations, faith-based charities, business and professional associations*. Warszawa–Kraków: Statistical Office in Kraków, p. 32.

26 [2023] *Kościół w Polsce 2023*. Raport. Warszawa: Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna, Instytut Dziedzictwa Myśli Narodowej im. Romana Dmowskiego i Ignacego J. Paderewskiego, pp. 210-211.

27 Adamiak, Piotr and Charycka, Beata. 2015. *Działania organizacji pozarządowych oraz samorządów w obszarze dziedzictwa kulturowego: współpraca, potrzeby, zaangażowanie wolontariuszy*. Warszawa: Klon/Jawor, p. 16.

In Poland, NGOs granted the status of Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) receive a range of legal and financial privileges aimed at supporting their socially beneficial activities. These include exemptions from several taxes and administrative fees related to their public benefit operations, specifically:

- corporate income tax;
- real estate tax;
- tax on civil law transactions;
- stamp duties;
- court fees.

Additionally, PBOs are entitled to:

- acquire the right to use real estate owned by the State Treasury or local government under preferential conditions;
- host individuals assigned to alternative civil service, allowing conscripts to fulfil service obligations by working for PBOs;
- access public media platforms, where public radio and television broadcasters provide free airtime for promoting the organisation’s activities;
- receive 1.5% of personal income tax voluntarily allocated by individual taxpayers through their annual tax returns.

According to data compiled by the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development, a total of 9,550 NGOs held PBO status in 2022. Of these, 1,012 organisations (10.6%) identified their primary area of activity as *Culture, Art, Protection of Cultural Property, and National Heritage*.

- Ustawa z dnia 7 kwietnia 1989 r. Prawo o stowarzyszeniach, t.j. Dz. U. z 2020 r. poz. 2261 z późn. zm. [Act of April 7, 1989 Law on Associations]
 - Ustawa z dnia 6 kwietnia 1984 r.o fundacjach, t.j. Dz. U. z 2023 r. poz. 166 [Act of April 6, 1984 on foundations]
 - Ustawa z dnia 9 listopada 2018 r. o kołach gospodyń wiejskich, t.j. Dz. U. z 2023 r. poz. 1179 [Act of November 9, 2018 on Farmers’ Housewives’ Associations]
 - Przepisy normujące stosunek państwa do danego kościoła lub związku wyznaniowego lub ustawa z dnia 17 maja 1989 r. o gwarancjach wolności sumienia i wyznania, t.j. Dz. U. z 2023 r. poz. 265 [Provisions regulating the attitude of the state towards a given church or religious association or the Act of May 17, 1989 on the guarantees of freedom of conscience and religion]
 - Ustawa z dnia 24 kwietnia 2003 r. o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie, t.j. Dz. U. z 2023 r. poz. 571 [Act of April 24, 2003 on public benefit activities and voluntary work].
- Legal basis for granting the special status

NGOs with special status/rights

Basic legal acts that determine the operation of NGOs in the country

Romania

Sources of data on NGOs

The principal public institution responsible for collecting and maintaining statistical data on NGOs in Romania is the National NGO Registry, administered by the Ministry of Justice (*Registrul Național ONG, Ministerul Justiției*). This register offers nationwide coverage and includes all formally registered NGOs operating across the country. For each organisation, the registry provides information such as: the name, registration number, legal status, geographic location (country, city, and address), and a textual description of its initial purpose, along with any subsequent modifications. Importantly, the purpose is recorded in free-text format, rather than being selected from a predefined category or classification system.

The Registry includes a wide range of organisational forms, namely associations, foundations, federations (groupings of two or more associations or foundations), and unions (entities combining multiple economic organisations, foundations, or trade unions). According to the facilitator’s analysis, no heritage NGOs were identified under the union category. The registry is updated on a weekly basis, and while it is the most comprehensive and authoritative source of NGO registration data in Romania, it does not include built-in tools for interactive data analysis or filtering.

Given the absence of a designated category for “heritage NGO” or a standardised classification of activity areas, the identification of heritage NGOs in the Registry was performed manually. The Facilitator filtered the entries based on the appearance of specific keywords within the stated organisational purposes, such as “heritage”, “folklore”, “traditions”, or “cultural activities”.

It is worth noting that Romanian NGOs include subcategories such as county youth foundations, which are governed by the same legal provisions as other foundations, but must meet additional conditions to qualify – such as explicitly serving youth-focused objectives and maintaining a membership composed of at least two-thirds young people. Religious organisations are not treated as a distinct legal form within the Romanian NGO system but may still be present within the aforementioned organisational types.

Beyond this central register, other entities contribute to data collection on the NGO sector. One such institution is the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society (*Fundația pentru Dezvoltarea Societății Civile*). This organisation has published a comprehensive report titled *Sectorul non-profit românesc: date existente, infrastructura de colectare, utilizarea datelor și posibile soluții de eficientizare* (*The Romanian Non-Profit Sector: Existing Data, Collection Infrastructure, Data Use, and Possible Streamlining Solutions*).²⁸ While only available in Romanian, the report offers qualitative insights into the structure of the NGO sector, the mechanisms of data collection, and comparative evaluations with international models. According to the Romanian-American Foundation, the report is based on three primary sources: an analysis of existing national data, interviews with key stakeholders in the sector, and comparative research drawing on international examples.

