

Chapter 12 /
**Conceptual Fuel for
Reviving the Past /**
Creating a heritage
revival in today's Europe /
Linde Egberts



Interest in history has moved to centre stage in Western culture.

Its popularity extends to television, films, books, video games, theatre, and even to the street. The past is omnipresent in popular culture and daily life and its role is complex. Historical films, adventure games, war commemorations, vintage cars, retro fashion, and music performances on authentic instruments are just a few of the many ways in which the old, the past, and the original are ceaselessly brought back to life.

The various ways of engaging with the past discussed in this companion can serve as tools for conceptualizing revivals of specific heritage themes on an international scale. Here, we will draw on some of the central notions from previous chapters in an effort to provide the means for such conceptualisations, as well as try to offer some further general, yet well-defined guidelines.

The term *revival* is used in this companion to stress the necessity of bringing a part of our past *back to life* in order to become part of a shared identity. This is particularly the case with early medieval heritage, conceived on a European-wide scale. This book itself is rooted in the European project Francia Media, which aims at finding a place for the heritage of early medieval Europe in the hearts and minds of today's Europeans. Francia Media, the Middle Frankish empire of the ninth century, can be seen as a cradle for today's European culture, as many aspects of the latter are rooted in this early period. Its potential value as a basis for understanding Europe and its cultures justifies a *revival* of this little known phase of European history.

Experience!

Heritage projects should be concerned, above anything else, with the creation of meaningful experiences. The chapters in this book discuss many fascinating examples of co-created experience, ranging from international heritage routes to alternate reality games and re-enacted historical battles. In line with the ideas of the "experience economy", I have empha-

sised the importance, when creating a concept for a heritage revival, of taking the needs and interests of the audience as one's starting point. A desire for experiences determines the way our economy works nowadays; consumers want – and are prepared to pay for – meaningful experiences that they can share with others. Here, I would like to focus again, though somewhat more concretely, on the process of making a heritage revival more effective by taking experience as the point of departure. Therefore, I will start by repeating the characteristics of a meaningful experience.¹ In a meaningful experience, all an individual's senses are involved and focused upon with heightened concentration. His or her sense of time changes during the experience, because he or she is immersed in it, and he or she feels emotionally connected to what is happening and is in contact with the environment through active participation. Therefore, each meaningful experience is a unique one for every individual.

These meaningful experiences are the ones that people remember best. Some of the cases included in this companion show how these characteristics can be incorporated into a heritage revival. One example, the construction of a new castle based on thirteenth-century ideals, in Guédelon, France (begun in 1997), is mentioned in Chapter 8. The progress there is slow – the construction will take an estimated 25 years – but it has already given hundreds of thousands of visitors the chance to observe this experimental undertaking. Through its website, the organisation recruits volunteers, with or without technical skills and/or basic knowledge of French, to help build this *new yet old* castle complex. About 700 volunteers join the professional team annually to learn through experience; they dive into this challenging adventure and get the chance to develop many different kinds of traditional craft skills. At the same time, they acquire historical knowledge and a deep understanding of how our ancestors lived and built.² Visiting the site or joining the construction workers means that all the senses – sight, smell, sound, touch, taste – are involved. Every

Professional and volunteer masons place the keystone in a vault of Guédelon castle in 2011, France (Thibault Martin, 2011).



individual can contribute and learn at the same time, and, of course, one's sense of time also changes when visiting the site or contributing to the project.

Guédelon is a true heritage revival – one that is sustainable and fits in well with our ideas of co-creating meaningful experiences, but it is not very international in character. Many foreigners come to the quarry, workshops, and construction site, but the heritage theme is typically French, and the activities are very local, by design. A classic example of a truly international heritage experience is walking the pilgrim routes from anywhere in Western Europe to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, a topic discussed in Chapter 11. This experience is meaningful in historical terms, and also spiritually, to most pilgrims, as well as being an occasion for outdoor activity. Yet, it is not overseen by one particular organisation or project, but rather is primarily created by the pilgrims themselves, relying on international travel information, online pilgrim communities, and local hosts and facilities.

