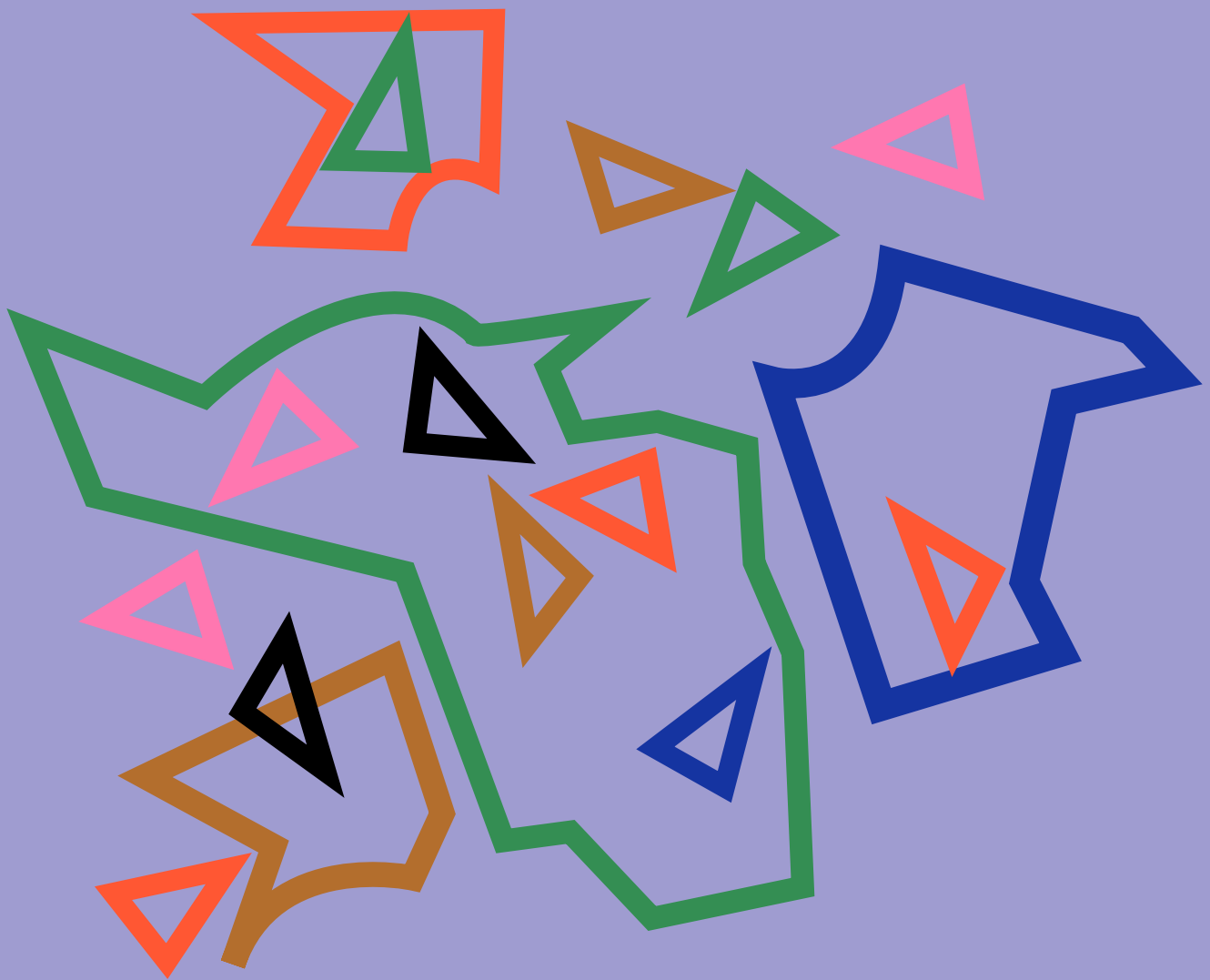


INCLUSIVE APPROACHES TO HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN BORDERLANDS: Insights Based on the B-SHAPES Research Project



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What is the B-SHAPES project?

The collaborative research project, 'B-SHAPES: Borders Shaping Perceptions of European Societies', sought to explore the role of borders in shaping the perception of Europe and European societies in the 21st century, as well as cross-border narratives regarding what unites Europe. The project aimed to reveal the challenges posed by re-bordering in Europe. Borders play a key role in shaping our perceptions of societies, culture, heritage and belonging.

Three empirical Work packages scrutinised the impact of growing Euroscepticism in border regions, national minorities and border landscapes. 'B-SHAPES' applied various participatory and ethnographic methods of citizen science (public's participation and collaboration in research), with a special focus on youth and minorities, to collect data in different European border regions. This challenge developed strategies and innovative policies that used more inclusive approaches to cultivate both natural and cultural heritage.