Based on the findings of this report, the facilitator identified several additional sources of

²⁸ Voicu, Bogdan, Andersen, Ștefania, and Țălnar-Naghi, Dana. 2021. *Sectorul non-profit românesc: date existente, infrastructura de colectare, utilizarea datelor și posibile soluții de eficientizare*, Romanian Quantitative Studies Association pentru FDSC.

information on NGOs in Romania:

- Special Registers at Local Courts: These contain basic registration details (e.g. name, headquarters, stated objectives, leadership, and public utility or religious association status). However, they are not publicly accessible, vary in detail across jurisdictions, and are not interoperable with other national data systems.
- Ministry of Finance – National Agency for Fiscal Administration (ANAF): This database includes identification data, financial statements, and selected fiscal indicators. Although partially accessible to the public, the data lacks detail on the specific operational areas of NGOs and may contain inconsistencies.
- Register of Entities/Cult Units (ANAF): This registry lists organisations eligible to receive sponsorship or allocations from personal income tax. It is accessible online after identity verification and reflects whether an organisation is active and compliant with tax regulations.
- Cultural Sector Register – National Institute for Cultural Research and Training: This source includes data on 1,179 NGOs involved in cultural activities, collected in January 2021 on a voluntary basis. The dataset contains organisational identification, operational fields, and areas of cultural intervention. However, there is currently no indication of whether this initiative will be maintained, expanded, or integrated into future data collection systems.
- Donors’ Platform – Code4Romania: Developed by an IT-based NGO, this platform compiles information on funding provided by 15 funding institutions and 19 Community Foundations (as of April 2021). The data is presented at a high level of aggregation, organised by general domain or area of activity, with limited granularity.

Taken together, while Romania possesses a range of data sources on the NGO sector, each is marked by specific limitations in terms of accessibility, completeness, interoperability, and thematic classification. The National NGO Registry remains the most comprehensive and reliable source, although its utility for thematic mapping – such as identifying heritage NGOs – is constrained by the absence of structured classification tools and the reliance on narrative self-descriptions.

Detailed data
on heritage NGOs

Table A16: Detailed quantitative data in Romania

| Legal form | Data for the year of | Total number of NGOs operating in a given legal form | The name of the category that is the most accurate approximation of the heritage NGO population | Number of organisations in a given category | % of heritage NGOs |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|--|---|---|--------------------|
| Associations (<i>Asociație</i>) | 2024 | 117 012 | heritage NGOs identified as a result of Facilitator's manual search of database by keywords | 1 515 | 1.3 |
| Foundations (<i>Fundație</i>) | 2024 | 20 771 | heritage NGOs identified as a result of Facilitator's manual search of database by keywords | 94 | 0.5 |
| Federations (<i>Federație</i>) | 2024 | 1 611 | heritage NGOs identified as a result of Facilitator's manual search of database by keywords | 3 | 0.2 |
| Total | | 139 394 | | 1 612 | 1.16 |

Source: Own elaboration based on [National NGO Registry](#), [Ministry of Justice](#).

Additional statistics

Table A13: Additional statistics in Lithuania

| Data for the year of | Heritage NGOs per 10,000 population | Heritage NGOs per country area |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024 | 0.74 | 0.007 NGO/km ² |

Source: Own calculations based on National Institute for Statistics (Institutul Național de Statistică) (population and area).

Additional relevant
information

The process of manually identifying heritage NGOs in Romania presents several methodological challenges, which affect the accuracy and completeness of the resulting dataset. Due to the absence of standardised classification categories within the National NGO Registry, the identification process relied on keyword-based filtering, followed by individual verification of results.

One major limitation is the risk of both underestimation and overinclusion. On the one hand,

the collective of heritage NGOs may be underrepresented due to the omission of organisations whose activity descriptions do not explicitly mention relevant keywords. On the other hand, the dataset may include organisations not actually engaged in heritage-related activities, due to semantic ambiguity. In Romanian, the term *patrimoniu* – translated as *heritage* – also denotes an organisation’s assets or property. As a result, many of the nearly 3,000 search results for the term “heritage” referred not to cultural or natural heritage, but to the description of an organisation’s material resources. Each of these entries required manual review to determine relevance.

A further complication concerns the limited visibility of locally operating NGOs, particularly those active in small communities (e.g. villages or communes). Approximately 50% of the organisations identified operate on such a small scale that they have no digital presence, making it difficult to verify their objectives and activities through online research alone. In these cases, analogue methods of contact (e.g. phone, post, or in-person visits) would be necessary to confirm their engagement with cultural heritage, which was beyond the scope of this study.

NGOs with special
status/rights

In Romania, certain NGOs may obtain the legal status of Public Benefit Organisation (PBO), which grants them specific rights but also entails a set of legal obligations and eligibility criteria.

To qualify for PBO status, organisations must meet the following requirements:

- demonstrate activities that serve a general or community-oriented purpose;
- have operated continuously for a minimum of three years;
- provide consistent and verifiable documentation demonstrating their operational history and impact.

Once granted, PBO status provides organisations with several rights, including:

- the ability to conclude concession contracts for the provision of public services;
- preferential access to local and national public funding sources;
- the legal right to publicly declare their public benefit status.

However, organisations with PBO status must also comply with several obligations, including:

- maintaining operations at a level that at least matches the standards on which their status was originally granted;
- submitting all relevant financial documentation for public inspection;
- publishing annual activity and financial summaries in the Official Gazette of Romania (*Monitorul Oficial*).

As of 2024, data from the Ministry of Justice indicate that only 54 NGOs in Romania held PBO status, of which just two were identified as heritage organisations. According to insights provided by the country facilitator, the low uptake of PBO status can be attributed to the administrative and bureaucratic burden associated with obtaining and maintaining it. In the case of heritage NGOs, these challenges are compounded by sector-specific difficulties, such as unstable funding,

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limited human resources, and a lack of continuity in operations. As a result, despite the potential benefits, many NGOs – especially those in the heritage field – are disincentivised from applying for PBO status.