Along the routes an entire specialised industry has grown up catering to the needs and interests of the pilgrims, who range from sports fanatics and students to firm believers and retirees with a special interest in history and heritage. This is a typically demand-driven enterprise which enhances the experience of the pilgrimage as much as possible.

In assessing the Santiago pilgrimage routes, it is worth shifting our focus from supply to demand. There we find that leisure, mobility, health, personal development, and relaxation are the dominant themes.³ This is because they are what consumers or audiences care most about. It does not need much imagination to foresee that a heritage revival can easily encompass multiple interests, as in the case of the castle of Guédelon or walking to Santiago. A heritage revival is, thus, a suitable way of creating the context in which members of the audience can live, accumulate worthwhile experiences, and give meaning to their lives.⁴ This is not the same thing as offering an environment full of entertainment for all the senses, as is done at annual fairs. Rather, it is a true dialogue between an

View on the building site of the castle of Guédelon, France, from the south-west (Guédelon, 2012).



organisation and its audience. Many initiatives in the fields of archaeology and heritage, as well as at museums, are already experimenting with an experience-oriented approach, through personalised interactive applications, serious gaming, and mobile technologies.⁵ The challenge is now to make them truly co-creative and international, as well. Conceiving a project from a demand-perspective can be quite a challenge, since it requires one to relinquish a certain degree of control. One has to trust the projected audience to be capable of co-creating meaningful experiences.

Place, time, and travel

While taking co-created experiences as a point of departure, I also want to underline the importance of *placemaking*. Some readers may know this concept from heritage studies, but Pine and Gilmore use it to make clear how organisations can and should move away from advertising and focus, instead, on

creating places – physical or virtual – where the audience has the opportunity to experience their offerings.⁶ For heritage revivals, this might be much less difficult than for commercial companies offering services or goods, since historical sites can easily serve as the projects' *flagship locations*. Some organisations choose to have mobile *flagships*, moving from one place to the next to reach as many people as possible. Traveling exhibitions do the same, as do replicas of historic boats (literally *flagships*), which sail the same routes as the original ships. One example is an Australian replica of James Cook's *Endeavour*, which sailed around Australia, to Europe and to the East and West coasts of America.⁷

Thus, historical places are a very important feature in a heritage revival, as is the experience of travelling from one historical place to another. As has been said before, connecting historical places in multiple countries is what makes a heritage revival truly international. By connecting modern hubs, networks, and landscapes with those of the past, such projects offer travellers the chance to create their own experience, physically establishing connections between places, and between the past and today. Heritage routes and trails are well suited to providing experiences that are authentic in many different ways. The goal is to establish a balance between, on the one hand, inviting an audience to have a certain kind of experience by offering (practical) information and, on the other, leaving enough space for the audience to create its own experience.

As the analysis of existing heritage routes in this companion shows, most European heritage routes do not take full advantage of the potential offered by the principles of experience-based design. Setting the creation of satisfying experiences as a main goal for heritage routes or trails can help realize its potential to become a successful *revival tool*.

Pine and Gilmore recommend connecting a revival to existing *experience hubs*, i.e., the places where people already are.⁸ The famous Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam did this quite successfully by opening a new branch inside the nearby



Schiphol International Airport. This *airport city* also includes a large shopping mall, restaurants, and new lounges where typical Dutch foods and products can be enjoyed.

An earlier discussion showed how online strategies offer opportunities for a heritage revival to expand its audience, but here I would like to stress again how *virtual placemaking* can enhance the experience of physical places when the two types are thoroughly integrated. Just like an actual place, a website should be an “experience venue worth visiting,” instead of just presenting the brochure-like format of most websites, which only states who we are, what we do, and how we do it.⁹ The website *is* who we are. If experience is important to a heritage revival, then it should also be important for its website, its online *flagship*. Social networks, forums, and platforms serve as online experience domains which, if properly used, can enhance the experience of a heritage revival.

