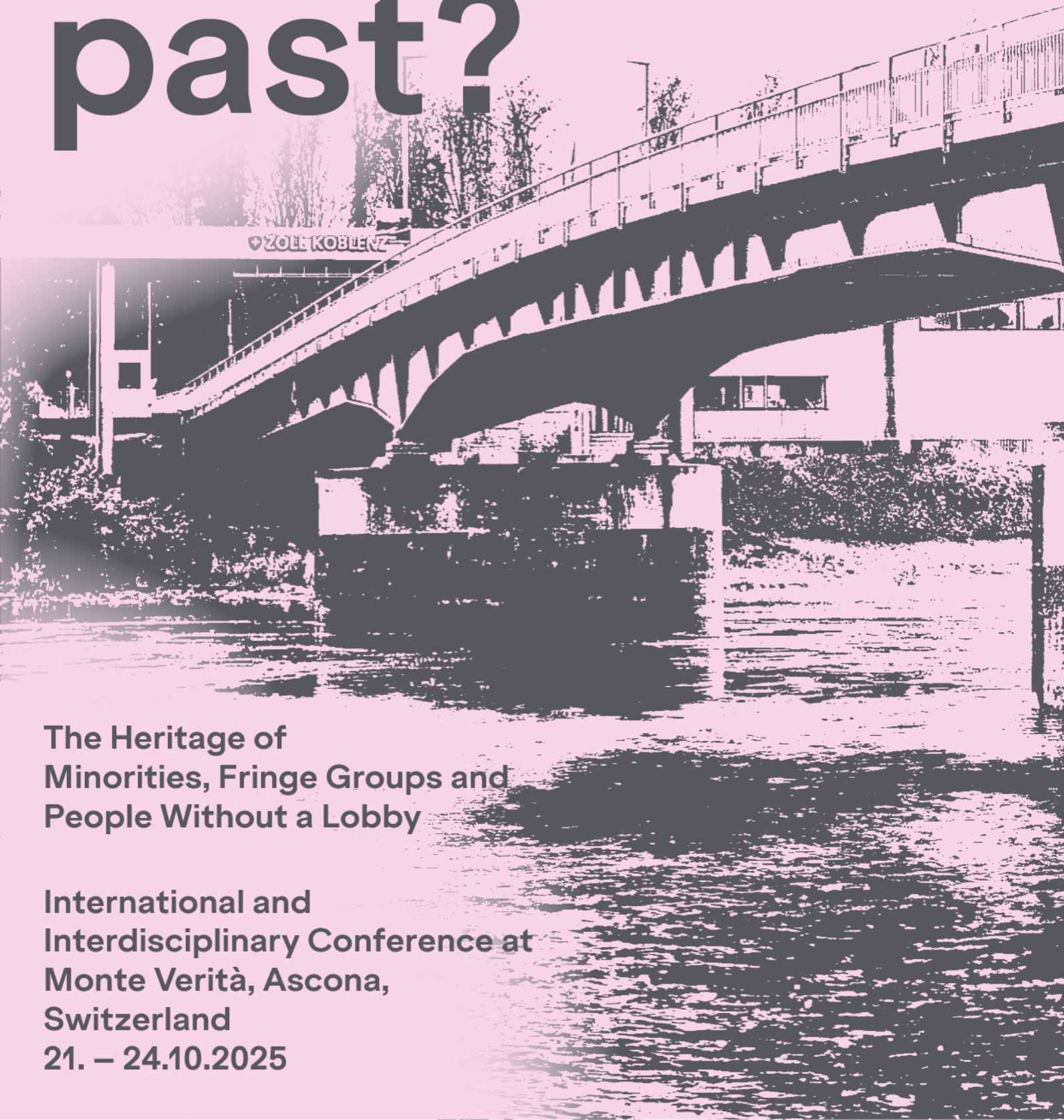


A future for *whose* past?



The Heritage of
Minorities, Fringe Groups and
People Without a Lobby

International and
Interdisciplinary Conference at
Monte Verità, Ascona,
Switzerland
21. – 24.10.2025

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In 1975, the European Architectural Heritage Year was launched with the motto: “A future for our past.” Fifty years later, we ask: *Whose past will monument preservation safeguard in the future?*

Climate change, globalization, migration, civil rights movements, and digital transformation have deeply reshaped living environments. Despite ongoing discussions about inclusion and representation, institutional frameworks and mechanisms still often marginalize those without political leverage, representation, or historical visibility. Although the boundaries of what is considered ‘heritage’ are shifting, the concerns of already marginalized groups are still not being sufficiently taken into account.