The results of the project have the potential to inform further research in the border regions, which in turn can help reconfigure heritage policies, complementing national schemes with cross-border European approaches to heritage, culture and a sense of belonging. Such methods should be developed to include established quality standards and best-practice models in a range of territorial development domains relevant to heritage planning in border regions (including existing best practice in the heritage sector, for example in relation to UNESCO transboundary projects). In return, they can empower citizens and economic sectors to contribute to the creation of a more inclusive vision of culture and promote shared values. Through conserving heritage and making it more accessible, heritage acts as a driver for social and economic development, with the potential to improve the quality of life of people living in border regions and throughout Europe.

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Introduction

Borders shape our perceptions of European societies. Heritage and how we think of it is central to our understanding of the past and the present and may help us to plan for the future. Borderlands heritage is not per se different from other heritage. But it is often interpreted through narratives connected to the border as a place of division ('ours' and 'theirs'), of national manifestation or, in contrast, of the borderland as a meeting point or border zone of cultural competition, change and exchange.

The research project 'B-SHAPES: Borders Shaping Perceptions of European Societies', funded by the EU's Horizon Europe research programme, reflected on historical processes and their impact on the lives of borderland inhabitants in Europe. Borders have come into being, disappeared, shifted and transformed as a result of historical events such as the First and Second World Wars, the collapse of communism in Europe and finally the war in Yugoslavia. There are places in Europe where borders have remained stable for hundreds of years, but in other places violent conflict and multiple border changes have occurred during the 20th century. This is particularly true of Central and Eastern Europe, although borderlands with a conflictual history can be found all over the continent. These events, of course, have determined the lives of borderlanders, sometimes forcing them to fight against their neighbours, sometimes to move elsewhere. Thus, a once closely guarded border has become an open, friendly place, while a peaceful place has changed to a closely guarded border.

Borders are sometimes called the 'scars of history': historical processes have left lasting traces on borderlands, both in terms of the landscape and among its inhabitants. Whether they are associated with positive memories or with trauma, they do not stop being an ever-present aspect of life. The physical proximity of neighbourhoods, or the view from the window across the river or across the road, forces one to remember. It continually allows for the possibility that the world on the other side of the border could be part of a common identity and a common heritage. Regardless of the nature of the experience, it is worthy of reflection. The European Union's internal borders, which are usually open and peaceful (though still affected by administrative and legal obstacles to integration or mobility), are particularly conducive to such reflection and give an opportunity for mutual understanding and cooperation and the enrichment of heritage on all sides of the border. This process can involve dealing with some of the more challenging aspects of the past and legacies experienced by communities in borderlands, while simultaneously offering opportunities for growth and inclusion.

The 'B-SHAPES' research findings argue that borders are a central factor shaping our perceptions of societies. The project collected border narratives through fieldwork in three areas, covering a total of ten European borderlands: first, involving borderlanders

belonging to Eurosceptic parties; secondly, young borderlanders belonging to a national minority; and, thirdly, by diverse borderlanders engaged in narrating border landscapes that are special to them and their lived experiences. 'B-SHAPES' has also analysed tourism brochures from these regions, as well as having examined how borders and borderlands are referenced to in educational materials, including school textbooks. Young minority borderlanders were engaged in creative work (zine-making) based on the results of border narratives found in minority language newspapers, as well as on images relating to border situations in general and specifically those in the borderlands in which they live. Meanwhile teachers and educators were involved in transcribing the research into student-friendly lesson plans.

The narratives of our participants reveal that most borderlanders have a specific perception of borderlands and borderland heritage both shaped by – and shaping – their personal identities. Narratives also express a wish to cooperate, to get to know each other and to look at borderlands from a cross-border perspective rather than a nationalising, conflictual, divisive 'us' and 'them' perspective. This does even apply to the Eurosceptic participants' perception of their home region or Schengen Europe, where a strongly divisive perspective about 'us' within the EU and 'them' outside, especially migrants, was expressed.

This document should serve as a tool for practitioners and policymakers concerned with managing and developing heritage in borderlands. It does not give a tailored solution but instead introduces initiatives for developing cross-border communication and cooperation around heritage conservation and management. The plan is built on three consecutive steps: it presents recommendations on how to design heritage management policies in border regions; provides a section introducing best practice examples; and closes with a roadmap to develop successful cross-border heritage management, which can easily be tailored to the specificities of your borderland. This makes it invaluable for policymakers and practitioners within the field of heritage management in border regions and of borderlands more broadly, including civil societies and local communities, especially politicians as well as NGOs responsible for culture and heritage; civil servants in ministries and authorities working with heritage management; practitioners working in cross-border cooperation institutions; heritage industry practitioners such as those working in museums, national and regional parks, event management; and the tourism industry. Furthermore, the plan can also be useful for businesses with roots in border regions and a specific company heritage.