A replica of the *Endeavour* and ocean liner *Queen Mary II* both circumnavigated Australia in the same period; the latter did it in 20 days, the former in 19 months (James Morgan/Getty Images, 2012).

Authenticity

If *experiences* are our point of departure, *authenticity* is the crucial signpost along the path towards a workable concept for a heritage revival. In Chapter 1, I discussed how important authenticity is in our Western society and what kinds of authenticity exist – whether alone or in combination with other types of authenticity. Authenticity is “what consumers really want,” and it has become the main factor in the economic success of products, services, and experiences. While a heritage revival does not always primarily need to be economically successful, it can benefit immensely from the understanding of how authenticity works for consumers and audiences. In many chapters in this book, authenticity is either present in the background or is explicitly discussed as a key notion, as in the case of the representation of history on television or of the re-enactment of historical events.

In discussing the many different types of authenticity, I illustrated how they can sometimes compete with each other. It often happens that heritage experts, spatial designers, governments, and citizens have different interpretations of what is authentic, as well as different notions about how a particular aspect of history should be conserved, changed, or represented. In practice, authenticity is an extremely complex and sensitive topic, and it should be handled with care. For example: what is an authentic representation of a war?¹⁰ Is it one offered in a museum setting, in a computer game, in a film, or in a *live* re-enactment? Such re-enactments, discussed in Chapters 5 to 8, have aroused considerable criticism and debate among scholars. According to one of them, Jerome de Groot, re-enactors “present an ‘authentic’ inclusive or participatory history which lacks the messy ‘edge’ of events. Public reconstruction is interested in presenting a sanitised, closed version of warfare, of avoiding the unrepresentability of war.”¹¹ At the same time, the drive for an authentic representation is great when it comes to the local and the specific. Re-enactors tend to shy away from historical controversy and present them-

selves as non-political, even in groups specialised in re-enacting, say, the actions of Nazi soldiers. Of course, in such cases a compromise has to be reached with respect to authenticity: re-enactment is recognised as a game or a role in which some important authentic parts are to be left out and which, in some instances, can create distance rather than understanding of the past.¹²

But is there a *good* way of representing war? Or any controverted past? What if several parties in a former conflict contribute to the revival? What does that mean for interpretation of this event and their current relationship?

Is it all right to strive for rendering memorable experiences when you want to convey knowledge about the past? History encompasses many historical sensations, but all representations of the past, whether in writing, in images, or in a play, are a contemporary interpretation of the past. The element of play and gaming obviously complicates things further, but where exactly does one draw the line between what is acceptable and what isn't in any given revival? And whose task is it to decide on these matters? How does one communicate the dilemmas of historical interpretation and representation when history is presented in the form of a *game*?

True to oneself

The answers to these questions are different for every project, but a general response lies in the following considerations. Our aim is always to have people perceive our revival as authentic, whatever the elements we choose to incorporate – say historical cooking or violent computer games. To achieve this requires careful steering through many options as we seek to reach audiences and gain attention. New approaches and a more tolerant attitude towards various forms of authenticity in creating heritage experiences are crucial. The most important thing of all, however, is to stay true to the core values of your revival. Don't make dubious concessions in the effort to attract more attention. Define what you are aiming for in your revival,

but also make it very clear what you will not do. This companion suggests many ways of reviving the past in present-day Europe. Some of them, perhaps, are just at the limit of what you may find acceptable. I certainly do not want to suggest that all the core values concerning how we should treat history should be thrown overboard. This would not only result in violating our own respect for the past and our own standards of how to represent it; it would also result in low credibility, since no one will perceive a revival as authentic if it does not maintain its own values and essential features. This is the fine balance that you need to maintain as you seek to offer meaningful experiences and to welcome the many forms in which authenticity can be expressed, without, at the same time, “selling yourself out” by adopting strategies that go against the very essence of your particular heritage revival. Finding this balance is, of course, not done easily or quickly. Finally, remember that a heritage revival should be a co-creation and that your audience’s opinion is, therefore, your most valuable source of information.