- Ordonanța Guvernului nr. 26/2000 cu privire la asociații și fundații [Government Ordinance 26/2000 on associations and foundations]
- Legea nr. 78/2014 privind reglementarea activității de voluntariat în România [Law No 78/2014 on the regulation of voluntary activity in Romania]
- Legea nr. 146/2002 privind regimul juridic al fundațiilor județene pentru tineret și a municipiului București, cu modificările și completările ulterioare [Law No 146/2002 on the legal status of county youth foundations and of the Bucharest municipality, as amended and supplemented]
- Legea nr. 489/2006, privind libertatea religioasă și regimul general al cultelor, republicată [Law No 489/2006 on freedom of religion and the general system of religious denominations, republished]
- Legea nr. 34/1998 privind acordarea unor subvenții asociațiilor și fundațiilor române cu personalitate juridică, care înființează și administrează unități de asistența socială, cu modificările și completările ulterioare [Law No 34/1998 on the granting of subsidies to Romanian associations and foundations with legal personality, which set up and manage social assistance units, as subsequently amended and supplemented]
- Ordinul nr. 808 din 10 noiembrie 2003 privind procedura de acordare a avizelor necesare pentru înființarea și funcționarea asociațiilor/fundațiilor/federațiilor și filialelor acestora și de aprobare a Criteriilor specifice de acordare a statutului de utilitate publică Publicat în Monitorul Oficial, Partea I nr. 847 din 27 noiembrie 2003 [Order No 808 of 10 November 2003 on the procedure for granting the necessary approvals for the establishment and functioning of associations/foundations/federations and their branches and approving the specific criteria for granting the status of public utility Published in the Official Gazette, Part I No 847 of 27 November 2003] [PBO]
- Ordinul nr. 2.664 din 26 mai 2003 pentru aprobarea Criteriilor și procedurii de acordare a statutului de utilitate publică asociațiilor, fundațiilor și federațiilor care desfășoară activități din sfera de competență a Ministerului Culturii și Cultelor [Order No 2.664 of 26 May 2003 approving the criteria and procedure for granting public utility status to associations, foundations and federations carrying out activities within the competence of the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs]

Slovakia

***Sources of data
on NGOs***

In Slovakia, statistical information on the non-governmental sector is primarily collected by two public institutions: the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic and the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. These entities maintain databases covering a range of legal forms under which NGOs operate in the country.

The Ministry of Interior maintains a comprehensive NGO register that includes data on the following organisational types: civic associations, foundations, non-investment funds, non-profit organisations providing generally beneficial services, and organisations with an international element (such as international NGOs or associations of foreign nationals).

The register allows users to search for organisations using multiple criteria, including:

- region, municipality, or specific address;
- organisation name or registration number;
- IČO (*Identifikačné číslo organizácie*) – a unique identifier assigned to all legal entities and public bodies by the Statistical Office;
- field of activity (depending on legal form);
- universal welfare purpose.

Each legal form has distinct characteristics and roles within the Slovak NGO landscape. Based on definitions provided by the facilitator, the following clarifications can be made:

- Civic associations are the most flexible form, able to engage in any generally beneficial activity. Their scope of action is defined in their statutes based on the organisation’s founding goals. They may undertake all types of activities typically associated with non-profit organisations providing generally beneficial services – and potentially more;
- Non-investment funds are non-profit legal entities established to pool financial resources for either general benefit or targeted humanitarian aid. Their activities must meet strict conditions: they may only provide aid in situations of individual or group endangerment or in response to natural disasters. Permissible uses of funds include support for spiritual values, human rights, environmental protection, cultural heritage, education, and social services. However, these entities are not permitted to directly deliver services;
- Non-profit organisations providing generally beneficial services operate under clearly defined legal frameworks that specify the types of public services they may offer. These include, among others: health care and social assistance; creation, development, and presentation of cultural and spiritual values; protection of human rights and freedoms; educational and scientific activities; environmental protection; regional development and support for employment; housing administration and renovation.

The second major source of statistical data on NGOs is the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. Its records cover the same organisational forms as the Ministry of Interior: foundations, non-investment funds, organisations with an international element, non-profit organisations providing generally beneficial services, and civic associations.

The Statistical Office collects and presents data by:

- registration number (IČO);
- organisation name and legal form;
- geographic area (district or municipality);
- activity status (active/inactive).

While the Statistical Office provides aggregated figures by broad thematic area, such as “operation of historical monuments and buildings and similar tourist attractions”, it is not possible to filter results by both legal form and thematic scope simultaneously. Therefore, it is not feasible to isolate data on heritage-focused NGOs specifically within the broader dataset.

In terms of civil society contributions to NGO data collection, an example is the “Zachráňme hrady” (Save the Castles) initiative, a non-governmental effort to document Slovakia’s castles. Although the initiative includes information on castles owned or managed by NGOs, it also encompasses those under the ownership of state or municipal authorities. As such, the data provided is fragmentary and not exclusive to the NGO sector.

Detailed data on heritage NGOs

Table A18: Detailed quantitative data in Slovakia

| Legal form | Data for the year of | Total number of NGOs operating in a given legal form | The name of the category that is the most accurate approximation of the heritage NGO population | Number of organisations in a given category | % of heritage NGOs |
|--|----------------------|---|---|---|--------------------|
| Non-investment fund (<i>Neinvestičný fond</i>) | 2024 | 789 – total amount including defunct and cancelled entities, 488 – active (the Ministry) 584 (the Statistical Office) | no selection by purpose | | |
| Organisation with the international element (<i>Organizácia s medzinárodným prvkom</i>) | 2024 | 171 – total amount including defunct and cancelled entities, 118 – active (the Ministry) 145 (the Statistical Office) | no selection by purpose | | |
| Foundation (<i>Nadácia</i>) | 2024 | 1 166 – total amount including defunct and cancelled entities, 514 - active (the Ministry) 1 538 (the Statistical Office) | no selection by purpose | | |
| Non-profit organisations providing generally beneficial services (<i>Neziskové organizácie poskytujúce všeobecneprospešné služby</i>) | 2024 | 4 255 – total amount including defunct and cancelled entities, 1 950 – active (the Ministry) 3 578 (the Statistical Office) | no selection by purpose | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|------|--|-------------------------|-------|--|
| Civic association (<i>Občianske združenie</i>) | 2024 | 68 198 – total amount including defunct and cancelled entities, 61 438 – active (the Ministry) 63 438 (the Statistical Office) | no selection by purpose | | |
| Total | | 64 508 (active NGOs; the Ministry) 69 283 (the Statistical Office) | | ~1500 | 2.3 (active NGOs; the Ministry) 2.2 (the Statistical Office) |

Source: Own elaboration based on The Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

Additional statistics A19: Additional statistics in Slovakia

| Data for the year of | Heritage NGOs per 10,000 population | Heritage NGOs per country area |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024 | 2.77 | 0.031 NGO/km² |

Source: Own calculations based on the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (Institutul Național de Statistică) (population and area).