The findings of 'B-SHAPES' are not conclusive and point to the opportunity for more technical work in developing evidence-based tools for cross-border heritage planning. Such work should be done within multidisciplinary contexts of territorial cooperation

and place-based (spatial) planning, as well as established norms for the conservation of the built environment, including archaeological and cultural heritage at national and international levels.

International standards, principles and tools for place-based and local democratic governance are also relevant for future work. Positioning borderland heritage planning as an area of inclusive and emancipatory borderland development and territorial cooperation resonates with, for example, the Council of Europe's Twelve Principles of Good Democratic Governance, the European Charter for Local Self-Governance, the Reykjavik Principles and specific Council of Europe systematic toolkits such as Intermunicipal Cooperation and Cross-Border Cooperation. We are conscious that to develop internationally benchmarked tools for cross-border heritage planning lies beyond the scope of the research, but it is our hope that the reflections and findings set out in this document provide a useful basis for further research and multidisciplinary collaboration.

Martin Klatt, Caitriona Mullan and Rafał Rogulski

Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners

Cultural landscapes in border regions are dynamic, diverse and innovative – often more so than in the areas within. This diversity creates opportunities for added value and can also revive the historical concept of borderlands as meeting places, where differences are celebrated as part of the richness of the region. In borderlands, cultural heritage policies and projects are especially important, as they contribute to European integration, promote cross-border cultural mobility and partnerships.

It is worth remembering that the cultural landscape stretches beyond the arts into heritage sites, publicly funded spaces such as archives, libraries, parks, zoos, botanical gardens, historical monuments, as well as festivals, folklore, crafts, dancing, cooking and other regional initiatives. Preserving cultural heritage does not end with organising cross-border events, but also extends to the ecological preservation of spaces, sustainable management of landscapes, inclusion of minorities in initiatives, listening to voices of scepticism and creating spaces for multilingual dialogue.

How does the cultural landscape look in your border region?

Despite the tension, miscommunication and conflicts that may happen in borderlands, engagement and working in these spaces is an opportunity to embrace diversity, differences and complexity. The 'B-SHAPES' researchers analysed different European border regions and prepared policy recommendations¹ that should support cross-border partnerships. The summary below aims to inspire policymakers and practitioners in creating comprehensive and inclusive policies and projects.



¹ <https://www.sdu.dk/en/forskning/forskningsenheder/samf/b-shapes/results/policybriefs> (accessed 6 February 2026).

What to consider when creating policies or projects in border regions?

1. Work across scales

The preservation and celebration of culture and heritage depend not only on national, regional and municipal political and administrative decision making, but also on the specialist knowledge of practitioners and heritage professionals (archaeologists, heritage conservationists, historians, ecologists, architects, biologists, reenactors, cooks, musicians, artists, etc.). There is great value in investing in partnerships not only between countries, but also between regional and local stakeholders across borders: researchers, politicians, artists, craftspeople, activists, citizens and local communities. Open their eyes to cross-border opportunities.

TIP: Think about creating an open, bilingual database with profiles of artists, craftsmen, folk groups, volunteers and organisations from the border regions.

2. Include minorities

Including indigenous and nationally recognised and unrecognised minorities in your decision making allows your initiative to be diverse enough to extend its outreach. Creating spaces for dialogue with those groups ensures comprehensiveness. Actively seek diverse partners and perspectives; include voices of women, youth and seniors in your initiatives – and remember about newly arrived residents and citizens. Do not think only about how to address and celebrate differences in those groups, but also about what are their common goals and characteristics.

TIP: If your region is home to a minority group, tell their story.

TIP: Emphasise individual human stories to underline the social and emotional background of crossing borders, reuniting families and seizing economic opportunities.

TIP: Remember to keep your policies and projects multilingual. Provide translations and focus on good communication that includes all minorities present in border regions.

2.1 Include young people and women

Engaging youth and women and their interpretation of culture and cultural heritage is crucial in building the public understanding of heritage. Intergenerational and inclusive approaches help rediscover and reimagine heritage. Including young and female voices should be done not only through formal consultations, but also via creative and participatory approaches.

TIP: Create spaces for reflective discussion on gender bias in border policies and projects.