Building bridges

The main task for a heritage revival is bridging the gap between professionals and the public regarding the most appropriate ways to experience, interpret, and represent heritage and histories. Part 2 of this companion presents many *tools* for creating meaningful experiences in cooperation with the audience. Building bridges should be one of the main concerns of a strong heritage revival movement; for we need these bridges to be able to engage others in our projects and experience heritage together.

But in order to build bridges to our audiences, we need to establish solid connections between the relevant professions as well. Those who are oriented towards the past (historians, archaeologists, and art historians for example) will have to work together with professionals who have a very different

focus, such as communication through images or making a profit from a new initiative. One serious challenge is to develop new strategies for engaging audiences. As mentioned in Chapter 4, it may take a new attitude, a different way of thinking to engage an audience effectively, particularly in the realm of digital strategies. Chapter 9 focuses on the development of appropriate 3D visualisations, but it also discusses how difficult it can be to rethink visualisations and shift away from showing off the newest techniques and producing visualisations simply because experts feel the need to re-arrange the data they have on a certain historical object or place. It truly takes a new, experience and user-oriented attitude to create digital strategies capable of engaging the audience that a revival needs. In short, the crucial element here is not techniques – it is attitude.¹³

Building a bridge to an audience requires building bridges between disciplines. Connecting the virtual world (websites, digital strategies, games, 3D visualisations and even film and television) to the physical world of exhibitions, spatial design and heritage routes is a great challenge, but it also offers many opportunities for creating meaningful experiences for a wide audience. Minke Walda mentions the case of the Liberation Route, which offers an extensive on-the-ground visitor information system (making use of large boulders), combined with a website packed with audio files, pictures and written information. The website also offers special events and package deals to make visiting the route easier.

The Liberation Route will not face the challenge of building another bridge, as some other international heritage routes are. I am referring here to the differences in conceptions of what constitutes a meaningful experience to be found in the various cultural regions within Europe, for example between the eastern and western parts of Europe. Large, international bodies of heritage that are very suitable for international heritage revivals are, for example, the Struve Geodetic Arch, a series of points established by a survey undertaken to measure a part of the earth's meridian and covering a distance of 2,820 km,

which was discussed in Chapter 2. It has been listed by UNESCO World Heritage since 2005 and crosses ten different countries, from Norway in the north to the Ukraine in the south. It would therefore pose major challenges in bridging the differences between the varying notions of a meaningful experience across these large distances. Another example of an international heritage that offers opportunities for a revival is the Atlantic Wall, a large coastal defence system built by the Nazi's between northern Norway and southern France during the Second World War. A third example of an international heritage project with broad potential opportunities is provided by the remains of the Iron Curtain, the border that divided Europe in two blocs until only two decades ago. All of these examples would face the challenge of overcoming cultural differences and varying ideas of what a meaningful experience is.

Connecting with allies

One cannot build bridges working all alone. The *tools* described in Part 2 show how existing media, platforms, and initiatives can be used to stage a new heritage revival. It is noted there, as well, that the line between privately and publicly funded initiatives is becoming ever more blurred. Here, I want to urge you to find allies – organisations which would be valuable additions to your undertakings and could help you reach the audience you need. Embed your project in existing infrastructure; you don't have to reinvent the wheel and start from scratch. Create your own website, but link it to social media and platforms – online and in the real world – through which you can reach their communities. And, whenever possible, enlist the help of noted personalities in these communities. Find allies that suit your core values, but don't be too hesitant to involve local, regional, and national businesses involved in tourism, or even in other fields. Why not work together with a hitch-hiking or couch-surfing club and a television station to connect all the historic places in your project in a televised

hitchhiking contest? Why not open your revival with a travelling re-enactment festival connecting all your important sites and involving many local and regional re-enactment clubs and networks in order to give your project a photogenic start? Why not cooperate with a Rhine River tourist company to design a special historic cruise for seniors along your heritage route? Why not become a *puppet master* in an alternate reality game that involves many media and businesses and centres around the unique and yet undiscovered treasures of the heritage you have on offer? Let others help you to create new and valuable heritage experiences!