Additional relevant information

Due to the inability to simultaneously filter by both legal form and purpose of activity within existing public databases, it is not possible to directly extract accurate data on heritage NGOs in Slovakia. As a result, the facilitator conducted an independent estimation based on available information and contextual analysis. This process yielded an approximate figure of 1,500 heritage-oriented organisations currently operating in the country.

NGOs with special status/rights

In Slovakia, NGOs can attain a special legal status as Non-Profit Organisations Providing Publicly Beneficial Services (NPOs). This designation allows them to deliver services that benefit the public, as defined by Slovak law. NPOs may be established by legal or natural persons, including government agencies, and are required to reinvest any profits back into their public benefit activities. They are prohibited from distributing profits to founders, members of governing bodies, or employees, and they do not have members, distinguishing them from other NGO forms in Slovakia. The number of such organisations is provided in the table above.

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- Zákon o neinvestičných fondoch 147/1997 30.05.1997 [Act on Non-investment funds]
- Zákon číslo 116/1985 Zb. o podmienkach činnosti organizácií s medzinárodným prvkom [Act No 116 / 1985 on the conditions on operating of organisations with international element]
- Zákon č. 34/2002 Z.z. o nadáciách 30.01.2002 [Act on Foundations]
- Zákon č. 213/1997 Z.z. o neziskových organizáciách poskytujúcich všeobecne prospešné služby 01.08.1997 [Act on organisations providing generally beneficial services]
- Zákon o združovaní občanov 83 / 1990 Z.z. 27.03.1990 [Act on Associations of Citizens]

Ukraine

***Sources of data
on NGOs***

As of 2024, Ukraine lacks a comprehensive public or non-governmental system for collecting and publishing complete statistical data on the non-governmental sector, including organisations operating in the cultural heritage field. The current limitations are primarily the result of martial law, under which access to state registers is restricted to authorised personnel, specifically state registrars and officials of the Ministry of Justice or its regional departments. Additionally, territorial affiliation requirements have been suspended, allowing NGO registration regardless of geographic location unless specific restrictions apply.

Prior to the full-scale Russian invasion, citizens could access the State Register of NGOs to retrieve information about individual organisations. At present, however, access to such data is severely limited. The State Statistics Service of Ukraine no longer provides publicly available data, and searches can now only be conducted via platforms such as YouControl and Opendatabot, which rely on archived or partial data. These platforms allow users to search by the organisation’s name or EDRPOU (a unique identifier within the Unified State Register), but they do not support statistical queries or provide aggregate information on the total number of NGOs. Consequently, the size and composition of the NGO sector, including the heritage segment, cannot be determined directly from official databases.

Moreover, no Ukrainian registry contains structured data on NGOs’ activity areas, particularly those working in heritage-related fields. Keywords such as “protection of monuments”, “national memory”, or “cultural traditions” are not categorised or indexed. NGOs that do work with heritage may be classified under one of two NACE codes:

- 94.99 – Activities of other public organisations not classified elsewhere
- 88.99 – Provision of other social assistance without accommodation, not classified elsewhere

These codes are overly broad and do not allow precise identification of heritage-oriented entities.

In Ukraine, NGOs involved in cultural heritage most commonly take the form of either a public organisation or a public association. According to Article 1 of the Law of Ukraine on Public Associations (No. 4572-VI, adopted 22 March 2012), a public organisation is founded and operated by individuals, while a public association may be founded by legal entities. Both are non-commercial in purpose and may carry out entrepreneurial activities only if this is

explicitly stated in their statutes and supports the achievement of their goals (Article 21). Public associations may own and manage assets, including donations, property purchased with own funds, or temporary use property, under conditions permitted by law (Article 24).

Other organisational forms in Ukraine include religious organisations, professional unions, cooperatives, charitable foundations (with public benefit status), and employer associations. However, based on the country facilitator’s assessment, these were excluded from the heritage NGO count, as heritage-related activities are not central to their missions and are rarely reflected in their official mandates.

One of the few institutions collecting project-based data on heritage-related organisations is the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation (UCF), a public institution established in 2017 to promote national culture and ensure access to Ukraine’s cultural heritage. The UCF maintains a publicly accessible archive of funded projects, searchable by thematic category, including heritage. Project descriptions include implementation dates, organisational details, and location. However, the data is often incomplete and requires cross-verification using other tools such as YouControl.

Additional – but fragmented – data has been generated through projects and civic initiatives. Notably, ReHERIT (2018–2021), a European Union-funded project, aimed to map Ukraine’s cultural heritage sector. It developed an online directory of individuals, organisations, institutions, and initiatives working in the field. While this platform serves as a networking and knowledge-sharing tool, it does not provide statistical summaries. Moreover, it includes a wide range of entities beyond NGOs (e.g. museums, businesses, government bodies), and therefore cannot be used as a stand-alone source for quantifying the heritage NGO sector.

Platforms such as YouControl offer the most reliable, though still limited, access to organisational information in Ukraine. YouControl is an analytical business intelligence platform that aggregates data from over 180 official and public sources, including:

Unified State Register of Legal Entities, Individual Entrepreneurs and Public Organisations (USR);

- Unified State Register of Enterprises and Organisations of Ukraine (UEDRPOU);
- register of non-profit institutions;
- national and international sanction lists;
- court decision databases;
- registers of inspections, taxes, debts, and more.