TIP: Discuss your policies/project ideas with youth to educate them about the importance of inclusion, and vice versa – what can you learn from them?

TIP: Although not part of the 'B-SHAPES' research and therefore not included in this document, there are numerous other minorities that should be taken into account. Ensure your work is inclusive in regard to disabilities, sexuality, religion and race.

3. Think about sustainability and landscape

In the light of the climate crisis, it is a shared responsibility and an ethical imperative to take care of natural heritage sites that spread and connect people across administrative divisions. The importance of these landscapes often lies in cultural memories that help create values relating to the border region's natural, built, archaeological, artistic and scientific heritage. Shared understanding of those values is key for developing successful, joint and sustainable initiatives.

TIP: Map your cross-border landscape, marking continuities and disruptions and the potential for tourism and its infrastructure.

TIP: Think about investing in the conservation of the built environment and archaeological heritage in the context of protecting nature and managing the damage caused by climate change.

TIP: Think about energy efficiency in the context of e.g. historic buildings and public transport.

TIP: Emphasise border landscape in education, funding schemes and project ideas, offer resources and opportunities for local schools to explore and make deeper connections with local landscapes; reflect on the influence of environmental change on your local landscape.

4. Add more European perspectives

Deepening the connections between regional and EU-wide (cultural) heritage perspectives is crucial in fostering the idea of borderlands as cross-border landscapes. Creating spaces for discussion on the alignment of these goals could improve the coordination and transfer of ideas across boundaries.

TIP: Consider extending your network to other border regions with similar issues. Opening a wider European dialogue might help you find new solutions.

TIP: When planning events and policy, include and proactively reach out to European representatives on 'the other side' of the border.

5. Maintain local relationships

It is important to pay attention to the social aspects of your projects/policies and include activities related to building a sense of identity and togetherness. Focusing on the human stories and needs will help balance the social and emotional significance of borders and foster a more personal connection to the European project.

TIP: Instead of one-off events, smaller and low-cost activities are helpful in building regular cooperation and stronger relationships. Think about e.g. organising regular networking meetings or residency programmes based on the interaction between border regions.

TIP: Think about involving youth, seniors and minorities in your cross-border workshops, micro-festivals, joint celebrations, oral history projects and landscape conservation projects.

6. Listen to voices of concern

Creating policies and projects based on European identity should include spaces for multiple and local identities and policies in order for them to stay on and flourish. Listening to voices of scepticism will allow for a better understanding of the complexity of the region and in turn a more comprehensive policy/project that addresses real concerns and promotes open discussion and cooperation.

TIP: Create open discussions and think about the right way to transfer knowledge across borders to reduce uncertainties and fears. Hearing voices of concern about borderland heritage management in your region might help you determine areas that need more attention in policies and projects.

Best Practices – Projects in Border Regions

Managing heritage should include initiatives that help preserve the culture of border regions through active participation. Supporting projects should be on the policymakers' agenda, but as a practitioner, it might be challenging to coordinate activities that keep audiences engaged. Below we present a few projects done in border regions by organisations involved in the 'B-SHAPES' project that we hope will inspire your work.

In Between? // European Network Remembrance and Solidarity



'In Between?',² an ENRS educational project running since April 2016, aims to explore the history of the 20th century and its legacy in border regions. The participants – university students – are given the opportunity to conduct oral history research in European borderlands. Gaining theoretical knowledge on the research methods and practical skills in journalism and **podcast**³ production, they record history's witnesses, local activists and representatives from local institutions, in order to create a reportage about the specificities of the border region they visit.

TIP: Good group integration is even more important than the message of your project. Do not hesitate to dedicate a lot of time to ice breakers and getting to know each other – a good understanding between the members of your group will be crucial while dealing with, often troubling and problematic, borderlands' history.

Summer School for Educators: Landscape as Heritage // European Network Remembrance and Solidarity



This summer school was a part of the 'B-SHAPES' project and explored what effects borders have on individuals and societies. Teachers and educators created **educational materials**⁴ (lesson plans and educational postcards) that reflect the knowledge they gained during the project. Looking at borders from three different angles – photography, border-landscape studies and oral history – served as a way to expand the idea of a border from an administrative divider to a space where cultures, languages, built and natural environments, politics, arts and stories meet.

TIP: While talking about borders, it might be beneficial to challenge the idea of a border as a line that separates. Creating a space for a more abstract or unconventional understanding of borders can be helpful in connecting people before discussing real, pressing problems.

2 <https://enrs.eu/inbetween> (accessed 6 February 2026).

3 <https://open.spotify.com/show/1CCtqZjE65aucSYE42ihCA?si=9739d4b66c42457f> (accessed 6 February 2026).

