

Conference Report of the European Students' Association for Cultural Heritage (ESACH)

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Following the guiding theme of the European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH) 2018, "Border Areas – Encounter Areas", and focusing on the inner-European post-war border of the Iron Curtain, the aim of this international conference was to review and discuss the difficult heritage of the Cold War as well as to explore the potential for transboundary cooperation and networking. However, the conference was also a milestone in focusing on the definition of joint values of natural and cultural heritage and in opening a discourse on "the boundaries between natural and cultural heritage [that are] taken as given".¹ Embracing the dissolution of these boundaries "allows us to reorient and reconceptualize heritage".²

Day 1 – Sunday, 17th June 2018

Opening the conference, Klaus Lederer, Berlin Senator for Culture and Europe, welcomed the conference participants at the Berlin Wall Memorial Visitor Centre. He pointed to the motto of EYCH, "Sharing Heritage", and to the importance of the work of encounter and reconciliation concerning the dark heritage of the Iron Curtain. The Berlin Wall Memorial Visitor Centre in close proximity to Bernauer Straße and the Mauerpark has played an important role in this work for the city of Berlin, the Senator stated. On top of that, Klaus Lederer expressed his conviction that the Mauerpark today is a place of self-organized urban culture.

Afterwards, Uwe Koch, Head of the Deutsches Nationalkomitee für Denkmalschutz (DNK) welcomed the conference participants as representative of one of the three European Cultural Heritage Summit hosts. Encountering history at sites of the Iron Curtain enables access to the heritage of borders, he stated. Considering the new borders created in and around Europe, e.g. through the Brexit decision in the UK, learning about this heritage gives new impetus and enables critical reflection, the second speaker of the evening stressed.

In a public evening lecture, Marianne Birthler and Thomas Willemeit of Graft Architects then presented the German contribution to the Venice Biennale of Architecture 2018 with the title "Unbuilding Walls". They described how they perceived the former Wall not as a line, but as space opened up for discussion, covetousness, remembrance, questions of property, infrastructure and lived reality. For the Venice exhibition, they chose 28 projects in Berlin, all situated at former Berlin Wall sites. When entering the Pavilion, the exhibition appears to be a black wall of concrete. But as soon as one changes one's position, the visitor realizes that the wall is not so concrete; cracks appear through which one can move, thus finding the project descriptions on the back of the installation. In the international

context, the speakers explained, the unbuilding of the Berlin Wall and the free spaces created and used by the people of Berlin are symbols of hope and optimism. The projects displayed in the exhibition range from Berlin's famous club culture to the development of the government district. They visualise the conflicts and negotiations between remembering and forgetting, developing and preserving, reusing and restoring the sites of the Iron Curtain in Berlin.

Day 2 – Monday, 18th June 2018

The following day, Jörg Haspel, President of ICOMOS Germany, addressed the topic of the nature/culture dichotomy in his introductory address. Pointing out that nature conservation and monument protection share a common goal concerning the former Iron Curtain areas, he expressed his hopes for further advancement of collaboration between the disciplines.

Before initiating Section 1 "The Path towards the Green Belt and the Iron Curtain Network", Axel Klausmeier, Head of the Berlin Wall Foundation, spoke out in favour of international and cross-border cooperation in light of contemporary political developments. His welcome was followed by that of Kai Frobbe from BUND, who in his function as project coordinator of the Green Belt stressed its relevance as a "living memory landscape" and "ecological monument". Michael Cramer, MEP, then presented the Iron Curtain Trail, a Europe-wide cycle route connecting areas along the former Iron Curtain.

This first section of the day combined two presentations from the organisational point of view with two presentations focusing on research and practical standpoints.

Uwe Riecken from the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, which is also the Focal Point of Green Belt Germany, explained the ecological importance of the Green Belt areas, stressing that 86.9% of these areas are "semi-natural or close to natural habitats". For him, the idea of the Green Belt Germany consists of three main ideas: the Green Belt as a habitat for threatened plant and animal species, as national natural heritage, and as a place of nature experience. In order to further nurture these targets, he pointed to the tools needed: political support, legal protection, the spreading of knowledge on the topic and a national ecological network supporting the ideas.