This conference addresses the question of who defines what is worthy of preservation. Under what conditions and through which voices, histories, and cultural expressions are certain narratives excluded from heritage frameworks? What roles do cultural experts, associations, and policies play in shaping (or limiting) recognition? Can and should we rethink or even completely redefine monument preservation from the perspectives of social justice, welfare, and remembrance policy?

The expanding discourse around intangible cultural heritage, Indigenous architecture, and postcolonial memory has already changed the field of monument preservation—but much work remains to be done. Would it be possible to conceive and practice monument preservation in a more inclusive way, and to learn from the perspectives of those who have been overlooked or underrepresented? What would it mean for heritage conservation to focus more on the heritage of marginalized communities? Which places and stories would become visible? And how would practice—materially, legally, institutionally—have to change to make room for this part of heritage?

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Finding Heritage in Unexpected Places

Rethinking Heritage Significance of Everyday Environments by Everyday People

Lidwine Spoormans/ TU Delft
Rienje Veenhof/ TU Delft



Courtyard view of a case study in Almere; © Victorien Koningsberger

This article argues for the emancipation of everyday environments in the current heritage discourse, building on the premise that unlisted, everyday neighbourhoods and buildings contain heritage significance. Everyday heritage has emerged as a key frontier in heritage studies (Fairclough, 2009). This development aligns with a broader shift, repositioning heritage as a community-led rather than expert-led process, moving attention from global to local interests and from objectivity to subjectivity. As a result, heritage is increasingly viewed as a resource for local identity and placemaking, rather than a static asset for conservation (Fairclough, 2009). The concept of everyday heritage refers to the built and lived environments that communities continuously use and experience, often without formal recognition as heritage, yet carrying the potential to significantly influence place identity and foster historical continuity. (Mosler, 2019; Fairclough, 2009). This requires a broader view of heritage practices, starting with rethinking heritage assessment, putting local users at the centre.

Our research into the heritage attributes of unlisted, residential neighbourhoods in the Netherlands from the 1970s/1980s reveals that different stakeholder groups and individuals attach a myriad of values to everyday environments. This supports two key arguments: first, heritage significance encompasses a broad spectrum that extends beyond conventional values of age, aesthetic, and cultural-historic value, as people convey value through a wider variety of attributes. In our case studies, people's views on heritage attributes are mediated by personal histories. People value their environment through the lens of family history and identity, e.g. childhood homes. They also mention 'hidden heritage': places that impacted their lives in the past but have been demolished, like schools or swimming pools. Stories and memories emerge as important attribute types. Other 'everyday' attributes key for daily users of the neighbour-

hood include activities, a sense of collectivity, and social contacts with neighbours. Although these attributes often remain invisible to outside perspectives, they play a vital role in the local heritage significance of these neighbourhoods.

Secondly, people attach values to everyday built environments, often considered 'unexceptional' by experts. Ordinary objects without evident aesthetic or historic significance, like blue plastic storage roofs in the Almere case, are valued as signifiers for 'their' neighbourhood. Similarly, residents value their house because it is their 'own', and often the first house they bought or rented. Investigating the lived experience provides depth to our understanding of the role of heritage in everyday lives. Identity and feelings of ownership make ordinary things extraordinary. This gap in perception is evident when comparing resident responses to professionals or 'outsiders', who focus on external attributes and the general historic narrative. Residents also acknowledge these, but additionally mention daily use attributes and compare situations across day and night, seasons, and years.

This underlines why everyday heritage, instead of being viewed as marginal and therefore disregarded, should be central to academic and institutional attention. Heritage significance, as a dynamic and social construct, should be informed by people's perception and the impact on their daily lives. Moreover, everyday environments require investigation due to their ubiquity and the large groups they affect. This shift challenges the heritage field to look beyond exceptionalism and to rethink the objects, buildings or places that we consider significant. As put by Lefebvre (1987): "The everyday is (therefore) the most universal and the most unique condition (...). Why wouldn't the concept of everydayness reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary?". Expanding the range of heritage objects and the values attached to them requires a broader spectrum of stakeholders in (re)defining heritage. Explicit efforts should be made to engage marginalised groups with limited lobbying power. This research aimed to reach a more diverse group by developing and applying a digital tool that combines visual and textual information and avoids expert language. Without the inclusion of a wide range of 'everyday' citizens, an informed, equitable assessment of the significance of everyday heritage is impossible.

Keywords: Everyday Heritage, Community-based Heritage, Participatory Methods, Digital Tools

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