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# **IMMOVABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW LOCALISM: THE ROLE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE-BASED DEVELOPMENT**

## **ABSTRACT**

*On the declarative level, immovable (physical) cultural heritage is a convenient subject of a variety of programmes, conservation approaches and legislative processes supposedly tied to sustainability development plans. The declarativeness of immovable cultural heritage integration processes is often exposed in spatial antagonisms based on frictions between local communities on one side and, on the other, conservation approaches, the development aspirations of investors, political structures and other actors who seek to assert their particular interests and needs. The paper analyses the mentioned frictions through the prism of “new localism” trends and connects them to the findings of several Slovenian case studies.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Localism, new localism, cultural heritage, participation, HEI-TRANSFORM*

# Nepremična kulturna dediščina v kontekstu novega lokalizma: vloga lokalnih skupnosti pri implementaciji na dediščini temelječega trajnostnega razvoja

## IZVLEČEK

Na deklarativni ravni je nepremična (fizična) prostorska dediščina priročen predmet vrste programov, varstvenih pristopov in zakonodajnih procesov, ki jo vključujejo v prostorske razvojne načrte in povezujejo z različnimi skupinami deležnikov. Deklarativnost procesov integracije nepremične kulturne dediščine se pogosto materializira v prostorskih antagonizmah, kjer prihaja do trenj med lokalnimi skupnostmi na eni in konzervatorskimi pristopi, razvojnimi težnjami investitorjev, političnimi strukturami in drugimi akterji, ki skušajo uveljavljati svoje interese in potrebe, na drugi strani. Članek analizira omenjena trenja prek koncepta »novega lokalizma« in ga povezuje z izsledki različnih študij primera v Sloveniji.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** lokalizem, novi lokalizem, kulturna dediščina, participacija, HEI-TRANSFORM

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Planning when items of immovable cultural heritage are involved is all too often regarded as merely a standard procedure based on well-established, predetermined legal systems of cultural heritage protection containing defined elements of protection and assigned functions determined according to expert knowledge, measurements and scientific data. The fact that immovable cultural heritage includes all tangible cultural elements like buildings, monuments, landscapes, archive materials, works of art or artefacts means it is automatically presumed that its physicality allows planners to properly arrange for the heritage's embedment within the locale's socio-cultural contextuality. It is blindly assumed by the general public that planning for heritage will follow in detail the procedures and selected objectives of protection policies, limiting negative spatial processes and favouring actions that work to the benefit of the entire community (see Council of Europe 2017; Ministrstvo za kulturo 2019). However, only

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in very rare situations can planning with cultural heritage actually be realised simply with formal measures that are known in advance; much more often, it is required to connect the perceptions and needs of local population groups with the formal planning objectives and practices to ensure that more considered and inter-community negotiated decisions are made concerning the management of immovable cultural heritage.

Introducing new ideas regarding immovable heritage management in a local area is a very sensitive undertaking and calls for considerable patience, the gathering of suitable data, and time-consuming processes of coordination between different local stakeholder groups. Planning for sustainable heritage-based development is in this context seen as a form of consultation or interactive management whose objective is to harmonise the interests of different (political, financial, class, ethnic, cultural) socio-economic groups present in a given space (Healey 1997; Sanoff 2008). These groups may have conflicting interests and differ not only with regard to their aims and expectations but also to the level of acceptance of new ideas, which may be translated into power, pressure or influence when it comes to decisions about interventions in the cultural heritage of a locality. The article presents the way in which the interactions between stakeholders operating within local communities often reveal discrepancies in attitudes to immovable cultural heritage. In this respect, discrepancies are observable between desirable and practical implementations in space while planning for sustainable heritage-based development. On the declarative level, immovable cultural heritage is a convenient subject of a variety of programmes, conservation approaches and legislative processes that are supposedly tied to sustainability development plans and should include various groups of stakeholders. Declarative aspects of these programmes are identified in the non-imperative nature of plans, strategies or documents that describe the desired results yet without explicitly listing the actions, timetables or steps that must be performed to achieve the proposed goals. The mere declarative integration of immovable cultural heritage within the socio-cultural context of communities is often exposed in various NIMBY (not in my backyard) syndromes whereby different types of civil society initiatives, local communities and, on the other side, conservation approaches, development aspirations of investors, political structures and other actors clash to assert their particular interests and needs (see Fischel 2001; Kiefer 2008). Frictions and thus non-optimised or imbalanced relations between actors lead to reinterpretations of the roles played by immovable cultural heritage and partly limit their function in building locally-based "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1986: 248) among the autochthonous population. By so doing, specific parts of cultural heritage or socio-cultural capital integrated with immovable cultural

heritage and belonging to less dominant social groups are pushed out to the periphery and used only in the most rudimentary forms like, for example, as a welcome sidekick element that helps to create a suitable ambience for the offer of consumable goods in the tourism or promotion contexts (Bianchini 1999).