His presentation was followed by that of Liana Geidezis from BUND in her position as head of Green Belt, regional coordinator Green Belt Central Europe, and deputy chairperson of the European Green Belt Association e.V. The latter's aim is to secure the management, coordination and funding of the Green Belt Europe agenda. It consists of 30 member organisations from 16 countries. Liana Geidezis pointed to the fact that this project is



Fig. 1: Preliminary excursion: The conference speakers and organisers on the roof of the Atelierhaus am Flutgraben (© ICOMOS.DE/ Jörg Haspel)

cross-border and a cooperation between government organisations (GOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Anna McWilliams presented her PhD research on the Iron Curtain. Practicing modern archaeology, she travelled parts of the former Iron Curtain areas, working with archaeological and ethnographic methods. The beginning of her research was a twofold understanding of the Iron Curtain as a metaphor and as “physical remains of heavily militarised borders”. She found the latter to be “time capsules”, e.g. in the ruins of border patrol stations. She also learnt that what the Iron Curtain meant varied extremely between places. On a farm at the border between Italy and Slovenia it went directly through the farm and was later adjusted minimally to better fit the environment while in other places she found the remains of a true “death zone” as described above. She also pointed to the fact that through researching, the researcher co-creates a phenomenon by sharing a story of a subject. For example, a man showed her the Iron Curtain remains simply because she asked for them, but later explained that they did not perceive this as the Iron Curtain at the time.

Mira Keune representing the Iron Curtain Network (Netzwerk Eiserner Vorhang) emphasised three aspects characterising this example of lasting institutional cooperation: places of political decision, places of military operation, and places of civil disobedience. Based on the generally accepted assumption that neither natural nor cultural heritage protection

is viable without the understanding of communities regarding the protected values, the importance of innovative legal instruments adapted to contemporary changes should not be forgotten. The panel raised the question how the cultural reminiscences and traces could be connected to the natural. The panellists agreed upon the fact that the operative level needs interdisciplinary cooperation. Thereby the notion of monument conservation shifts towards a “management of change”.

Section 2 “European Initiatives along the Former Iron Curtain as Partners of the Initiative ‘European Green Belt’ and ‘Iron Curtain Network’ – Focus: the Border Region of Austria/Hungary” focused on one national and two cross-border projects and their challenges.

Christine Pühringer from the National Focal Point Green Belt Austria pointed out the ecological importance of the former Iron Curtain areas, which consist mostly of wetlands in Austria. With tools like nature buy-outs, voluntary help, and Green Belt camps with teenagers, the organisation seeks to preserve the natural habitats created by the former Iron Curtain. Unfortunately, cultural heritage plays only a minor role in this project, the speaker stressed.

Architect Tibor Kuslits from Hungary presented what he called “The Tone of the Monument”, pointing to the moral aspects of difficult heritage. In his view, the refugee crisis has led to a return of the Iron Curtain along the border between



Fig. 2: Opening of the conference by Klaus Lederer, Senator für Culture and Europe, Berlin
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Austria and Hungary. Afterwards, Ulrike Herbig presented a research-oriented perspective on cross-border projects. On the basis of semi-structured interviews, film documentation and mental maps she captured the historic remembrance and contemporary perception of people living along the Neusiedler See in Austria and Hungary.

The final presentation of the panel was held by Martin Stary and Pavel Bečka from TransParcNet, a project coordinating the national parks Sumava (Czech Republic) and Bavarian Forest (Germany). As they stated, “what both parks have in common is nature”. Political changes in the Czech Republic have made the collaboration of the two contiguous parks difficult, but their aim is, on top of coordinated nature preservation, to inform visitors, among them children and school classes, bilingually.

Section 3 “European Initiatives along the Former Iron Curtain as Potential Partners of the German Initiatives “European Green Belt” and “Iron Curtain Network” featured two presentations from heritage practitioners and was chaired by Melanie Kreutz.