Chapter 11 discussed the need for partnerships for European heritage trails from a different angle. As the analysis of existing routes showed, many of them remain abstract, existing mainly as a partnership between cultural institutions, rather than as marked routes, suitable for tourist use. Partnerships with companies, local governments and other organisations could provide opportunities for translating the concept of a heritage route into a concrete route, literally brought down to earth and furnished with sufficient information to enable tourists to find their way.

Another argument for connecting with allies concerns the sustainability of a route or trail. The routes analysed by Minke Walda in Chapter 11 illustrate how difficult it is to keep a route alive after European funding for the initial years has run out. To secure a life for a route after collective funding ceases it is essential to find allies, quite possibly among the business sector, who will share an interest in maintaining the route for a longer period of time. Commercial consciousness is essential to keep a route alive when public funds have run out. The Oranjeroute illustrates how commercially rewarding a heritage route can be and how cooperation between public and commercial organisations can result in a sustainable, long-term, international heritage route, with a rich offering of package deals and visitor information. Developing a financially viable earnings model for a heritage route is essential to guaranteeing that it will be a long-term, self-sustaining initiative.

The case of Cradles of European Culture

Let us now apply some of the recommendations in this companion to a specific case. Our example is *Francia Media*, which is not only an actual heritage revival, but is also the context in which this companion was developed. *Cradles of European Culture: Francia Media*, to give the project its full title, is funded by the European Commission and is managed by a network of twelve institutions in nine European countries. Its aim is the revival of early medieval heritage, which, culminating in Charlemagne's reign, offers a fruitful basis for understanding many aspects of present-day Europe. Among the significant elements of modern Europe whose origins lie in early medieval times we may mention: infrastructure, religion, languages, learning, music, architecture, art, and our knowledge of antiquity, as transmitted to us through scholars and copyists. Project members assume primary responsibility for an early medieval heritage site such as a church, a castle complex, or a valuable museum collection (or more than one). These locations, which are scattered all over Western and Central Europe, sometimes with large distances in between, include: Prague, Ravenna, Arles, Nijmegen, and Ingelheim, among many others. Each partner has a specific story to tell, and taken all together the stories constitute a valuable window onto the processes of unification and diversity in early medieval Europe – and right up until today. The story which emerges from this whole network of heritage sites and museum collections is, therefore, certainly a highly interesting one. Of course, the question which arises is: how does this collective project, with its rather limited budget, capture the attention of a large audience? Assessing *Francia Media* in the light of the key issues discussed in the companion, there are several recommendations we can make in this regard.

A great asset of the project is the *Francia Media Heritage Route*, which is now in development. Because the route has not yet been launched, it is impossible to analyse any results regarding cooperation, sustainability, user experiences or num-

bers and type of users. It is possible, however, to offer some recommendations based on the analysis in this companion.

The route offers great opportunities for engaging large audiences and creating new experiences by working in cooperation with them. We need to consider what the audience needs, namely meaningful experiences, and conceptualize the route from that perspective. An answer must be found to the question of what kind of approach would make the audience feel the urge to travel. In the case of *Francia Media*, one could consider organizing a series of related events (a travelling re-enactment festival, experimental archaeology, craft courses, sports tournaments, etc.).