The paper analyses the mentioned frictions within the local environment based on the findings of various research projects. Special focus is paid to examining possibilities for developing new mechanisms for connecting what thus far have been less involved or insufficiently empowered groups of users of immovable cultural heritage. From this point of view, the article analyses how elements of “new localism” (Strassoldo and Tessarin 1992: 287) reflect the actions of stakeholders involved in the management of immovable cultural heritage today by considering empirical cases from Slovenia. In the case of cultural heritage, local actions are often connected to hierarchised and rigid local networks whilst the new localism conceptualisation envisages the use of local elements in ways that benefit both the local and general (global) society. Analysis of this dialectic relationship between (traditional, autarkic) localism and new localism within cultural heritage management is based on data drawn from the research projects HEI-TRANSFORM (2022–2025), Fakin Bajec (2005–2020) and Kuševič (2016) that allow insights from various case studies in Slovenia.

## **2 “New localism” and its potential for sustainable heritage-based development**

The sustainability of cultural heritage management can be defined in two ways. The first dimension is “green sustainability” and consists of assuring adequate procedures that enable the physical preservation of cultural heritage through the use of green materials and green approaches that do not disrupt natural ecosystems cycles (see, e.g., ICOMOS 2013, 2019; Scardigno et al. 2019; Foster 2020). The second dimension of sustainable cultural heritage management is focused on the social sustainability of cultural heritage. This approach tends to strike a balance between the quality of life in the local community and cultural heritage management. The approach is complex and contains unpredictable elements because it includes close cooperation with local communities, experts, owners and various institutions (local, municipal, state) that are involved in the process of cultural heritage management. Still, in the last few decades the mentioned approach has been significantly undermined and neglected compared to other approaches (see Vecco and Srakar 2018). In terms of social sustainability, a sustainable cultural heritage management model has to provide capacities that based on the appropriate balanced participation of all stakeholders enable the

long-term development of local communities while simultaneously serving the general public by ensuring the preservation and accessibility of the cultural heritage. This act of balancing between local and general benefits on a longer-term scale represents the most conflictive and difficult part of the process of developing a sustainable heritage model and is unique for each case (see Garcia and Cox 2013). Namely, each case involves a different set of actions, actors and needs that must be balanced in order to assure sustainable development that considers the heritage.

The concept of social sustainability in the management of immovable cultural heritage is inherently connected to the notion of participation (see Stöger 2010; Müller and Stotten 2011; Council of Europe 2017). Although stakeholders' participation is an inseparable part of the process of ensuring social sustainability in heritage studies, it is also one of the most frequently mentioned concepts that is becoming ever more controversial in terms of its capability for implementation in the field due to a lack of expertise, finance, political will and local specifics. It is worth mentioning that socially sustainable heritage management is in this sense often exploited in the name of developing a holistic approach to heritage management that presupposes the active cooperation of the state, investors, local and other interested stakeholders. Formal policy actors (state, municipalities) under the guise of the concepts of participation, inclusive society, and active citizenship often attempt to transfer the cost of maintaining public goods on to the shoulders of civil society. Authors like Coombe and Weiss (2015), Cantillon and Baker (2020) describe such actions as reflecting of the growing importance of the economic sector and aspirations to achieve short individual financial gains in contrast to generating long-term welfare effects for society at large.

In the article, special attention is paid to the analysis of social sustainability in cultural heritage management in selected cases, while the dimension of physical green sustainability is left aside as a secondary dimension that, while inherently important, does not add to the arguments presented. In this respect, focus is given to the analysis of crucial elements that either provide, support or obstruct the implementation of social sustainability in heritage management in Slovenia. One of the important debated characteristics that contribute to or obstruct the social sustainability of cultural heritage in Slovenia is the effect of active local interest articulation or "localism". In popular debates, localism is often described as an element that prevents the introduction of novelties into the local space and hinders any faster development of it. The real effects of present localism trends are much more complex and cannot be reduced to a simple differentiation between levels of global permeability in the local space. All of the local communities in today's Europe are connected with the globalisation process and form their spatial

(local) identity in relation to the (global) "space of flows" (Castells 1989: 146), i.e., circulation of cultural elements, information, goods, people and capital. Every single local community responds to the challenges of globalisation in its own ways. The sphere of new global influences on local communities possibly ranges from the distinctive protection of traditional local spatial features to the distinctive transformation of local communities. Some communities are more open/permeable as concerns the new (global) elements being introduced into their space, whilst others tend to be reserved and try to minimise their influences. In relation to this, many authors have described a shift from "old localism to new localism" (Strassoldo and Tessarin 1992: 287).

Localism is best described as a relationship between place (understood as a space, which is relatively small and limited) and the social phenomena that occur in it. This relationship is valorised (ideologised) from the point of an observer or actor and becomes a part of their state of conscience (ibid.). In this way, the locality (and space in general) becomes an important ingredient in the construction of an individual's identity and, contrary to the theories pointing to the loss of territorial determinism, stresses the importance of locality in everyday life. Traditionally, localism and rootedness have been considered backward and part of the conservative pole of values. Modernisation processes seemed to be directed at cosmopolitanism, universalism and mobility. Territorial attachment, described by Tönnies (1999: 31) as part of "Gemeinschaft", seemed to be vanishing, as it was supposed to be gradually destroyed by a functional "Gesellschaft". Strassoldo (2004: 7) explains that while Gemeinschaft was in fact somewhat influenced or restrained by those processes, the trend did not alter its contents: "It has found inner limits in some basic human needs, and has generated dialectically its own limiting contradictions and countervailing forces" (ibid.). A consequence of these processes was new localism where elements of the old localism were fused with the processes of globalisation that brought new elements into the locality. Mlinar (2001: 770) examines old localism relative to new localism based on the analytical dimensions of "connectedness" and internal "characteristics". Connectedness is analysed through the prism of autonomy, while internal characteristics are defined according to the exclusion or integration of specialties. In Table 1, one can see that old localism is much more closed, and less connected than the choice-oriented new localism. Similar differences are recognised in the way that old and new localism exclude or integrate the special features of localities.