Despite its extensive coverage, YouControl does not provide statistical data and requires prior knowledge of the organisation’s name or identifier to conduct a search. As such, it is useful for verifying specific entities, but not for quantifying the heritage NGO sector as a whole. Nevertheless, due to its comprehensive and up-to-date nature, it was considered by the Facilitator as the most reliable available source for confirming NGO identity and activity.

Similarly, Opendatabot, a Ukrainian civic tech initiative, provides access to state registers and publishes occasional statistical summaries. In 2023, it released a report listing the most common types of non-profit organisations in Ukraine. However, it did not include disaggregated data on

Additional statistics

heritage NGOs, as the classifications are based solely on NACE codes, which, as previously noted, do not reflect specific heritage-related activities.

In conclusion, while several platforms and initiatives collect and disseminate data on NGOs in Ukraine, no complete or centralised database exists for the cultural heritage NGO sector. All available sources present either fragmented, project-specific, or entity-level data, which limits the possibility of conducting robust quantitative analysis. As a result, identification of heritage NGOs requires manual, case-by-case verification, and estimates of sector size must be made using triangulated data from multiple sources.

Detailed data on heritage NGOs

Table A20: Detailed quantitative data in Ukraine

| Legal form | Data for the year of | Total number of NGOs operating in a given legal form | The name of the category that is the most accurate approximation of the heritage NGO population | Number of organisations in a given category | % of heritage NGOs |
|--|----------------------|--|---|---|--------------------|
| Public organisa- tion (Громадська організація) | 2024 | 57 497 | no selection by purpose - data extracted manually by the facilitator | 284 | 0.5 |
| Public association (Громадська спілка) | 2024 | | no selection by purpose - data extracted manually by the facilitator | 10 | |
| Charitable organisation (Public Benefit Organisation - РВО) (Благодійна організація) | 2024 | 20 671 | no selection by purpose - data extracted manually by the facilitator | 45 | 0.4 |
| Charitable foundation (Public benefit foundation) (Благодійний фонд організація) | 2024 | | no selection by purpose - data extracted manually by the facilitator | 48 | |
| Total | | 78 168 | | 387 | 0.5 |

Source: Own elaboration based on the following: total amount: Opendatabot, 2023; heritage NGO: [YouControl](#); [ReHerit](#); [The Ukrainian Cultural Foundation](#).

Additional relevant information

Table A21: Additional statistics in Ukraine

| Data for the year of | Heritage NGOs per 10,000 population | Heritage NGOs per country area |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024 | 0.11 | 0.0006 NGO/km² |

Source: Own elaboration based on the statement of the Deputy Director of the Institute of Demography and Quality of Life Problems of Ukraine (population), State Service of Ukraine for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre (area).

The identification of NGOs operating in the field of cultural heritage in Ukraine was based on a triangulation of multiple sources. Primary information regarding the names and profiles of heritage-oriented organisations was obtained from the project archive of the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation (UCF), the ReHERIT platform (an incomplete directory of heritage sector actors), various project reports, and lists of organisations provided by regional cultural departments, as well as other publicly available materials.

Following the initial identification, each organisation was individually verified using the YouControl database. This platform enabled the confirmation of key details such as the organisation’s legal status, activity scope, and registration history.

The total number of organisations listed in the table (78,168) refers specifically to those legal forms under which heritage NGOs operate. This differs from the total number of NGOs used for calculating the percentage share of heritage NGOs (208,385), which includes all forms of non-governmental entities across Ukraine. Therefore, the table reflects only a subset of the broader NGO sector, limited to organisational types relevant to the heritage field.

Accurately estimating the current population of Ukraine remains difficult due to the ongoing war and its demographic consequences. As of 1 January 2022, the State Statistics Service of Ukraine reported a de facto population of 41,167,335 and a permanent population of 40,997,699. For the same date, the CIA World Factbook estimated Ukraine’s population at 43,528,136, a figure that includes residents of temporarily occupied territories, such as parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and the city of Sevastopol. According to the International Monetary Fund, the population declined from 41.0 million in 2021 to 35.0 million in 2022, and further to 33.2 million in 2023.

For the purposes of this report, an estimated population figure of 35 million was used, based on the assessment by Oleksandr Gladun, Deputy Director of the Institute of Demography and Social Studies of Ukraine, who confirmed that the population had decreased from 42 million to approximately 35 million.²⁹

29 [State Statistics Service of Ukraine](#); CIA World Factbook produced by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA); World Economic Outlook prepared by International Monetary Fund.

NGOs with special status/rights

Ukraine’s official territory covers 603,628 km². As of 2021, approximately 43,300 km² (or 7% of the total area) was under temporary occupation by the Russian Federation.³⁰ Since the onset of the full-scale invasion in 2022, this figure has increased by a factor of 2.9³¹, although the exact number fluctuates daily. Nonetheless, for consistency, all territorial calculations in this report are based on the entire official territory of Ukraine as defined prior to 2022.

In Ukraine, two key legal forms operate within the sphere of public benefit activity: the charitable organisation (благодійна організація) and the charitable foundation (благодійний фонд). Both are non-profit legal entities established for the purpose of conducting charitable activities, and are governed by specific statutory provisions.

Charitable organisations operate based on a specialised statute, outlining a clearly defined mission and set of goals. These entities are typically engaged in implementing charitable programmes or supporting specific beneficiary groups or broader societal needs. Their core functions include the collection and distribution of funds, goods, or other resources to recipients of charitable assistance.

According to Article 11 of the Law on Charitable Organisations, public benefit entities are expressly prohibited from distributing profits to founders, members of management bodies, affiliated individuals, or employees. Employees of such organisations are governed by standard labour legislation, including provisions related to state social insurance and social security. Moreover, all activities and the use of organisational assets must align with legal frameworks and the declared charitable objectives. Administrative expenses may not exceed 20% of the organisation’s income in a given fiscal year.