4 <https://hi-storylessons.eu/lesson/discovering-borderlands-and-landscape/> (accessed 6 February 2026).

Border walks // B-SHAPES

Border walks are a mobile interview method that is especially beneficial for studying people's perceptions of border landscapes and for exploring place-based narratives. This method was developed by the 'B-SHAPES' researchers to understand border landscapes as people's heritage.

This is an inexpensive way to learn about the local perspectives and impressions that can also be adopted by policymakers and practitioners to gain insights into citizens' lives. Walking in the neighbourhoods – especially in the lesser-known areas – can be a way of attaining a more comprehensive image of life in border regions as well as being a good integrating activity for locals and an eye-opening experience for local policymakers.



How to organise a border walk?

1. Find a group of volunteers who would like to share their experiences and show you places that are important to them in border regions. Remember to reach out to minorities, youths, seniors and women.
2. Ask them to pick a place in the border region that is either meaningful to them in some way and represents their life in the borderland or one that they wish to be preserved for the future. It could be anything from a street corner to a bridge or a tree. The place does not have to be historically important – it just needs to be significant to the person presenting it.
3. Invite other participants, decide on the route and set a date – it's time to go out.
TIP: Remember to give equal attention to areas on every side of the border.

4. Ask your guides to talk about their experiences, opinions and impressions relating to the border region – you can also turn the walk into a cultural heritage project (e.g. an oral history project) and record the talks. Make a podcast, ask participants to take photos on the way inspired by the conversation or create StoryMaps of your towns.

What are StoryMaps?

StoryMaps is a website⁵ that allows you to pin important places on a map. These pins can be accompanied by photos and texts. 'B-SHAPES' researchers used it to present the results of the border walks and the experiences of the locals. The narratives were presented through publishing photographs taken along the route and quotes by the border walks' local participants. How could this tool be useful in your case?



Zine-making // B-SHAPES

Zine-making is a creative and participatory research method in which participants produce their own paper booklets (zines) to explore a specific theme or topic. In the zine-making workshops organised by Eurac Research, we worked with young minority borderland citizens to gather their perspectives on borders and Europe. During the activity, we used border-related newspaper headlines and images and asked participants to reflect on their own experiences of, and feelings towards, the local border. Participants used scissors and glue to select and assemble images and text for inclusion in their zines. The researchers facilitated the sessions by offering guidance and giving helpful prompts throughout the process. At the end of the activity, participants were invited to present their zines to the wider group, followed by a collective discussion about their thinking processes and zine creations. These insights can help policymakers and practitioners better understand how young people experience borders and design responses that reflect those lived realities.



5

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/> (accessed 6 February 2026).

Here are some basic instructions that can be followed to carry out a similar zine-making research activity.

How to organise a zine-making workshop?

1. **Prepare materials**

Select and print border-related newspaper headlines and images from prior media analysis relevant to the local context. Put paper, scissors, glue and pens on a large table in the centre, and seat participants around the table.

2. **Create zines**

Introduce zine-making as a participatory activity and invite participants to create their own zines in response to the research questions using the materials. Instruct participants on the correct way to fold their A3 paper booklets. Encourage them to reflect on their personal experiences and relationship with the local border. Facilitators should ask open, prompting questions during the process.

3. **Share and reflect**

Participants present their zines to the group, followed by a guided discussion about their creative choices, meanings, and emerging themes.



The Travelling Monument // Lungomare

For the 'B-SHAPES' project, Lungomare invited five artists to work on a site-specific approach in two European borderlands. They did not only delve into the history of the region but also into present challenges. As a result, they produced, in close exchange with the curators of the project, an artistic work that has been seen across Europe as part of a travelling exhibition.

Two of the artists, Boris Missirkov and Georgi Bogdanov, developed 'The Travelling Monument' (2025) and an artistic method that reflects on the absence of memorials dedicated to those who lost their lives trying to escape from the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War. Starting from monuments dedicated to the guards on the Bulgarian-Greek border, the artists highlight the asymmetries of commemoration and the unresolved trauma. The work comprises three elements: a counter-monument – a mock-up of a breaking bridge; photographs of the landscape of the escape routes; and archival propaganda footage.



Through this project, the artists open a space for confronting the legacies of violence and the forms of trauma that are rarely addressed. In doing so, the artists not only challenge institutional amnesia but also question the power structures that underpin the selection of who is deemed worthy of commemoration. Their work thus operates as a form of counter-memory that reconfigures the relationship between power, remembrance and territory.