**Table 1: Old and new localism.**

Analytical dimension	OLD LOCALISM	NEW LOCALISM
Connectedness	Autonomy/ Independence	Autonomy/ Choice
Characteristics	Specialties/ Exclusion	Specialties/ Integration

Source: Mlinar 2001.

According to Strassoldo (2004), two additional differences between new and old localism are critical. The first is that while old localism was primordial and less reflective, the new one is the outcome of a more conscious choice. While the old localism seemed “necessary and natural”, the second appears more “voluntary and intentional (rational)” (Strassoldo 2004: 7). The second difference is: “that the old localism tended to minimize contacts with the exterior to maintain a strong closed boundary; while the new localism is quite aware of the rest of the world, and is quite open to interactions with it” (Strassoldo 1992: 46–47). By way of a general assumption, we may say that new localism is more open than (old) localism, yet still emphasises the need for certain values that should be present in the locality.

The concept of new localism brings new elements into the debate concerning the management of immovable cultural heritage in Slovenia. It first raises the question of the extent to which new localism is present when dealing with various forms of immovable cultural heritage in Slovenian local communities. Given that local communities need to integrate novelties into their environments, this process immediately triggers dialogue between the forces of old (preservation) and new localism (adaptation). Second, this process of the inevitable confrontation of the two localisms is nested within a much larger question of whether the management of immovable heritage in Slovenia is directed more to heritage development that considers sustainability or the existing rigid, hierarchical form of mere protecting the status quo. “Business as usual” in this scenario would mean a distinct embeddedness in old localism whilst neglecting the values and benefits of new localism, where sustainability orientations are mixed with globalisation and local values. Although this “glocalisation” (Robertson 1995: 173) process is undoubtedly in place in Slovenia, the question regarding its extent and features in the case of immovable heritage management has hardly been examined. We address the presented questions through an examination of specific data and case studies in Slovenia.

### **3 Analysing the management of immovable cultural heritage in local communities**

#### **3.1 Methodology**

The analysis of how immovable cultural heritage in local communities is managed was performed based on data gathered from multiple research studies that include the project HEI-TRANSFORM (2022–2025) as well as field studies by Fakin Bajec (2005–2020) and Kuševič (2016). The selected research studies are relevant for our analysis as they include data regarding multiple types of actors on the local level (e.g., local inhabitants, municipality, experts). Due to the use of a mix of accumulated primary (HEI-TRANSFORM) and secondary (Fakin Bajec and Kuševič) data, the methodology applied in the article may best be described as the “mixed research methodology” approach (see Tashakkori and Teddlie 2010) or the “grounded theoretical approach” (see Holt-Jensen 1988; Glaser 1998) where various types of data are synthesised in order to produce a more general theory, i.e., a hypothesis. The data analysis thus combines data of various types spanning from semi-structured questionnaires to field analysis in various locations. The intention of the analysis is to identify key changes related to the presence of new localism and social sustainability that have occurred in the area of immovable heritage management in local communities over the last two decades. The analysis first interprets data that succinctly summarise specific noteworthy ideas or elements that guide the handling of immovable cultural heritage in local communities. Second, in the conclusion, the collected interpretations and ideas are re-grouped into higher-level concepts to explain how and why local communities and other stakeholders handle the management of immovable cultural heritage in particular ways. The model can assist with the drawing of conclusions regarding whether elements of “new localism” can be detected in a given location.

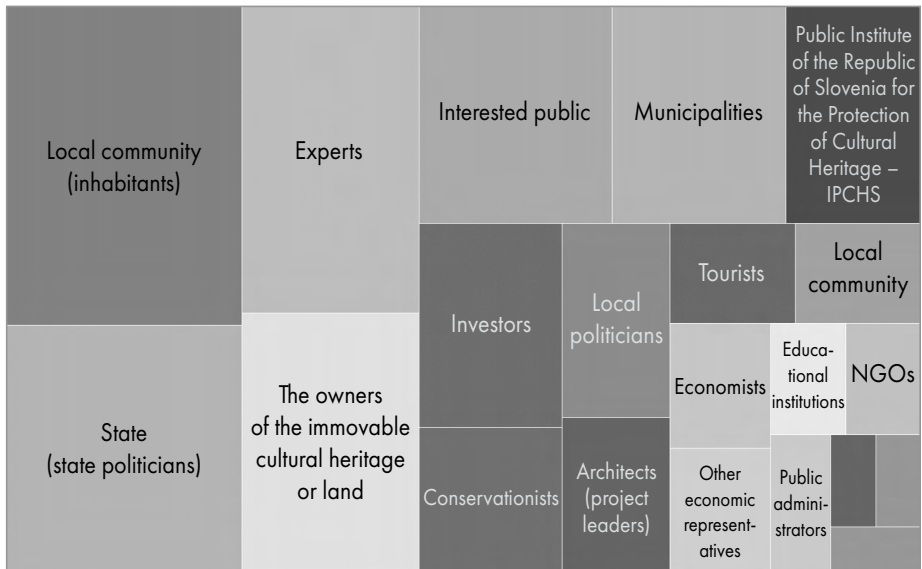
#### **3.2 The ideal model of participation in the management of immovable cultural heritage**