The key features of a charitable organisation include:

- a defined mission and specialised charter;
- the ability to be established by one or more individuals;
- the option to engage both volunteers and salaried employees;
- operation on a non-commercial and independent basis.

In contrast, a charitable foundation is a legal structure specifically designed to collect, manage, and allocate financial resources for charitable purposes. Its primary function is to provide

financial support and services to those in need. Foundations are typically structured to:

- manage and allocate funds for charitable activities;

- provide direct financial assistance;
- be founded by one or more individuals or legal entities;
- raise funds from both private individuals and legal entities;
- operate on a non-profit basis.

The distinction between these two forms lies primarily in their legal structure and scope of operations. While charitable foundations focus on the financial dimension of charitable support, public benefit organisations often engage in a broader range of social and community-based projects. Additionally, foundations tend to support individuals or targeted initiatives, whereas public benefit organisations may provide assistance at the community or societal level. Both forms play a critical role in advancing social welfare and improving quality of life in Ukraine.

As of 2023, a total of 20,671 charitable organisations and charitable foundations were registered and operating in Ukraine.³² Among these:

- 45 charitable organisations were identified as active in the heritage sector;
- 48 charitable foundations were similarly involved in heritage-related activities.³³

Given that these entities constitute distinct legal forms, they have been included separately in the statistical table, and their share within the broader heritage NGO sector has been calculated accordingly.

- Закон України “Про громадські об’єднання” № 4572-VI [Law of Ukraine “On Public Associations” № 4572-VI, March 22, 1012]
- Закон України “Про благодійну діяльність та благодійні організації” [The Law of Ukraine “On Charitable Activities and Charitable Organisations”, June 05, 2012, № 5073-VI]
- Закон України “Про державну реєстрацію юридичних осіб, фізичних осіб – підприємців та громадських формувань” [Law of Ukraine “On State Registration of Legal Entities, Individual Entrepreneurs and Public Organisations”, 15.05.2003 № 755-IV]
- Податкоий кодекс України [Tax code of Ukraine, current edition dated April 1, 2024]

Basic legal acts that determine the operation of NGOs in the country

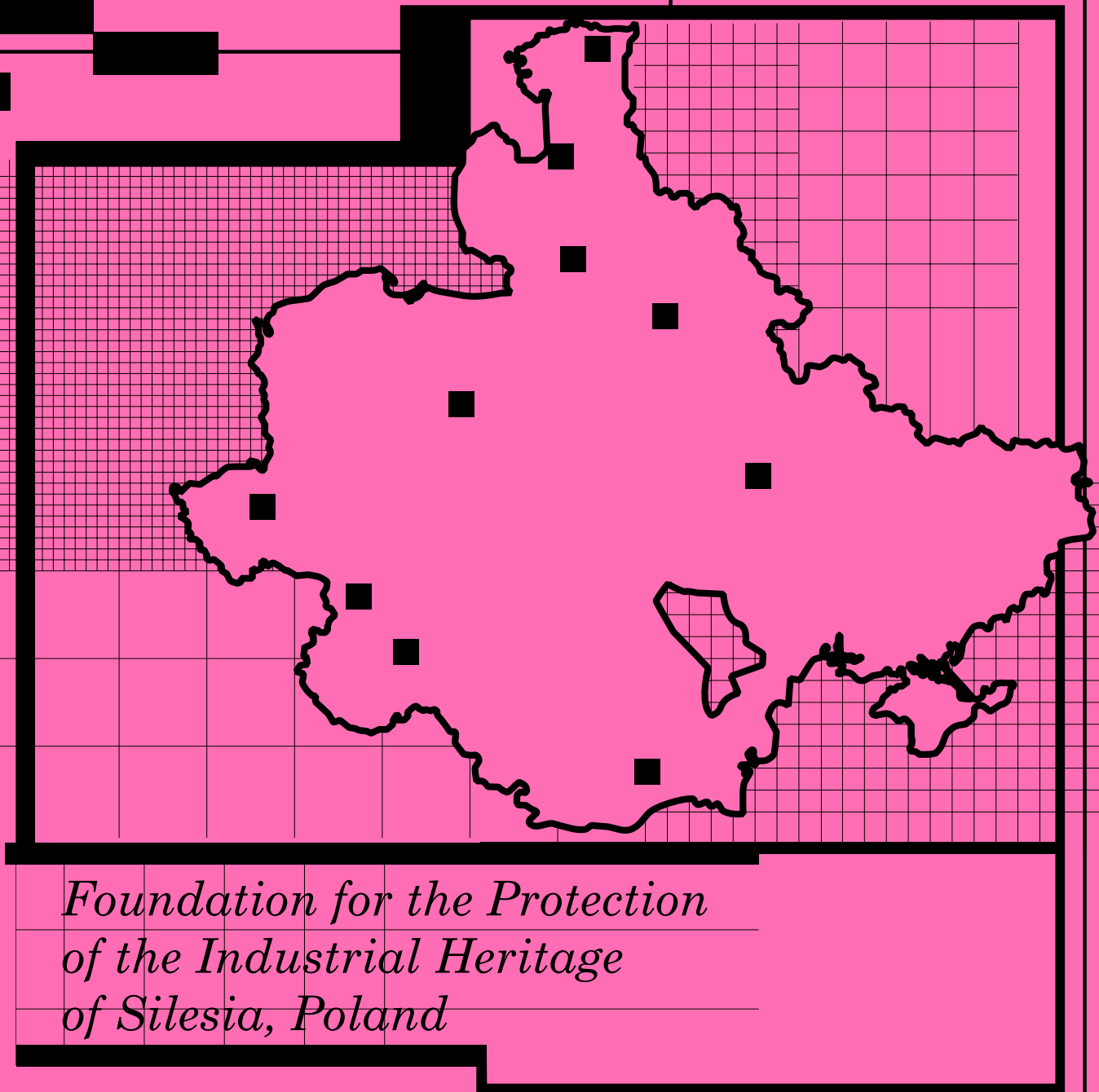
30 The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a law that provides for the application of the general wording “the territory of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation”.
31 State Service of Ukraine for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre; Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 32/2019 About the boundaries and list of districts, cities, towns and villages, parts of their territories, temporarily occupied in Donetsk and Luhansk regions; Order of the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine dated 20.12.2023 No. 363 “On Approving Changes to the List of Territories Where Hostilities Are Conducted or Temporarily Occupied by the Russian Federation”.