To learn more about all artistic projects on borders, visit their website.⁶

TIP: Addressing difficult pasts is necessary in understanding the complexities of human experiences. Using art can be an effective way of bringing people together to think about what happens when history is written by the winners.



⁶ <https://b-shapes.lungomare.org/> (accessed 6 February 2026).

Museum's perspective //

The National Museum of History, Sofia

The Lungomare project also was hosted by The National Museum of History in Sofia, Bulgaria – an institution that implements several initiatives dedicated to the cultural heritage of Bulgaria's border regions. 'Through the Prism of Borders – Episode 2', developed within 'B-SHAPES', explores the borderlands between Bulgaria, Greece and Türkiye through contemporary art, personal narratives and public programmes. Questioning the institutionalised narratives of Bulgaria's historiography, particularly those concerning its border regions with Greece and Türkiye, the exhibition invites visitors to reflect on how borders – both physical and conceptual – shape not only (national) identities but also our understanding of history itself. Alongside this, the museum carries out fieldwork and collaborations with local institutions to document shared traditions, crafts and oral histories in these regions. From a museum's perspective, these efforts present borderlands as dynamic spaces of cultural interaction and support inclusive, community-based approaches to heritage management.

How to Develop an Inclusive Borderland Heritage Management Plan: A Roadmap

1. Foundations

Outlining an Inclusive Borderland Heritage Management Plan is an essential step towards creating a uniform strategy for policymakers on both sides of the border. It's an opportunity to highlight milestones needed to enable further professional co-management of cross-border heritage. Such a plan should be the result of successful cooperation and discussions among all the actors, including practitioners, involved. The management plan's goal is to identify common elements in every border region that all stakeholders find significant on which to focus their work. Although plans developed for individual borderlands may differ due to the specificity of the cultural heritage they concern as well as to the diversity of cross-border relationships and stakeholders involved in these relationships, it is possible to identify certain common elements in these documents that determine the conditions for their use in everyday heritage management in borderlands.

The following roadmap outlines steps for creating an Inclusive Border Heritage Management Plan, focusing on inclusive approaches, consultation and implementation, including monitoring, evaluation, promotion and communication.

When developing a plan, three crucial issues should be considered:

➔ **Place-based approach**

It emphasises the unique context of a specific borderland by recognising its heritage as deeply intertwined with the social, environmental and economic conditions of its physical place. It means understanding how a common heritage is reflected in shared and contested histories, narratives, identities and local needs. Prioritising local specificity and holistic preservation; seeing the spirit of the place itself – the *genius loci* – as the primary value is key to this approach. It ensures that all actions are tailored to the immediate environment, setting and community.

➔ **Resource-based approach**

It treats heritage, both tangible and intangible, as assets that can be strategically managed to generate larger socio-economic and cultural benefits. European border heritage can be considered a valuable resource for building European identity and human

capital, and for supporting regional development. It requires inventorying, protecting and valorising these assets to promote cross-border tourism, cultural exchange and sustainable economic activities.

➔ **Participatory principle**

The process of developing and implementing the management plan involves all relevant stakeholders, especially border communities and minorities. This advocates co-creation and shared responsibility and is crucial for legitimising projects and ensuring they are inclusive of diverse perspectives (e.g. from both sides of the border and across different cultural/ethnic/linguistic groups). Implementing this principle involves consultation, collaboration and empowerment, making sure local knowledge and concerns shape the future of their shared heritage.

2. Process steps

Step 1: Foundation and scoping

The process should start with establishing a cross-border task force to conduct the development, formal acceptance and implementation of the plan. When establishing this body, one should adopt an inclusive and participatory approach, providing the representation for all local institutional stakeholders from both public and private sectors, as well as local communities, including minorities.

The task force should have:

- ➔ a strong mandate to develop the plan,
- ➔ a clear decision-making structure,
- ➔ and a sufficient consultation process.

To ensure balanced local representation of border actors contributing to the development of this document, a stakeholders' map should be developed. It is necessary to identify and invite the following groups to cooperate:

- ➔ key policymakers and practitioners from all sides of the border,
- ➔ representatives from cultural institutions,
- ➔ local and regional authorities,
- ➔ tourism boards,
- ➔ NGOs and others who can contribute to the process.

By providing this, the task force should have a clear helicopter view of the borderland heritage landscape and its drivers.

To develop the plan, it is crucial to ensure transparency by defining its scope and methodology; fostering a shared understanding of its vision and approach to its development; and ensuring equal access for all border actors throughout the process.