The main premise of the analysis was to identify how elements that constitute the socially sustainable handling of immovable cultural heritage are dealt with in the case of Slovenia. This led us to look at the model of participation in the case of heritage management in Slovenia. In this regard, the ideal sustainable model of immovable heritage management should also include a well-integrated model of stakeholder participation that enables good communication between (local) actors and the balanced use of resources stemming from the heritage. The first layer of data analysed is the results of the HEI-TRANSFORM survey in 2023



conducted among members of the project group involved in the project. The survey was conducted online using the 1KA web tool. Since a large number of experts from various fields are participating in the HEI TRANSFORM transdisciplinary project, we sought a general picture of experts' views on the major questions about the values of immovable cultural heritage, and about stakeholders in the processes of the renovation and reuse of the heritage. In January 2023, a total of 30 experts on the subject of cultural heritage coming from various scientific fields (architecture, economics, sociology, psychology, art history, ethnology, geography, anthropology, conservation studies) were asked semi-structured questions about the immovable cultural heritage. In terms of immovable heritage studies, the sample was distributed approximately evenly between various heritage expert categories, with 30% being experts in cultural heritage studies, 30% in spatial heritage sciences and 30% in conservation studies, whereas 10% were experts from smaller fields (e.g., psychology, communication studies). In the context of our analysis of the socially sustainable management of immovable cultural heritage, the questions were related to the perception of participation; the inclusion of local stakeholders in the system of heritage management was particularly important (Graph 1).

**Graph 1: In your opinion, who are the key stakeholders in all processes of the renovation and reuse of heritage in Slovenia?**



Source: HEI-TRANSFORM 2023.

Graph 1 presents the experts' responses distributed according to the frequency of mentions with the size of a box being designated accordingly, i.e., from the most (biggest box) to the least mentioned smaller box of stakeholders. As the questions allowed multiple answers, i.e., for multiple stakeholders to be listed according to the hierarchy of their importance, the total number of stakeholders the experts mentioned was 124. The data show how the experts perceived the ideal model of management of immovable cultural heritage in terms of stakeholders' roles in Slovenia. Further, the data help identify the top actors in local communities (inhabitants) and the state (state politicians), followed by experts and owners of immovable cultural heritage or land on which it stands. The second group of actors that gradually follows this primary group consists of the interested public, municipalities, the Public Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for the Protection of Cultural Heritage – IPCHS, followed by a third group made up of investors (financers), conservationists, local politicians and architects (project leaders). The fourth group of stakeholders includes economists, other economic representatives, educational institutions, NGOs, public administrators and others. Nonetheless, this ideal model with a great number of stakeholders involved in the management of immovable cultural heritage does not sufficiently correspond to the actual situation when it comes to planning in Slovenia. The interviewed experts were therefore asked a series of questions in order to explain the constraints in the relationships between various stakeholders with a view to identifying the biggest barriers to the better handling of immovable cultural heritage in local communities.

One question concerned the problems related to implementing a more “values-led approach” (Wijesuria et al. 2016: 35) to the management of immovable cultural heritage. The concept represents an umbrella beneath which a series of actions is summarised, where each tries to retain the cultural significance of places through a balancing of the aesthetic, historical, scientific, spiritual and especially social values that exist in a space. The values are in this sense related to the locally specific perception of what is (un)valuable and should be handled accordingly. Highly elaborated on in recent scientific literature (Poulios 2010; Myers et al. 2010; McClelland 2018), the values-led approach is the epitome of aspirations in heritage conservation practices that try to combine high awareness of the local context with the comprehensive inclusion of autochthonous stakeholders in the heritage management process. The presence of a participation process in heritage management was critically reflected on by Slovenian experts, and several problematic aspects were revealed. When asked: “In your opinion, what would be the key to establishing the values-led approach to the management of immovable cultural heritage in Slovenia?”, the experts exposed the following

key problematic dimensions that have not yet been either sufficiently addressed or elaborated on in this context (Table 2).

