

RESULTS

Needs Assessment: Inclusive Remembrance Culture in *Europe*

across Austria, Cyprus, Italy, Portugal & Serbia



Co-funded by
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This research explores how remembrance culture works across Europe today*

to identify

- shared patterns
- important differences
- collective needs

with particular attention to questions of **inclusion**, **pluralism** and the **role of artistic approaches**.

*the scope of the research should also be understood in light of what pluralistic remembrance actually means: it encompasses inherently diverse, intersectional, personal, familial, collective, as well as competing perspectives and histories. Capturing this plurality is not feasible within one study. Instead, the research prioritized an exploratory overview of gaps, needs, and challenges.

Remembrance culture in Europe is fundamentally shaped by power.

i.e., by decisions about whose histories are told, whose suffering is acknowledged, and whose contributions are rendered visible.

Remembrance culture is plural and contested.

In all five partner countries, the research revealed not a single, unified memory of the twentieth century, but a landscape of competing narratives between:

- official and unofficial histories,
- dominant communities and marginalised groups,
- state-sanctioned commemoration and grassroots memory-making.

How these tensions are navigated determines whether remembrance culture reinforces existing inequalities, or contributes to a more inclusive public life.

Participants frequently distinguished between pluralism and inclusion.

Pluralism:
recognition and
visibility of diverse
histories and
perspectives

Inclusion:
who has genuine
access to and
participation in
remembrance
processes

Both of these dimensions are necessary.

Pluralism without inclusion can reproduce tokenism, while **inclusion without pluralism** runs the risk of domesticating difference, rather than genuinely engaging with it.

The gaps in European remembrance culture are not marginal.

Across all contexts, the histories of women, non-binary and LGBTQIA+ people, minorities and minoritised groups, Roma communities, working-class populations, colonised peoples, and migrant, diasporic and displaced communities remain insufficiently represented in official memory.

A central gap remains when it comes to intersectional perspectives.

Marginalized narratives are not simply absent, but actively excluded.

Remembrance culture, as it is currently structured, is not equally accessible to all.

- Language barriers and missing multilingual provision
- socioeconomic inequalities
- presupposed levels of literacy, mobility and cultural familiarity
- (physical) inaccessibility
- urban vs rural disparities

Beyond practical barriers, there remains also a deeper question of who feels addressed and included.

Exclusions reproduced by structural conditions, funding arrangements, institutional practices, politics and social hierarchies, shape who has access to remembrance culture and on who's terms.

Education is one of the primary arenas in which remembrance culture is transmitted, contested and renewed across generations.

Schools, universities and non-formal learning spaces all shape which histories young people encounter, and how they are framed.

Politically sanctioned and well-documented historic events tend to dominate, while the experiences of marginalised communities, colonial and gendered perspectives get sidelined.

In several countries, participants described schools as places where remembrance feels more performative than genuinely exploratory.

In this context, art-based approaches to remembrance education become especially significant, and are seen as being more effective in creating genuine engagement with difficult histories.

Remembrance culture is never simply about the past.

A recurring concern is the tendency to treat remembrance as a historical exercise.

But participants across all five countries were clear: inclusive remembrance is a democratic necessity. That means making visible the connections between historical injustices and the discrimination, exclusion and inequality that persist today.

When remembrance culture is **genuinely inclusive, participatory and rooted in the present**, it has the potential to strengthen solidarity across difference, to foster empathy and mutual recognition, and to support the development of active, informed and critically engaged citizens.

Most urgent areas in need of action:

The fragmentation of remembrance initiatives limits impact and prevents the kind of sustained and systemic change that the field needs.

Limited institutional support and resources will leave the field of remembrance structurally fragile.

Political sensitivities and contested histories contribute to constraining the space available for critical and pluralistic remembrance work.

The findings presented in this report point clearly toward the

Need for a shared transnational framework on inclusive remembrance

In the report, you'll find an outline of what such a framework could look like.

Read the full report for all findings of the needs assessment, in-depth insights on the five national contexts, and the outline for a transnational framework.

We thank everyone who took part in the research and shared their perspectives, expertise, and (artistic) practices with us. We also want to acknowledge the vital and often underfunded, unpaid, and underrecognized work that has already gone – and continues to go – into fighting for recognition and visibility of the histories of many different communities and people in the five countries.

Inclusive Remembrance Practices & Art as a Methodology

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we asked participants

When do remembrance
practices **feel meaningful
and authentic?**

What role do art and arts-based
approaches play in creating a more
inclusive remembrance culture?

This needs assessment identified a range of initiatives that stand out for their effectiveness in **building more inclusive and participatory remembrance cultures.**

Alongside state-led remembrance, a rich and diverse landscape of **civil society organisations, community groups, grassroots initiatives and individual practitioners** are doing some innovative and inclusive work on remembrance across all five partner countries.