32 Opendatabot, 2023.
33 Data for 2024 from: YouControl, Ukrainian Cultural Foundation (archives of projects in cultural heritage), ReHerit (incomplete database of heritage operators), project reports, lists of NGOs received from regional cultural departments and other institutions).

HERITAGE NGOS FROM

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE:

SNAPSHOTS



Foundation for the Protection of the Industrial Heritage of Silesia

il. 38. Railway Museum in Silesia in Jaworzyna Śląska, opened in 2005. Overview of the main railway buildings with historic locomotives and rolling stock.

Photo by Przemysław Durr.

il. 39. Railway Museum in Silesia in Jaworzyna Śląska. Close-up of historic locomotives.

Photo by Katarzyna Jagodzińska.



The **Foundation for the Protection of the Industrial Heritage of Silesia** was established in 2004 by Dr Piotr Gerber. He is a leading personality in Poland who is totally committed to the protection and preservation of industrial heritage, still the most commonly neglected area of material heritage. Gerber's entire professional career has resulted in raising awareness of the cultural and historical value of former industrial buildings, and was instrumental in the prevention of the demolition of numerous priceless examples of historic architecture.

Dr Gerber's seemingly endless adventure with industrial heritage started when he was a student at Wrocław's University of Science and Technology. Already then he started delving into the systematic documentation of extant industrial buildings – for many of them, this vast documentation became a testimony of their existence before their ultimate demolition – and then as a practising architect he implemented the adaptation of new functions for post-industrial spaces (e.g. of a coal mine in Wałbrzych into a museum) while putting emphasis on preserving as much of the original fabric as possible.

Dr Piotr Gerber is convinced that it is important not only to document the industrial era, but also to preserve the most representative examples of industry for future generations. For this reason he contributed his private money – earned as an architect specialising in hospital design – to buy out industrial plants in need of immediate help. The Foundation for the Protection of the Industrial Heritage of Silesia, of which he is the president, protects and manages a growing number of industrial facilities in two regions of Poland – Lower and Upper Silesia. Gerber's main concern is to preserve the authenticity of industrial facilities, their completeness and understanding of their original purpose. As a result, architectural conservation and machine repairs are always subject to meticulous work and the search for original elements and materials. The aim is to ensure that historic machines can be presented in motion.

In 2005, the Foundation opened its first museum, located at the former steam locomotive depot in Jaworzyna Śląska, which remains its most successful location in terms of visitation numbers to the present day. Gerber recalls its beginnings:

We are tasked with how to protect 3.5 hectares of land filled mainly with the ruins and remains of railway cars and locomotives, as well as buildings. Everything was falling apart, collapsing, the area is not fenced, so there is theft on a massive scale. Opposite there were two scrap metal depots that lived off parts from this open-air museum. It really was a fight with windmills, especially as it required [financial] resources.

The place was brought back to life in stages, starting from securing the site to protecting the remaining elements from getting robbed, and then from decay.





il. 40. Dr Piotr Gerber as a historic train driver in Jaworzyna Śląska.

Photo from the Archive of the Foundation for the Preservation of Industrial Heritage of Silesia.

Want to know more about the foundation's activities? Check out this episode of Holistic Heritage, a podcast series by the Europa Nostra Heritage Hub in Kraków

On The Road: Redefining industrial heritage in Silesia

 **available on [www](#)**
 **available on [Spotify](#)**

il. 41. Zinc Metallurgy Museum in Szopienice-Katowice, opened in 2016 in the former zinc plant.

Photo from the Archive of the Foundation for the Preservation of Industrial Heritage of Silesia.



In 2024, the Foundation opened its fifth museum, the Silesian Porcelain Museum in Tułowiec. Earlier openings were the Zinc Metallurgy Museum in Szopienice-Katowice (2016); the Hilbert Mill in Dzierżonów (2017); and the Museum of Agricultural Techniques in Piotrowice Śląskie near Świdnica (2018). Two more sites await regeneration: the Railway Museum in Dzierżonów and the Zinc Metallurgy Museum in Świętochłowice-Lipiny.

Each site represents a different industry which was historically typical of the Lower and Upper Silesia regions. The idea is not to address the sites themselves, but to situate them in a broader context of civilisational development. Referring to the newest acquisition, a former zinc plant in Świętochłowice, Gerber comments his philosophy to industrial sites:

The building itself is fantastic, everything is authentic, original, the machines, the production line, as well as smaller equipment and fittings. Our task will be to protect this authenticity, to preserve the legibility of the production process which was introduced there, that is from the melting of zinc to the production of the relevant sheet metal profiles. At the moment, we are working to ensure that this adaptation for the needs of visitors does not run counter to preserving the authenticity of the building. When you come here, you have to understand at the beginning how a steam engine works in order to understand its place in, for example, a steam locomotive, and then how this steam locomotive moves and why, what role it played in communication. In the same way here, you have to start with how zinc contributed to civilisational development, and then how it was produced, what it was extracted from, how it was melted, processed and what the end product was.

It seems to me that this is the problem we have today, that we do not understand technology. We are users of often very complicated technology without understanding it at all. So this is one of the ideas, to show with these simple examples if it can be understood, so that we can then create something new.