**Table 2: Key dimensions for establishing a values-led approach to the management of the immovable cultural heritage in Slovenia listed by importance in the expert interviews.**

Rank	Description of problematic dimension	Example quotes by experts	The three most present scientific fields in the dimension
1	Insufficient participation and inclusion of stakeholders	<i>Find ways to involve the local population in the process (development of participatory methods); find ways to establish networks of knowledge between various stakeholders involved; promote education, awareness raising and empowerment of all stakeholders...</i>	Conservation studies, architecture, art history
2	Weak methodology, data collecting and analysis of the local context	<i>Adequate interpretation, analysis of relevant good practices, stakeholders' development of a critical view, ability to implement actions based on knowledge and experience...</i>	Sociology, economics, geography
3	Weak elaboration and implementation of communication practices in heritage management	<i>That all key actors know (are able) to listen to others and understand other values, actors, their needs. To develop the ability for democratic argument and coordination between stakeholders...</i>	Ethnology, anthropology, sociology
4	Low financing	<i>Arrangement of the structured and long-term financing of heritage and development of a financing structure that allows a financial influx from various sources</i>	Conservation studies, economics, architecture
5	Gaps in policy implementation, imprecise-elaborated legislation and unimplemented long-term policies, strategies, goals	<i>Reduce the influence of some (especially local) political entities in relation to others (the state, experts, other stakeholders) ...</i>	Conservation studies, architecture, ethnology

Source: HEI-TRANSFORM 2023.

The results presented in Table 2 must be placed in perspective, meaning that the problem with implementing a values-led approach in heritage management in Slovenia is multi-layered in terms of the problem itself as well as the expert fields that mention it. It may thus be assumed that specific problematic dimensions overlap with other dimensions and other expertise in Table 2. For example, the dimension of legislation and policy implementation overlaps with many other dimensions (e.g., the dimension of problematic communication practices). The most all-encompassing dimension is the problem of the low inclusion or participation of stakeholders, which permeates and forms an inherent part of several other dimensions and fields of expertise. From this perspective, the problem of including stakeholders is deeply connected to the problem of legislation and the implementation practices of local politics. In general, the mentioned dimensions well identify the main problems that are obstructing the implementation of more sustainable heritage-based management in local communities within Slovenia. Especially the highly noticed problem of the dysfunctional inclusivity of local stakeholders, i.e., non-developed mechanisms, deficient communication models, incrementalistic political actions, followed by unclear legislation undermine the process of ensuring the better or more balanced use or participation of local stakeholders in the process of immovable heritage management. The inconsistencies in this process create rifts between stakeholders, contribute to the feeling of disempowerment experienced by specific stakeholder groups, and have long-term effects on values in terms of the system of trust in actors (state, local authorities, investors, owners, civil groups etc.) that influences spatial development and heritage management within local communities.

### **3.3 Analysing the characteristics of the management of the immovable cultural heritage in Slovenia**

In order to illustrate the characteristics of the Slovenian context when it comes to managing the immovable cultural heritage in local environments, we deliberately used two sets of secondary data (namely, the results of different research studies) in this analysis to generate a broader set/scope of views on the issue. This multi-focus approach is intended to bring additional elements into the analysis of sustainable heritage management. The first level/set are analytical results of a single case study on "Debela griža", a monument in a rural area, while the second level/set is represented by the results of a group of case studies about local communities in which specific "empty" monuments owned by the Republic of Slovenia are located.

### 3.3.1 The case of Debela griža

Debela griža in the Karst region of Slovenia reveals a gap between the operations of the local association (Društvo Debela griža) mainly composed of locals from the village of Voljči Grad where the immovable cultural heritage is situated, and the involvement of a private developer from a neighbouring village. The site of Debela griža is a potentially attractive prehistoric archeologic site for visitors that is well embedded within the enchanting dry Karst landscape where the natural environment is formed by elements of Karst rock formation (Picture 1). The combined cultural and natural landscapes along with the unique archeologic setting potentially dating back to 2000 years BC makes the location attractive for multiple socio-economic uses.

**Picture 1: The archaeological site Debela griža.**



*Photo source: Matjaž Uršič 2023.*

The case of Debela griža illustrates an often-discussed conflict between the preservation and exploitation/marketisation of immovable cultural heritage. It also raises questions regarding the holistic approach to heritage management that presupposes the active cooperation of the state, investors, local and other interested stakeholders (see, e.g., Ministry of Culture 2019). The Debela griža site was identified as an interesting area in 2000 by local residents who

upgraded the activities at the site by forming a local association. This local association (Društvo Debela griža) supported the first actions on the site through the voluntary work of local residents. These included small actions on the site (e.g., cleaning, putting up the first information boards) but also expanded to numerous other small activities in the village (e.g., production of a documentary film in 2005, restoration of specific artefacts and buildings in the village in 2012). In 2014, a local businessman from a neighbouring village established a new, parallel private institute (Zavod Krasen Kras) that intensified the activities on the site. This new actor also purchased most of the land on which the prehistoric site stands and commenced a series of activities that go beyond the aspirations of the local residents in terms of financial engagement, support and restoration of the place. This triggered a series of conflicts in terms of management of the site, its future development, collective spatial identity, memory, local quality of life, economic prosperity and maintenance support for the site.

