



CONTEMPORARY HERITAGE

Executive summary



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Executive Summary

This first contemporary heritage report from the Basque Observatory of Culture deals with the new challenges and definitions around the subject from a generic viewpoint, helping to focus, generate and contribute ideas to the debate. The overall management of heritage is the focal point, without going into analysis of the regulations and procedures of involved sectors, such as museums, archives, bibliographic heritage, etc.

This report starts out from the basis that the concept of heritage and the elements that make it up are under constant review. In contrast to a traditional idea associated with the material and the link to memory and the historical and monumental value, new visions arise which separate it from materiality and antiquity. Thus, over the last few years, the contemporary dimension has been increasingly added to the concept of heritage itself as well as its management.

To define and analyse the concept in all its complexity it is important, in the first place, to focus on the concept of heritage from its most traditional viewpoint. Thus, its function is to protect, preserve and place value on those assets considered to be of special artistic, historical, cultural interest, and which has traditionally been tied to the safeguarding of assets passed down to the present day and which deserve special recognition for the value they represent. In this regard, UNESCO defines heritage as:

"Our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations."

Currently, the debate about the conservation of historical cultural heritage, that is, the most traditional heritage, has been surpassed and there is a general agreement at international level regarding both the need for protection and which assets it is necessary to preserve. Beyond this consensus, new debates are emerging regarding the productions that are currently being carried out and the need or not to conserve all these goods. It is in precisely this debate where the concept of contemporary heritage, still in the process of definition, arises.

The different conventions being proclaimed, above all by UNESCO, have guided the evolutionary process of this concept and, at the present time, the division between the **natural** –that tied to the landscape and nature– and the **cultural** –tied to the action of human being– is widely accepted. Likewise, cultural heritage has been divided between **material** and **immaterial**, thus differentiating between **tangible** and **intangible** types of heritage.

The fact is that the conceptualisation of heritage and the elements making up part of it has changed substantially over the years. The evolution of societies, the emergence of new artistic manifestations and the revolution brought about by digitisation involve new challenges which inevitably raise questions about a straitjacketed definition of cultural heritage.

The changes in the concept of heritage are stated in the conventions, letters, declarations and recommendations approved by international organisations such as UNESCO, the European Union and ICOMOS, where new meanings and definitions are generated. The review offered in the long version of the report analyses the main contributions of the different international conventions, allowing us to observe the evolution of the concept, from its most limited historical vision to new wider viewpoints.

What this normative review shows is that the idea of heritage value has notably evolved over time, and that those criteria linked to materiality and antiquity are less and less exclusive to be considered as such. Currently, the need to acknowledge the value of different cultural expressions gives rise to a thorough, much more inclusive review which must face new challenges. The concept of heritage has not stopped evolving since the beginning of the 20th century to the present day. However, the lack of a clear and widely accepted definition of contemporary heritage makes it difficult to carry out generalised initiatives to protect it.

Contemporary heritage is facing new challenges inevitably leading to specific preservation needs. A development stage and the need to adopt an overall conceptualisation are two of these main challenges.

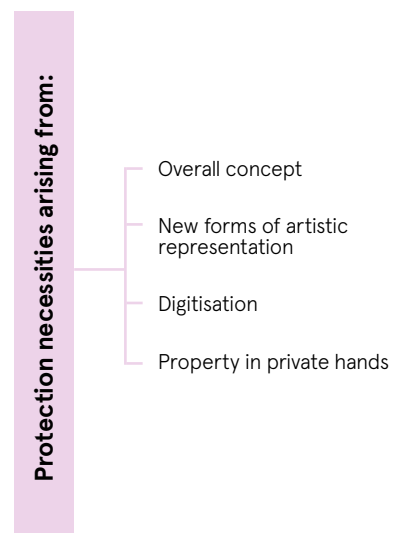
HERITAGE IN DEVELOPMENT	
One of the most important aspects defining contemporary heritage is that it is developing, which is linked to a series of challenges:	
Temporality	Heritage has been traditionally tied to antiquity and history, although it has become more evident that artistic and cultural manifestations produced recently also need to be protected, preserved and brought to light. Despite this, a significant difficulty arises from the fact that temporal distance facilitates social consensus on the heritage value of that to be declared. Although, especially when it comes to architectural heritage, there is some confusion between the terms contemporary and modern, in this report the use of the term contemporary refers to the 20th and 21st centuries.
Memory	Because contemporary heritage is linked to productions from the 20th and 21st centuries, it is often part of the present memory and involves current communities strongly linked to it. Although this link with living memory is one of the most characteristic features of contemporary heritage, it can lead to management difficulties due to the involvement with certain assets liable to be declared heritage. In this regard, involving communities in the preservation without detracting from technical and expert opinions is one of the challenges to be considered.
Diversity and quantity	The change from an elitist model of the concept of heritage related to the exceptional and monumental towards a different more open and inclusive model which incorporates the rural and urban worlds and the working and middle classes, added to the enormous constructive activity of the 20th century, implies a different and much more inclusive approach to heritage management. This need to open up to the ordinary, the day-to-day and the industrial involves significant challenges arising from the impossibility of preserving everything.