The first project presentation, “The ‘Místa Zblízka’ Project”, by Linda Kovárová and JAN Albert Šturma is an interdisciplinary project, Kovárová being an ethnologist, Šturma a biologist. They work on several regional development projects along the border area of Germany and the Czech Republic. Their perspective is to analyse local needs and realise social innovation through bottom-up approaches based on public participation. Among their tools are borderland excursions where participants explore the natural and cultural heritage of the former Iron Curtain regions.

Geese Hansen and Peer Henrik Hansen from the Cold War Museum Langelandsfort presented the perspective of a country where the Iron Curtain was at sea, not on mainland. Denmark’s most urgent military task during the Cold War was to stop ships from reaching the Atlantic Ocean through the Baltic Sea. The former military installation at Langelandsfort has been turned into a museum. Their presentation illustrated that there are different national approaches to the matters of monuments and commemoration.



Fig. 3: Opening of the conference, Thomas Willemeit (Graft Architects) talking to Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailović of Europa Nostra
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Day 3 – Tuesday, 19th June 2018

As first speaker of the second day’s section 1 “Definition of Joint Values of Natural and Cultural Heritage along the former Iron Curtain – Strategies How to Proceed” Matthias Pytlik (for Torsten Dressler) argued that the Berlin Wall today has nearly disappeared from the common memory of Berlin citizens. However, until today excavations in the former “death strip” open archaeological windows – allowing insights into this forgotten time. Most importantly, these recent archaeological monuments explain which urban structures were destroyed in the context of the construction of the Wall.

Joachim-Felix Leonhard stressed the importance of the UNESCO Memory of the World project for making history tangible, especially for the young generation. Therefore, it was an important decision to include the heritage of the Cold War and the Iron Curtain in the Memory of the World programme, the speaker explained.

Only small parts of the Berlin Wall could be preserved by the Berlin Monument Conservation Authority as the general public supported a quick and complete demolition of those structures reminding them of the time of suppression. As the day’s third speaker, Leonie Glabau stated that the current debate showed a change in attitude and explained the chance of the Iron Curtain becoming a serial natural and cultural World Heritage site. In this context, the main issue of the monument conservation authorities is to secure the authenticity and integrity of the relics.

The Green Belt is characterised by numerous landscapes which have been affected by regional development and new infrastructure. When exploring the potential of a World Heritage application it is important to underline that the aspect of shared heritage results from the overlapping border besides the military structures, Katharina Diehl explained. In differentiating between two scenarios of such an application – A (mixed) and B (cultural) – especially the comparative analysis will be important to justify an OUV, the participants learned.

Barbara Engels outlined that there is an increased recognition of the connections between nature and culture. In 2018 two mixed World Heritage applications were successful. This also



*Fig. 4: Panel discussion at the conference
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*Fig. 5: Discussion at the conference
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means that the standards for such a serial application have risen. Therefore, it is most necessary to focus on the difference between mixed property and historic cultural landscape in terms of the 1972 Convention, the speaker stated.

Section 5 “Strategies for an Extension/Europeanisation of Existing Networks” consisted of a panel discussion with Susan Baumgartl, Roland Bernecker, Barbara Engels, Liana Geidezis and Berlin State Secretary for Europe Gerry Woop. There was agreement that the European Heritage Label action has been a strong impulse for heritage conservation. As main issue – which must be faced during the next years – the panellists found that while the EU Commission’s aim is without any doubt the Europeanisation of heritage, standards and support for heritage protection in the different EU member states still differ considerably. State Secretary Woop explained the political potential of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018. The panel discussion furthermore confronted the question on how the values and experiences materialised in the structures of the Iron Curtain could spread around the world. Ending the conference’s last section, Jörg Haspel stressed the importance of reconsidering a separation of mere political heritage actions from scientific monument conservation initiatives.

¹ Cf. Rodney HARRISON, Beyond “Natural” and “Cultural” Heritage: Toward an Ontological Politics of Heritage in the Age of Anthropocene, in: *Heritage & Society*, vol. 8, 1 (2015), p. 24.

² *Ibid.*