In a series of semi-structured interviews with actors involved between 2005 and 2020, Fakin Bajec gathered a substantial amount of information on the most problematic characteristics of the immovable heritage management in this case (see Fakin Bajec 2005, 2011, 2020a, 2020b). On the basis of a snowball sample, approximately 30 interviews were conducted about the actors' subjective views on the controversy. The interviews comprised questions regarding the main problematic themes, key actors and relationships between them. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour and was transcribed in order to perform a basic text analysis. Namely, the methodological approach was not a detailed text analysis but may be identified more as "pragmatic text analysis" (Verschueren 1995: 128), where the main lines of the interviewees' narrative were identified. Pragmatic text analysis is a derivative of pragmatics, i.e., a subfield of linguistics and semiotics which studies the ways in which the context contributes to meaning. In this sense, pragmatics not only studies language but attempts to combine other elements in its analysis (e.g., the context of the statement, re-existing knowledge about those involved, intent and other factors). The sample of the interviews was demographically evenly distributed between the adult population of local residents in the area of Komen. The majority (70%) of the sample was gathered in the village of Volčji grad, where the site is located, whilst the other interviews were gathered in the nearby (neighbouring) areas. Analysis of the interviews allowed the central characteristics of the conflict to be identified. In Table 3, these characteristics are arranged hierarchically, from the most frequently mentioned characteristic to the least mentioned one. Each characteristic is supported by a quote from the interviews in order to illustrate the characteristic in question.

**Table 3: Problematic characteristics of immovable heritage management in the case of Debela griža.**

Rang	Identified characteristic	Sample quote from the interviews
1	Absence of more sustainable systemic tools, mechanisms, mediators that would ease communication between stakeholders	<i>We do communicate, [...] we have a signed cooperation agreement in which the [association members] have committed themselves that when we need leadership, they will take care of it, of course for a fee. When we needed them twice last year, they were not there. [...] Some within the association would participate, while others within the association are against it...</i>
2	Differences in financial capabilities, resources between the stakeholders involved	<i>He [association member] has no money. And when one appears with the money, a feeling of jealousy arises within some people in such societies. [...] The Association feels excluded. Because he is aware of the limitations of his possibilities and consciously or subconsciously there is a human reaction in the sense of "yes, he is rich now and we are poor" ...</i>
3	Implemental absence, insufficient engagement of formal (state, municipality) actors in the long term	<i>The umbrella of the municipality should be above all of this. The mayor should come to the meeting between him [entrepreneur] and the association. I'm surprised that everything has stopped. The association stopped and even he [the entrepreneur] should show more after seven years. The tourists were confused in the village, they saw that there was a split [conflict]. That's how I see the role of the municipality ...</i>
4	The question of general quality of life vs. the commodification/ marketisation of the cultural capital on the site	<i>Some associations choose the business way. They realised that if we don't make money for our area, someone else will come. Well, the membership fee runs for the first couple of years, everyone is excited, they come to the general meeting and give a few euros. Then it slowly goes downhill. All the associations on the Karst went downhill like this. If you don't turn the situation around at that time to prepare some activity then ...</i>
5	The problem of devalued general trust in/between the stakeholders	<i>Perhaps you really can't count on the Association if you're going for one big story. A clear vision, clear goals need to be explained to the people, and not to implement some background stories again. As soon as people feel that something is not clean, it's over. Transparency and trust, that's the foundation ...</i>

Sources: Fakin Bajec 2005, 2011, 2020a, 2020b.

The case of Debela griža chiefly points to the problem of communication between the actors involved. The problem of communication can be interpreted in several ways. As such, the exposed problematic characteristics supplement each other and explain the general picture of the communication problem when it comes to management of the cultural heritage. The problem of communication affects the basis of the system for participation, which cannot gain momentum if certain basic conditions go unmet. First, the interviews clearly identified the problem of the absence of systemic supportive mechanisms, tools that should sustain the general process of holistic participation. These supportive mechanisms should function as intermediators and would help balance the relationships according to the interest of stakeholders. Second, the long-term durability of the participation process is very weak since it lacks a long-term financial structure, clear roles of the formal actors (state, municipality), and a clear elaboration of the micro and macro development goals on the local, municipal and state levels. Also noticeable is the complete absence of a more detailed analysis of the contextual situation with respect to the socio-economic structure, developmental goals, and perceptions of the primary users prior to the start of the process of managing the cultural heritage on the site. Finally, the problem of the eroded trust between local stakeholders is significant and obstructs any faster solving of other problems in the field. The problem of the missing intermediary mechanism is connected to the problem of trust because not one of the potential mediators present (e.g., the state, municipality) enjoys sufficient trust from the groups of stakeholders involved.