Step 2: Borderland heritage inventory and further analyses

To create a comprehensive inventory of the borderland heritage, a tailored methodology needs to be developed and implemented. It should aid in exploring borderland cultural resources, outlining elements of the borderland cultural heritage that can be managed across the border and identifying the conditions and circumstances in the borderland environment that influence borderland heritage management.

a) Preparing a methodology

The Inclusive Borderland Heritage Management Plan should cover the tangible and intangible elements of borderland heritage, which stakeholders collectively agree to focus on and provide further cross-border management. Therefore, pointing out these elements and recognising other conditions and circumstances related to their functioning is crucial, e.g. legal requirements for their protection and sustainable use, ownership and management conditions, accessibility, cross-border barriers to implementing the plan and other relevant conditions.

This requires the development of a heritage research methodology that – given the financial resources of the participants in this process, their capacities to implement the process and the availability of other resources (e.g. experts) – should ensure the broadest possible approach to heritage and borderland environment analysis. The methodology should incorporate both **quantitative and qualitative methods** and the relevant research tools.

A range of **quantitative** – both statistical and analytical – techniques can be used to measure, compare and model this phenomenon. These methods focus on the analysis of numerical data obtained from surveys, cultural institution databases and registers and include Factor Analysis, Cluster Analysis, Multidimensional Scaling (MDS), geostatistical and GIS methods. Social network analysis and even econometric methods can provide the task force with access to comparable data on both sides of the border.

Qualitative methods helpful in researching borderland heritage include:

- examining texts and narratives, e.g. document analysis, discourse and content analysis and symbol and iconography analysis,
- collecting data from stakeholders, allowing for the exploration of individual perspectives and experiences, e.g. in-depth interviews and focus group interviews,
- observation and fieldwork, which embed heritage research in their natural context, e.g. participant observation, non-participant observation, walking interviews, tours as well as audio and video documentation of the borderland's daily life.

The research process can be supported by expert methods that provide in-depth, concise conclusions. These methods leverage the specialised knowledge, intuition and experience of professionals (e.g. scientists, historians, ethnographers, architects, museum professionals, regional planners and EU experts) to assess, evaluate and forecast phenomena. These methods include Delphi methods and expert panels, indicator-based heritage assessment and evaluation methods, case study evaluation and reviews.

b) Undertaking studies and analysis to identify borderland cultural heritage

The diagnosis of the cultural heritage of a borderland can be carried out by the task force independently or with the support of external contractors, which is more costly.

Researching a borderland requires a holistic, balanced approach that considers the perspectives of every side of the border equally. It often involves operating in an environment of specific tensions, differences and asymmetries, and requires a particular sensitivity. Key challenges that may be encountered in such research include:

- data asymmetry, i.e. incompatibility between statistical systems such as heritage registers,
- data access conditions, i.e. data may be open (open data) in one country while requiring complex official approvals in another,
- different geodetic reference systems, which can result in inconsistent GIS maps and hinder the harmonisation of spatial data,
- different narratives regarding historical heritage, which translate into diverse approaches to understanding and appreciating heritage,
- legal and jurisdictional barriers resulting from different heritage management structures on all sides of the border,

- different heritage protection regimes on all sides of the border, which hinder joint heritage management planning,
- language and communication differences, which must be considered, e.g. when designing surveys for research. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure the questions have equivalent meanings and are not just translated,
- building trust and social engagement on all sides of the border, ensuring the balanced involvement of a representative group of stakeholders in the process,
- ensuring the representation of national, ethnic and linguistic minority groups in research and official discourse.

Step 3: Content development

The task force leads the process of developing content, but continuously relevant borderland stakeholders should be adequately engaged, particularly those included in the stakeholders' map. The content development process should cover two logically interconnected fields: the diagnostic and the strategic. Each field should be grounded in cross-border dialogue in accordance with the participatory principle and embedded in the place- and resource-based approach. Processes conducted in each field should be addressed in the relevant sections of the study, developed by one or more representatives of the task force responsible for the document's content.

The diagnostic section of the content takes into account all partial conclusions from the research conducted in accordance with the adopted methodology, as well as the results of any additional expert analyses. This part of the document should at least:

- a) include brief presentation of the methodological approach, including primary research findings;
- b) be consistent with existing strategies and policies (regional and national) on both sides of the border;
- c) include the results of the inventory of the borderland's cultural heritage, including tangible and intangible heritage, taking into account any elements for which different historical narratives exist on every side of the border;
- d) include a description of the heritage elements that will be subject to cross-border management, taking into account their potential for the development of cross-border social (e.g. building the identity of borderland residents based on shared heritage), economic (e.g. developing commercial cultural offerings related to heritage exhibitions) and environmental (e.g. slow tourism) initiatives;

- e) include an assessment of the legal status regarding the protection and use of heritage, as well as regulations regarding heritage care on all sides of the border and the identification of any asymmetries, e.g. in legal provisions and barriers hindering joint heritage management.