HERITAGE IN DEVELOPMENT	
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Gender gaze	This opening up of the concept also involves taking into account aspects of day-to-day life which, from a traditional vision of heritage, had become invisible.
Consensus and social value	It is much easier to identify the value of something extraordinary and unique than to do so with things one lives alongside. That is why it is necessary to define criteria allowing the reading of the social value given to a certain cultural production or manifestation while paying attention to the diversity of criteria which may enter into play.

OVERALL CONCEPTUALISATION	
Another distinctive element is that progress is being made towards an overall conceptualisation of heritage, not only by widening the consideration of the cultural asset, but also extending it to management linked to protection, preservation, promotion, dissemination and enjoyment. Overall consideration of heritage highlights:	
In the heritage asset	More importance is given to the holistic concept of the heritage element, recognising the environment that accompanies the cultural asset or manifestation.
In heritage management	There is an ever-greater commitment to management which takes into account the different levels of governance involved in the management of the asset, including the involvement of matters of sustainability, integrity, acknowledgement of value and financial opportunities.

Contemporary heritage is a wide, flexible and dialectical concept and is in a process of definition which has not yet reached its end. The later decades of the 20th century were characterised by a review and profound renewal of the conceptual approaches to cultural heritage, from which three key elements stand out: the adoption of a dynamic definition of heritage, the adoption of an inclusive gaze at heritage, and the widening of the social evaluation criteria. Despite the trend towards an overall vision of heritage, both in its definition and in its management, studies carried out on contemporary heritage have mainly focussed on the analysis of architectural, industrial, landscape and immaterial heritage.

These new challenges arising from the evolution of heritage as well as the changes brought about by contemporaneity and society's progress also involve the emergence of new protection needs arising, for example, from progress towards an overall conceptualisation, from the appearance of new forms of artistic manifestation, from the processes of digitisation and from the existence of a large quantity of heritage in private hands.



In addition to specific new protection needs, management is widened giving importance to dissemination, awareness raising and the enjoyment of citizens. Heritage should become closer to society and make itself known, boosting the acquisition of enriching values and knowledge which help build inclusive, cohesive, tolerant, innovative and strong communities.

To safeguard it and meet these protection needs, there are currently protection tools and procedures to legally ensure its preservation. In this regard, one of the first steps to ensure the protection of an asset is its recognition, which is usually linked to a legal procedure which does not cover all the existing protection needs.

Despite the complicated nature of the declaration process, even when these assets are correctly declared, the lack of specification regarding particular protection tools makes correct safeguarding of the heritage difficult. The lack of specific instruments and tools is most evident in the most contemporary heritage (such as the immaterial, the environmental, the industrial, cultural landscapes and itineraries, etc.).

Current Basque legislation establishes the procedures to be followed to declare an asset of cultural interest, and they differ depending on whether the level of protection assigned is special, medium or basic. In addition to establishing the corresponding declaration procedures, the different protection regimes applicable to each heritage asset typology are also itemised.

DECLARATION PROCEDURE FOR AN ASSET OF CULTURAL INTEREST	
Special and medium protection cultural assets	Basic protection cultural assets
1. Initiation of the declaration dossier. Initiation involves the immediate application of protection.	1. The declaration takes place when the asset is included in the municipal urban catalogues.
2. The declaration dossier is subjected to public information and hearing of the interested parties.	2. It must be included in the Basic Protection Cultural Assets register.
3. The special or medium protection assets declared are included in the register.	