### **3.3.2 Local communities managing “empty” monuments owned by the Republic of Slovenia**

The second set of secondary data refers to the results of a study on a compendium of seven local communities dealing with the management of immovable cultural heritage in their territory. From this perspective, the analysis does not concentrate on specific cases but on an overview of reactions of representatives of local communities concerning the management of “empty” monuments, namely, those that have yet to be assigned a proper use and are owned by the state. Local communities in this case are represented by municipalities, which function as partial caretakers of the immovable cultural heritage at sites. The cooperation between the state and local communities in this regard is limited and spans from the mere occasional use of immovable cultural heritage for various purposes to more intense uses and supports where municipalities partially assist with the preservation of the heritage owned by the state. The current cooperation between the state and local communities is very complex, as revealed by



research conducted on the issue in 2015 and 2016 (see Kuševič 2016). The study contained semi-structured questionnaires that were completed online by key employees who deal with cultural heritage in seven municipalities that have empty monuments owned by the Republic of Slovenia. The questionnaire consisted of closed questions, although the interviewees were given the possibility to upgrade each answer with supplemental information. As the questionnaire was addressed to the whole municipality as the legal entity in question, each collection of answers formed part of the official answer of the whole municipality as concerns the management of a specific heritage site. The sample thus consisted of seven representative units of official answers collectively constructed by key employees of the municipality dealing with heritage questions according to ZVKD – the Act on the Protection of Cultural Heritage (e.g., the mayor, mayor's office, municipal council, commission, committees). The names of municipalities, monuments and the official responses of the local communities to particular questions related to the management of cultural heritage of the study are displayed in Table 4.

The answers provided by the municipalities regarding the management of specific immovable cultural heritage indicate some problematic aspects that are insufficiently discussed in heritage studies in Slovenia. First, the data expose the issue of the financial and physical maintenance of heritage. The municipalities clearly express dissatisfaction with the maintenance of the cultural heritage that is managed by the state, but at the same time are unwilling to transfer the maintenance and ownership of it to the local community and hence into their area of responsibility. In this perspective, immovable cultural heritage is seen as a type of financial burden and the municipalities are not prepared to risk a further rise in costs in the municipal budget. Although the municipalities acknowledge the great importance of monuments for the development of municipal cultural activities, they are not willing to engage more in the management of the cultural heritage owned by state. In this respect, the municipalities would rather renounce part of the sovereignty or autonomy in terms of control over cultural capital originating in the immovable heritage than have to deal with complex strategies that would require knowledge and resources to manage it. We might speculate that with the present constellation of relations between the state and local communities (municipalities), the latter actors have more modest ambitions for the management of cultural heritage, despite being aware of its importance and the opportunity that it brings for a further elevation of the quality of life in the local community. This assumption is further supported by responses that indicate the need for further inclusion or cooperation between the economic (private) sector and the management of cultural heritage. The municipalities in this regard indicate support for the deeper integration of PPP (public-private partnerships) in order to optimise the

maintenance of the heritage and increase financial benefits for the municipality. This interplay between the marketisation/commodification of heritage and the preservation/use of the heritage for the development of cultural activities and improvement of the quality of life is very sensitive and fragile given that it easily moves beyond the expectations of specific groups within local communities and may incite conflict. Due to these problematic aspects, the municipalities prefer to keep the status quo and generate a chaotic ambivalence while simultaneously supporting state dependence and independence when it comes to the management of immovable cultural heritage.

**Table 4: Responses from local communities concerning the management of cultural heritage.**

QUESTION	Location: Dolane – Grad Borl/ Municipality of Cirkulane	Location: Črnomelj– Kulturni dom/ Municipality of Črnomelj	Location: Dornava – Dvorec Dornava/ Municipality of Dornava	Location: Dvor pri Žužemberku – Železarna Dvor/ Municipality of Žužemberk	Location: Leskovec pri Krškem – Grad Šrajbarski turn/ Municipality of Krško	Location: Spodnji Slemen – Grad Viltuš/ Municipality of Selnica ob Dravi	Location: Turjak – Grad/ Municipality of Velike Lašče
Are you satisfied with the current care provided by the state for the cultural monument?	YES	NO	NO	NO (partially)	NO	YES	NO
Would you like the state to transfer the cultural monument into the ownership of the municipality?	NO	NO (Until the local community is organised in such a way that it can serve its purpose)	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES

Would you like the local community to take over the management of the cultural monument?	NO	NO REPLY (Note: same as in answer 2 above)	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES (in case it is not transferred into ownership)
Which programmes/ activities would you implement at the monument if you owned or managed it?	A historical presentation, a museum, events, catering services, wedding ceremonies, education, accommodation services	A historical presentation, an exhibition space, events	A historical presentation, a museum, an exhibition space, events, catering services, wedding ceremonies, education	A historical presentation, a museum, an exhibition space, events, catering services, education	An exhibition space, events, catering services, wedding ceremonies	A historical presentation, a museum	A historical presentation, a museum, an exhibition space, events, catering services, wedding ceremonies, education
Is the cultural monument important for the development of cultural activities in your area?	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
If you owned or managed the monument, would you invite a private company to participate in its management?	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES (in the case of catering services only)
Would you be willing to cooperate with the municipality's activities (cultural, tourist) even if the monument was leased to another entity?	YES	YES	YES	Depends on the tenant	YES	NO	YES

Source: Kuševič 2016.

## 4 Conclusions – local heritage management in the context of systemic obstacles

In the area of cultural heritage management, it is not unusual to notice in the media often unverified information stating that local communities are obstructing the development of a more sustainable type of immovable heritage management due to the formation of civil initiatives, the presence of NIMBY syndrome elements and other issues that block any faster project implementation. Regardless of the radical actions (physical protests, obstruction) that local communities sometimes use in order to prevent the implementation of specific cultural heritage projects, it is necessary to note that the issue is far more complex. In reality, the picture seems much more grey than black-and-white. The analysed data show that local communities miss certain key elements, tools and mechanisms that would enable them to fully participate in the process of implementing sustainable heritage management.