In any case, the route should be easily usable for people who do not have the means to travel large distances, and it should offer the opportunities to create experiences of the early medieval past on a relatively smaller scale. It should also be adapted to various modes of transport and take into account the experience travellers are likely to have while going from one site to the next. One option would be to conceive the way people travel from one place to the next. Why not use the Rhine and Rhone Rivers, vital avenues of travel and trade in the Early Middle Ages, as portals to the historic experience? And why not offer travel on modern Rhine barges, primitive rafts, or historic vessels, scheduled so as to connect historic places, landscapes, and ancient infrastructures? One could also explore the possibility of re-tracing the medieval land roads, some of which are still used, in their new forms, as highways (like the Hellweg in the German Ruhr region), or are still functioning as pilgrim routes, for example, to Santiago de Compostela or Rome. This way, the audience is not obliged to travel from one point to the next to create a set of experiences: simply being underway becomes the experience itself.

There are many other historically significant places which are not as yet part of the Francia Media Heritage route but which represent a part of the Carolingian heritage in Europe. The city of Aachen for example, or the monasteries of St. Gall (Switzerland), Prüm (Germany), and Murbach (France), the



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Het Valkhof

Velzeke

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Ingelheim

Prague Castle

Kostolány pod Tribečom

Gradišče above Bašelj

Ravenna

Biskupija-Crkvina

Montmajour abbey

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Francia Media and all partners of Cradles of European Culture (CEC)

1:12,000,000



Francia Media (843-1033): Middle Frankish Realm



CEC Project partners

- 1 Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, Ljubljana
- 2 Ename Center for Public Archaeology and Heritage Presentation (EEC)
- 3 Provincial Archaeological Museum of Ename (pam Ename)
- 4 Provincial Archaeological Museum of Velzeke (pam Velzeke)
- 5 Culture Lab, Brussels
- 6 University of Rijeka
- 7 Institute for Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague
- 8 Aix-Marseille Université - CNRS - LA3m (UMR 7298)
- 9 Römisch-Germanische Kommission des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts (RGK), Frankfurt
- 10 Istituto per i Beni Artistici Culturali e Naturali della Regione Emilia-Romagna (IBC), Bologna
- 11 VU Research Institute for the Heritage and History of Cultural Landscape and Urban Environment (CLUE), Amsterdam
- 12 Gemeente Nijmegen Bureau Archeologie & Monumenten G280
- 13 The Monuments Board of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava



Heritage sites from the Heritage route



Associated partners

- a Service Publique de Wallonie, Jambesthe Slovak Republic, Bratislava
- b Vrije Universiteit Brussel/ Université Libre de Bruxelles
- c vtbKultuur, Antwerp
- d Museum of Croatian Archaeological Monuments, Split
- e Národní Muzeum, Prague
- f CERHIC EA 2616: Université de Reims - Champagne - Ardenne
- g Université de Lorraine - CLSH Nancy 2
- h Museum bei der Kaiserpfalz, Ingelheim
- i Mittelalterliches Kriminalmuseum, Rothenburg
- j Università degli Studi di Padova
- k Institut Européen des Itinéraires Culturels, Luxemburg
- l Narodni Muzej Slovenije (National Museum of Slovenia), Ljubljana
- m Heritage Solutions, Oudenbosch
- n Leiden University
- o Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen

Carolingian heartlands (Belgium), and battlefields in the border areas are only a few examples of places which could enrich the currently existing network and thereby offer the audience the opportunity to see more while travelling less.

The final shortlist

I want to conclude this companion with a final list of tips for building a strong heritage revival concept:

- Make the co-creation of meaningful experiences a primary goal;
- Embrace many kinds of authenticity;
- Stay true to your ideals and maintain your standards;
- Mix and match *tools* and media that reinforce each other;
- Remember that connecting places by offering the means of travelling between them makes a heritage revival truly international;
- Seek out discussion and exchange between professional historians and non-professional audiences;
- Find allies – both commercial and public organisations – to carry out the project together;
- Secure the life of your project by foreseeing sources of income which will be available after the initial funding runs out!

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