PROTECTION REGIME		
Group	By protection levels	By typology
Common protection regime of cultural assets	Specific regime for special protection assets	Specific regime for immovable property
	Specific regime for medium protection assets	Specific regime for movable property
	Specific regime for basic protection assets	Specific regime for intangible assets

Protecting heritage does not only involve preserving it and avoiding damage but also preserving, safeguarding, disseminating, raising awareness and promoting its use and enjoyment of it, etc. In this regard, heritage protection measures must cover matters from the recognition of cultural value to preservation, restoration and outside communication.

In the Basque Country, cultural and natural heritage is gathered and catalogued in the corresponding register. Analysis of this register enables an in-depth look at the most important characteristics of contemporary assets in terms of protection and typology. However, the registration of cultural assets is a delicate and laborious process and often one single dossier includes multiple assets to be protected. Although this integration and group vision of the heritage element is essential to guarantee its correct protection, it often complicates the initiation, registration and protection process, and makes quantifying the heritage existing in a territory very complicated.

The report includes an analysis of contemporary Basque heritage, which should be read with precaution due to the difficulty of quantifying heritage protection. This analysis has been carried out with a quantitative (analysing the register) and qualitative (analysing those assets declared in the last 10 years) perspective. In general terms, this analysis shows that:

- Bizkaia is, by a long way, the historical territory with the most protected cultural assets, in both the special and medium categories.
- Currently, most of the protected assets are assets classified as special protection, followed by those inventoried with medium protection.
- Although the majority of protected architectural assets have been linked to monumental buildings, the protection of 20th century assets has been very significantly linked with residential properties, followed by industrial or civil buildings and those devoted to services.
- The majority of unprotected assets are of residential or industrial type.
- Industrial heritage, residential, civil or public architecture, immaterial manifestations, cultural itineraries, industrial landscapes, etc. are elements and typologies that had not received explicit recognition and heritage value until the end of the 20th century or beginning of the 21st century.
- The bulk of contemporary heritage recognised in the last decade is included within the typology of landscape (with emphasis on industrial landscapes) or industrial heritage.
- The evolution in the typology of protected assets is clearly a reflection of contemporaneity, of the widening of the concept of heritage and of the assignation of social value to that which traditionally has gone unnoticed.

As has been seen, contemporary heritage management raises particular challenges and specific needs which had not emerged as strongly until now. In this context, the existing protection tools are often inadequate for guaranteeing the protection of heritage in development, and they need a greater level of detail to guide protection of, above all, intangible heritage. Faced with this situation, the report proposes a series of innovative elements which may inspire future action lines in matters of contemporary heritage management.



Collaboration with private investors in heritage management	Public-private collaboration is a rising trend in all fields which, in some cases, allows high levels of action to be attained.
Definition of effective access policies and dissemination of heritage	To guarantee effective access to be in contact with and to the knowledge of heritage it is necessary to activate continuous dissemination policies and to generate and set in motion public information tools. This is of interest both to position heritage within the reach of the whole population and to inform and raise awareness about protection needs.
Social consensus	Promoting social consensus around the contemporary meaning of cultural heritage is essential to offer guidance regarding its valuation criteria.
Education and socialisation of cultural heritage	It should be planned from the formal education system itself and it is important to achieve this social valuation.
Smart management of heritage	This new contemporary heritage management must be based on the permanent adoption and revision of scientific and technical knowledge and the constant updating of catalogues and inventories.
Economic promotion	Beyond the new tools and the definition of suitable policies for contemporary heritage management, heritage is currently an economic promotion tool in itself.

In conclusion, this report has aimed to shed light on the current debate about how to understand and protect contemporary heritage as a whole. It emphasises the theoretical evolution of the concept, gives details of the new challenges and specific protection needs and gathers some elements which may serve as inspiration to carry out future actions in this field.

Currently, the conceptualisation of heritage has evolved and assets are now understood as an element of the whole whose conservation requires the protection of both its immediate environment and the inside or the group of elements making it up. Additionally, the management of heritage is also evolving and increasingly adopting an integrated management value that covers from its protection to its preservation, dissemination, communication, recognition of value and projection in financial terms.

As has been remarked in this report, contemporary heritage management faces new challenges, both regarding its own theoretical conceptualisation, which must be widened to include heritage elements which have not been covered up until now, and with regard to its management, which must widen its focus. Protection tools have sometimes proved insufficient and once again it becomes necessary to explore and recognise good practices, to mark out protection measures, above all for immaterial heritage, to provide valuation details of a heritage element or to raise awareness among the public, among other things.