What are characteristics of inclusive and impactful remembrance initiatives?

Shift from symbolic visibility to genuine self-recognition

They do more than just add marginalised groups to existing narratives. They create the conditions for people who have been systematically excluded to recognise themselves as historical actors with agency and significance.

Effective initiatives treat the **process of memory-making** as valuable.

Creating dialogue between older and younger generations - intergenerational dimension where memory is tested, reinterpreted and then kept alive.

They create lasting change beyond the project itself - The most significant good practices identified are the ones that leave something behind.

They do not choose between **emotional engagement** and **critical reflection**.

Research across the five countries shows
**Art functions as a distinct
methodology for engaging
with the past.**

**This makes art a genuine methodology
through which to create more inclusive and
participatory remembrance practices.**

The evidence gathered makes for a **strong case for arts-based approaches as a central, rather than supplementary component of inclusive remembrance work.**

Participants noted that **art's particular strength lies in what it does not claim**; unlike textbooks or official commemorations, which often assert singular truths, artistic works embody multiple perspectives, and leave space for personal meaning-making.

Artistic engagement has the capacity to openly ask questions, to accommodate contradiction and complexity, rather than simplifying it into a single account. This is seen as a strength, as memory is by nature plural, contested and incomplete.



The Miners Strike Monument (2018) in Lefke (CY) commemorates the historic struggles of the region's mining workers and their collective fight for labour rights and dignity. Located in a town deeply shaped by copper mining, the monument serves as both a memorial and a reminder of the social and environmental impact of the mining industry on local communities. Through its symbolic presence, the work connects Lefke's industrial past with broader themes of resistance, solidarity, and social justice in Cyprus.

Credit: Selin Genc

Artistic practices

- create spaces where multiple and contradictory truths can **coexist**
- where **emotions** and **experiences** are taken seriously alongside historical knowledge
- where **audiences** are invited into **active reflection** rather than being a **passive participant**
- can **reach communities** who may not engage with academic and institutional forms of remembrance
- capacity to intervene in and contribute to public discourse beyond existing frameworks.
- Art engages with memory intellectually and spatially, **making the past present, while orienting that experience toward the future.** This capacity to bridge past, present and future is one of art's most distinctive contributions to inclusive remembrance.
- **Embodied dimensions** such as performative rituals, walks through contested urban landscapes, and participatory theatre produce a different form of engagement, which, according to many research participants, shifted their understanding of difficult histories.

Artistic engagement, but not without its risks.

Research participants described the professional and social consequences faced by artists and cultural practitioners who engage with politically sensitive histories, including marginalisation, censorship and restricted access to institutional support.

These consequences and pressures **directly shape what work is produced, by whom, and under what condition it reaches the audiences.**

The freedom to engage critically and creatively is not equally available, and **artists who choose to engage with remembrance through the arts must reckon with the potential consequences.**

The most significant and transformative acts of remembrance often take place **outside institutional walls.**

Often, the most effective practices are initiated and carried out by civil society organisations, community groups and individuals, receiving little to no structural support and remaining consistently underfunded.

Short-term project grants, unpaid activism and personal dedication therefore sustain much of what exists.



Photograph from the verbatim theatre performance Moving Women by the theatre company Astro Fingido, part of the Cycle of Invisibility, which highlights the lived experiences of women in the Municipality of Paredes who, throughout the 20th century, carried furniture on their backs as part of their work and daily survival. Credits: Paulo Pimenta/Image courtesy of Astro Fingido



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The most significant and transformative acts of remembrance often take place **outside institutional walls.**

A distinct feature of this landscape is the degree to which communities have organised themselves into more structured grassroots initiatives in response to the failure of official remembrance.

Where state institutions have been slow to recognise or actively exclude particular histories, affected communities have created their own infrastructures.

The research has shown consistently that the

Communities most affected by gaps in remembrance culture are also the ones with the most knowledge, creativity and commitment to address them.

These initiatives embody a fundamentally different approach to remembrance, one that is **participatory, relational and rooted in lived experience.**

Many organisations must **actively fight for a seat at the table** in remembrance-related dialogues and policy processes, **rather than being engaged and recognised as co-decision makers.**

In cases where the state or institutions implement initiatives, the following aspects have emerged as **markers of good practice**

- They involve communities **at every level in significant ways** and pay for their contribution and involvement.
- While involving communities, they also take up responsibility for pluralistic remembrance themselves and **don't place the burden exclusively on underrepresented communities.**
- They involve **long-term strategies** to continue to take over responsibility for remembrance.
- They introduce **meaningful measures** to make remembrance **accessible** to members of the community at its centre.



