

**BUILT HERITAGE AS THE COMMON
GROUNDS FOR ALL!**

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RCHTECH
**EMPOWERING YOUTH TO REDISCOVER EUROPE'S
ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY**

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The relationship between built heritage and the sense of belonging.

There is something about standing in front of a giant! Be it built, natural or cultural heritage, when a person absorbed by its beauty or greatness the mind stops thinking about worries, deadlines and to-do-lists but rather focuses in every little detail that shapes and adds to what you love about it, in the depth of time that it's been there and the events that it has survived. Have you ever been in a situation that you've stood in front of a certain building or monument that has diminished your self-consciousness, beliefs, achievements and so on. It doesn't matter much where you are from, that your beliefs and achievements become quite insignificant, and all that matters is the power of this infatuation that causes you to inquire more about its story and its relationship to historical events until it intertwines with your sense of identity and belonging.

If this has ever happened to you, you are not the only one! There is something about heritage that calls to our sense of belonging because it acts like a bridge that connects us to history, cultural traditions or meaningful places related to events that marked a turning point for a community of people or even a country. Identifying oneself with heritage sites and everything that they englobe (stories, legends, historical events), helps individuals and especially young people figure out who they are and where they come from, and leads the way to understanding to who they want to become.

Not only does built heritage reinforce personal identity, but it also strengthens collective identity, the sense to belonging to a community and provides the conditions for social cohesion to happen. On the other hand, historic building, squares, cultural landmarks and other sites serves as focal and meeting points where people gather and interact with each-other. It is here that social capital thrives and where often active citizenship initiatives take place.

Research by Historic England found that people living in areas with a richer historic environment report stronger social networks, greater civic participation, and higher levels of community engagement. Through volunteering, local history projects, cultural events, and the preservation of historic places, heritage can strengthen social bonds, promote mutual understanding, and enhance community resilience, particularly during periods of social change or uncertainty. As such, heritage serves not only as a record of the past but also as an active resource for building more connected, inclusive, and cohesive communities.

European heritage is important for young people because it helps them their place, first local communities and subsequently in the broader European context. It helps them make the connection between their local and national identity to the wider European values and narratives while encouraging respect and appreciation for diversity. The European Commission and the Council of Europe emphasize that cultural

heritage plays an important role in citizenship education, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion, and the promotion of democratic values. By engaging with heritage, young people develop critical thinking skills, a greater appreciation of cultural diversity, and a stronger understanding of how the past informs present-day challenges and future opportunities.

As Europe continues to evolve socially, culturally, and politically, heritage remains a valuable bridge between generations, cultures, and places. Its significance lies not only in preserving the past but also in its capacity to inspire dialogue, foster mutual understanding, and support a shared vision for the future. Ensuring that young people can engage meaningfully with heritage is therefore essential to maintaining its relevance and sustaining its contribution to society.