1. The case of Debela griža shows that one of these key missing elements lies in the incapacity of the existing system for participation (on both formal (legislative) and informal (legitimacy) levels) to provide appropriate channels of communication with various layers of local stakeholders. The incapacity of the actors involved to present, specify and include the interests of multiple local groups seems to generate imminent complications that translate into a direct conflict between the parties involved even though they both might hold similar aspirations.
2. The second missing element is the incapacity of formal systems (institutions that deal with heritage management) to build up actor empowerment and enable the process of deliberation for local stakeholders (Peck and Theodore 2015). The process of deliberation that would try to activate the presence, active engagement in local environment and help actors to contribute to the solving of situations in the field is neither well formulated and nor supported. The case of Debela griža suggests that actors were prevalently left on their own to self-organise and act based on their own knowledge and capacities to build up specific modes of management in relation to cultural heritage. Notwithstanding the intention of local stakeholders to participate in the process of managing the cultural heritage, supportive systems to permit them to both learn about the possibilities of sustainable heritage development and learn from the experience of other similar cases in order to help develop a suitable model for the specified context are missing on the systemic (formal) level. Each model of sustainable cultural heritage management must be adapted to the context of the location in which it is embedded. This notion assumes there is a need to integrate expert (outsider) and local (insider) knowledge to optimise the situation in the field in order to ensure the harmonious co-existence of the

use of the heritage and the interests of local communities. Only such a model assures long-term sustainability in terms of adequate quality of life for the local community, while also providing for the optimal preservation and use of cultural heritage for the general public.

3. The inconsistencies between stakeholders in all selected case studies suggest that each time stakeholders try to produce a specific model of cultural heritage management, the process suffers from a shortage of information in the sense of decisions made on unclear or non-transparent information on the subject. The data from the responses of local communities with empty monuments owned by the Republic of Slovenia reveal considerable differences between how communities, municipalities, the state and other stakeholders imagine the heritage management. The whole process is currently based on the principle "whoever pays owns the place". Due to weak collaboration between stakeholders, full focus is placed on the economic (financial) costs associated with the support and maintenance of heritage while less effort is made in the direction of a detailed analysis of all possible tangible and intangible factors of heritage that might influence the long-term well-being of the community and society in general. This suggests that an information gap exists with regard to what represents cost and benefits for the community. Here, the absence of a detailed interdisciplinary socio-economic elaboration of the context and the situation in the field prior to starting the process is a problematic aspect of the formal system for the management of cultural heritage.
4. The data also show that strong elements of new localism are present in the localities of the selected case studies. The fact that all of these localities recognise both the social and particularly economic characteristics of cultural heritage management suggests that local communities have developed the capacities to detect the elements needed for heritage models to function on a wider (global) scale. The presence of such elements in local communities indicates that the cost-benefit analysis process is considered and that stakeholders are willing to engage in elaborating the needs for the community and general public. The conflicts between various stakeholders on the local and state levels shows that the elements of new localism are not well recognised and, above all, neither well connected nor integrated into the system of participation when it comes to the sustainable management of heritage. The low trust in formal actors in particular obstructs any further integration of elements of new localism into the general system for cultural heritage management. The low level of trust is consistently regenerated through the existing institutionalised system that does not support the gradual empowerment or deliberation of local actors in terms of managing the cultural heritage.

The final answer to the question of whether particular elements of localism are obstructing the implementation of sustainable heritage development in Slovenia thus has two parts. On the micro-scale, some elements of localism indeed stop specific actions that could lead to the development of local sustainable capabilities. Yet, on the macro scale, the formal system for participation in heritage management does not allow the sufficient inclusion of stakeholders in the process, even though that would allow better optimisation of the sustainability process for the local community. The problem of obstruction originating from local communities is thus not deliberate in sui generis but a consequence of deficient systemic structure that deals poorly with the management of cultural heritage on the local level and does not support the longer, re-iterative process of consultation. Here, the Slovenian case is a typical reflection of an “immature socio-political system” (Kos 2002: 21) in that while it might advocate public development and participation there are inadequate support mechanisms and a financial structure (see Coombe and Weiss 2015; Cantillon and Baker 2020). Old localisms in this constellation are used as a “weapon” by local communities to prevent unwanted consequences to current lifestyles or general quality of life. The elements of new localism (e.g., recognition of global economic capabilities of heritage, importance of content creation on heritage sites etc.) are present but not activated on the local level due to systemic failures. These include the incapability of the political and institutional system to recognise and enable a sufficiently trustworthy environment to start and produce a balanced outcome that satisfies all stakeholders involved. The problematic aspects suggest that local actors are not sufficiently equipped or given the possibility to learn about the issues and how to deal with the challenges they face. These answers definitively require more elaborate future studies that combine analysis of the legislative system, the operation of institutions, and the social capital and value system in Slovenia pertaining to heritage studies.

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