This 2023 project, Come2Art, blends contemporary art techniques - frottage and caviardage - to engage audiences with history through immersive, sensory encounters. By transforming monuments into interactive experiences, it invites reflection on their origins, intentions, and the contexts that shaped them. Led by artists Elena Tortia and Valentina Sciarra, with historian Federico Tenca Montini, the initiative took place along the Italian-Slovenian border in Trieste/Basovizza and Gorizia. Credits: IoDeposito ETS

The practitioners, communities and organisations whose work has been described in this report

demonstrate that more inclusive, democratic, and meaningful forms of remembrance are not simply a distinct aspiration, but a present reality

Giving communities real co-ownership of their own histories, that connect the past with the present; alongside participatory design, intersectional thinking, sustained community involvement, and a commitment to relevance.

although one that remains fragile and inconsistent.

Across all five countries they are doing extraordinary work, often with very limited resources, and have reached several positive milestones that have already made remembrance culture more pluralistic and inclusive on a wider level.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

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The findings of this needs assessment **point to a number of concrete actions** for a more inclusive remembrance culture in Europe.

the recommendations address

politymakers
cultural institutions & remembrance
organisations
educators & youth workers
artistic practitioners

recommendations for

cultural institutions, remembrance organisations

- **Moving from tokenistic representation towards genuine co-creation** with communities whose histories are being addressed, and ensuring that **affected communities have real influence over the narrative.**
- **Developing accessible formats** across language, (physical) access, geographical reach and educational background, so that remembrance does not remain structurally limited.
- **Building partnerships** with other civil society organisations and grassroots initiatives, recognising them as **equal partners.**
- **Investing in long-term preservation and contextualisation** of community archives, oral histories and digital collections.
- **Creating platforms for transnational exchange of practices and methodologies** that contribute to a shared European remembrance culture, across borders.

recommendations for

educators, youth workers

- **Seeking out and using educational resources produced by and for marginalised communities**, including podcasts, artworks, oral histories, and community archives.
- **Creating space** in the classroom or workshop for **students' own identities and family histories** to be brought forth, in dialogue with broader historical narratives.
- **Connecting historical memory more explicitly to contemporary social realities**, and supporting young people to draw and recognise meaningful links between past injustices, and present-day forms of discrimination and inequality.
- **Integrating arts-based and participatory methodologies into remembrance education** as a standard approach.
- **Pursuing professional development opportunities** in inclusive remembrance methodologies, and **advocating within institutions for the time and resources** to implement them meaningfully.



Photograph of the board game Roma Heroes, created by ERIAC as an educational tool on Roma resistance and used as an exhibition piece at ERIAC Serbia. Credit: Bela Varadi for ERIAC Serbia



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recommendations for

artistic practitioners

- **Engaging critically with questions of risk and responsibility** when working with **contested histories**, and **building support structures** for colleagues who face professional or social consequences.
- **Using digital tools and platforms thoughtfully**, ensuring that digitally produced remembrance work is preserved, and is accessible over the long term.
- **Prioritising genuine community engagement and partnership** in the design and delivery of remembrance projects, ensuring that artistic agency does not override the perspectives of the communities involved.
- **Advocating for sustainable funding models** that allow arts-based remembrance work to develop depth and continuity over time.

recommendations for

polycymakers

- **Establishing sustainable, long-term funding mechanisms for community-led and civil society remembrance initiatives**, replacing short-term project grants with structural support.
- **Reforming the national curricula** to include colonial histories, minoritized experiences, migration and displacement as core components of historical education.
- **Ensuring diversity in leadership and governance in publicly funded cultural and memorial institutions, with meaningful representation of minorities in decision-making roles.**
- **Protecting and expanding civic space** for critical and pluralistic remembrance work, including safeguards against the political instrumentalization of memory.
- **Recognising and formally commemorating the histories of communities that are currently absent from official memory** (e.g. establishing missing memorials, adding commemorative days to official calendars).



“People Who Dream of Peace & Connection” is an Inside Out community action reimagining Cyprus beyond division. In June 2022, 99 large-scale portraits were installed across both sides of Nicosia’s historic centre, symbolising hope, unity, and a shared future for the island. Credit: Çağın Özsoy



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Building a genuinely pluralistic remembrance culture across Europe requires structural change

in how public funding is allocated, who holds decision-making power, what is taught in schools, and how the state relates to communities whose histories it has historically marginalised or ignored.



Presentation of the collected photographs within the communities of origin, without explicit captions, allowing participants to collectively interpret the people and places depicted and to reconnect with shared memories and lived experiences. Credits: Associação AO NORTE

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