The strategic section of the document should address all key assumptions of the borderland heritage management process, including the SMART objectives:⁷ **s**pecific, **m**easurable, **a**chievable, **r**elevant and **t**ime-based. Another important component is an action plan to achieve these objectives and to identify responsible partners involved in the creation of the plan. It is also necessary to define the conditions for the plan's feasibility and the management of its implementation. This section should include at least the following elements:

- a) a general vision for the long-term perspective of borderland heritage management,
- b) thematic or geographic areas in which actions will be undertaken (e.g. tourism, education, conservation and digitisation);
- c) directions of intervention to be considered in borderland heritage management;
- d) strategic and operational objectives of borderland heritage management for each of the identified directions of intervention;
- e) an action plan translating the strategy into concrete steps:
 - a detailed list of planned initiatives adapted to the local context and resources, along with a deadline for their implementation and the stakeholders responsible for them;
 - a framework schedule for individual initiatives, including milestones where applicable;
 - budget and funding sources for individual initiatives.
- f) implementation framework, i.e. assumptions regarding the operationalisation of the plan and measurement of its effects:
 - governance, including the role of the task force or other executive structures for the plan's implementation phase;
 - determination of success indicators (quantitative and qualitative);
 - assignment of responsibility for implementing the document and achieving success indicators to relevant stakeholders on every side of the border;
 - procedures for monitoring progress and updating the plan;
 - communication and promotional activities regarding information about the plan and its results to build public support in each part of the border area.

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G.T. Doran (1981) 'There's a SMART Way to Write Management's Goals and Objectives', *Journal of Management Review*, 70, 35–6.

Step 4: Implementation

While developing a study is a milestone in managing the borderland cultural heritage, its implementation is crucial to achieving the assigned interventions and objectives. Once the document has been developed, the following activities at least will be necessary for its implementation:

- a) cross-border, inclusive consultations of the document with stakeholders on both sides of the border, including minorities, conducted online and on-site to ensure the broadest possible participation of all interested parties, whose voices will be heard by the task force,
- b) incorporating substantive changes to the document resulting from the consultations,
- c) formal approval of the document by the authorities or other relevant stakeholders on both sides of the border,
- d) organisation, coordination and oversight of the management of the borderland cultural heritage according to the governance framework described in the study,
- e) implementation of monitoring and evaluation procedures for the document, which are feasible for the responsible entity and adjusted to the plan's content and specificity,
- f) planned communication and promotional activities to disseminate the management plan and enable its execution among relevant stakeholders and target groups.

The road of designing and implementing a management plan as presented above can serve as a vital strategic framework that bridges and fosters long-term cross-border cooperation. By integrating place-based, resource-based and participatory approaches, it ensures that heritage management is both sensitive to local contexts and inclusive of diverse community voices.

Moving from thorough diagnostics to strategic implementation enables border stakeholders to transform shared heritage into a valuable asset for socio-economic growth and a resource on which they can build their cross-border identities and sense of togetherness.

The long-term success of this plan relies on the sustained commitment of the task force and the formal adoption of its objectives by authorities on all sides of the border. Potential users of the document should be asked to consider the document's cohesion with other existing strategies and policies in this field on all sides of the border, in the spirit of integrated cross-border planning.

By establishing a shared heritage management framework, stakeholders can effectively navigate different narratives and turn potential cross-border tensions into opportunities for building trust. A structured roadmap ensures that the needs of minorities and marginalised groups are heard, providing the necessary legitimacy for large-scale cross-border initiatives.

Ultimately, this roadmap provides a clear path towards a resilient, shared future of borderlands, where cultural diversity is recognised as a fundamental pillar of European integration.

Reflections for the road ahead

We, the 'B-SHAPES' partners, hope that this guidebook will inspire you as a stakeholder in heritage tourism, as an interested citizen or as a policymaker to a new approach in your work with your region's heritage. A cross-border outlook on your heritage that incorporates both local and European stories can lead to opportunities for new areas of tourism development and engage businesses and civil society. It can also support the elaboration of mental maps for inhabitants and visitors to the region alike. Embracing inclusive borderlands heritage planning as a practice and a process can build capacity for celebrating and promoting diversity as cultural capital, in ways that do not threaten the existing identities but instead nurture the expression of intersectionality while safeguarding uniqueness. All of this has the capacity to improve people's quality of life and ultimately deepen the rich diversity that lies at the heart of the European project and strengthen European values that seek to protect heritage for future generations.