The major difficulty for the Foundation's work in protecting heritage has been a mediocre understanding and awareness of the value of heritage, in other words: trivial social prestige, which results in the neglect and recklessness in allowing important and representative examples



il. 42. Hilbert Mill Museum in Dzierżonów, opened in 2017 in a former grain mill.

Photo by Katarzyna Jagodzińska.

of historic architecture to be demolished or overly transformed. Another problem is scarcity of funding for the protection of post-industrial buildings, although this too is the result of the lower prestige of this architecture compared to representative, residential, sacred and public architecture, thus additionally resulting in worse access to funds for monument protection.

Saving buildings and technical equipment from demolition and adapting them to new functions leaves a minimal ecological footprint. However, investors' cost analyses often show that it is much easier, cheaper and faster to demolish an old building and build a new one in its place. This also involves transport, which also has a negative impact on the environment: the thousands of litres of petrol or diesel needed to deliver materials to the construction site already have a huge impact on CO₂ emissions. Thanks to Gerber's activities, the preservation of historic buildings has saved an excessive negative impact on the natural environment, as well as kept representative examples of industry for posterity.

As Gerber says:

The protection of industrial heritage is one of the ways to protect the environment, because from the point of view of emissions, pollution, but also the protection of the land and the environment, it is better to adapt a site than to demolish it and build a new one. So we are trying to link the protection of industrial heritage with action to protect the environment in general.

The issue of cooperation in sustainable tourism is present in various international projects: Interreg, the Technical Monuments Trail and ERIH.

In every location, the Foundation has developed relations with local communities and engaged them in various activities of museums, both as participants and members of staff. Former employees of factories which were subsequently shut down, gained a second life as part of the Foundation established by Gerber, being hired to secure maintenance of still working machinery and retain intangible know-how of the operations of each place. They are custodians of these museums and guides during special museum days and visits.

il. 43. Former historic zinc plant in Świętochłowice-Lipiny currently being adapted to new functions. Interior with original, still operational machinery.

Photo by Katarzyna Jagodzińska.



Local communities are regularly targeted with various projects. A major event organised at the Railway Museum in Silesia in Jaworzyna Śląska is the “Children’s City”. Every year over the past decade, the facility is handed over to children from Jaworzyna and neighbouring townships for the duration of a month during the holiday period, turning it into a city to be managed and co-created under the supervision of specialists, being an educational tool on economy and societal relations.

When we came to Jaworzyna in 2004, unemployment was at its peak, I think it was around 30% at one point, and it was just a poor area.

The idea was to give children a holiday, because they don’t have one here at all. For a month, we turn the museum into a city ruled by children. The locomotive shed and the whole area were perfect for this. Every year between two and three hundred children spend their holidays with us. The children would stand in line in the morning to get a work assignment, then they would get a document with which they would go to different places where they would do some activities, such as sewing, cooking or repairing something; always under the supervision of professionals, of course.

They were paid for their work, and for this payment they bought things they had made themselves. This was a closed micro-city, where there was a mayor, where there were services, there were police, institutions to clean and run things.

This is one example of a project which was successfully repeated for many years and inspired numerous other projects realised by institutions in Poland and abroad. However, the Foundation has realised various community-based projects in its various locations.

Every museum has a manager and a small supporting team, including educators engaged on temporary contracts as demand calls for.

In 2024 for his achievements in the field of heritage protection and popularisation Piotr Gerber received the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award in the category Heritage Champion.

Mapping of the Central and Eastern European non-governmental heritage sector: Report presents the findings of the first comprehensive mapping of the non-governmental heritage sector in Central and Eastern Europe, conducted in 2023–2025, which covers ten countries: Belarus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine.

This research project is a response to a pressing knowledge gap. Despite the growing visibility of heritage NGOs and their essential contribution to safeguarding, interpreting, and reimagining Europe's diverse cultural and natural heritage, no systematic comparative study has, until now, attempted to map this vibrant sector across the CEE region.

The study estimates that approximately 33,500 NGOs across the region are engaged in heritage-related activities.

Key findings on the NGO heritage sector in Central and Eastern Europe

- A fragmented but dynamic sector
- Motivation rooted in community values
- A fragile ecosystem in terms of funding
- Insufficient recognition
- Challenge for wellbeing
- Insufficient intra- and inter-sectoral collaboration
- Social transformation of central importance

Strategic Agenda for Support: A diagnosis of key needs and strategic directions for strengthening the heritage NGO sector

- Recognition of heritage NGO work and value
- Sustainable funding
- Wellbeing and burnout prevention
- Generational renewal
- Capacity building
- Support for project implementation

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Zuzanna Ciesielska-Janik: Open Culture specialist at Centrum Cyfrowe Foundation. Cultural studies expert, psychologist, and psychotherapist in training. Digital skills trainer and an expert in the fields of promotion, communication, and digital project management within cultural institutions.

Maria Drabczyk: Board chair and policy and advocacy head at the Centrum Cyfrowe Foundation. Sociologist, researcher and project manager interested in how technology and copyright regulations impact culture, education and access to knowledge. Member of the International Advisory Committee of the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme.

Dr Dominika Hołuj: Assistant Professor at the Institute of Spatial Development and Urban Studies (UNESCO Chair in Heritage and Urban Studies) at the University of Economics in Kraków. Economist and heritage specialist with special focus on participatory heritage management issues.

Dr Katarzyna Jagodzińska: Head of the Europa Nostra Heritage Hub for Central and Eastern Europe, Assistant Professor at the Institute of European Studies, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, and founding Director for Programming at the Toy Museum in Kraków. Art historian, museologist, heritage specialist and journalist. Researches participatory practices of museums and sensory aspects of heritage.

Dr Aleksandra Janus: Director of the European Commission's initiative European Sites of Holocaust Memory (ESHEM), President of the Zapomniane Foundation, and co-founder of the Engaged Memory Consortium. Anthropologist, curator, memory scholar and cultural activist. Collaborator of the Research Centre for Memory Cultures at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

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