UDK: 930.85(497.4)
DOI: 10.5937/KonGef24091L
Прегледни научни рад

MONITORING THE CONDITION AND ENDANGERMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN SLOVENIA FOR EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT AND ADAPTIVE REUSE

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Abstract: The protection of cultural heritage in Slovenia is organised by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (IPCHS), and the Register of Protection Regimes is compiled by the Register of Immovable Cultural Heritage, which includes over 32,000 cultural heritage units. Entry in the register recognises the value of the listed building or site as cultural heritage and its classification as a cultural monument of local or national importance determines the way in which it is protected. A spatial analysis and review of the official national heritage register shows that the inscription of heritage buildings and sites often depends on the commitment of regional conservators, while the declaration of a cultural monument of local or national importance depends on political will, awareness and public engagement. Many areas with immovable cultural heritage also pose a major challenge for spatial planning. The balancing of needs and interests in spatial planning at all levels, but especially at the local level, often leads to conflicts and quick, unprofessional decisions. A particular problem is the systematic identification and monitoring of heritage at risk, which should ensure proactive role on more endangered but culturally valuable objects. As endangerment screening is not systematic at the national level and has only been carried out on a very limited scale, we developed a simple participatory mapping application in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture. As part of the study, we tested the application with geography students and students of ethnology and cultural anthropology at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, who visited and inventoried more than 1000 cultural heritage units. Through participatory mapping and cooperation between different disciplines, it is possible to record a larger number of cultural heritage units and identify critical areas/objects in poor condition more quickly and in a timely manner. We estimate that 10% of ICH in Slovenia is seriously at risk, which demands quick response with targeted protection, conservation and renovation.

Keywords: cultural heritage register, heritage at risk, spatial pressures, collaborative mapping, Slovenia

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage is an important driver for sustainable development, sustainable urban planning, climate protection, etc., as shown by the numerous projects (e.g. CLIC, SoPHIA, HEI-Transform) and research (e.g. Douglas, 2006; Gustafsson, 2019; Foster & Saleh, 2021) on these topics. Cultural heritage contributes, among other things, to improving the quality of life and well-being of residents, promoting investment, GDP growth, biodiversity, etc. (UNESCO, n. d.). Carl Elefante (2012) has already pointed out that "the greenest building is the one that is already built", and cultural heritage is also key to achieving the objectives of the Green Transition, as emphasised in the Green Paper on European Cultural Heritage. The document identifies cultural heritage as an asset that can promote sustainability, resilience and inclusive development and thus contribute to the objectives of the Green Transition. In the context of the Green Paper on European Cultural Heritage, adaptive reuse plays a central role as a key strategy to promote sustainability, preserve cultural

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heritage and address the challenges of climate change and environmental degradation. Adapted reuse ensures longevity, resource efficiency, preservation of tradition, etc., and the practises are also in line with circular economy principles and contribute to reducing the carbon associated with the construction of new buildings (Potts, 2021; European Commission, n. d.). Cultural heritage sites and areas play an even more important role in this process as they have a range of values that are important to society, e.g. historical, social, artistic, etc. Apart from their utilitarian value, these sites and areas should therefore be treated with greater care and attention should be paid to preserving their material and spiritual values. It is important to bear in mind that cultural heritage does not exist in itself, but is created by the various actors in the local environment.

In Slovenia, the field of cultural heritage is regulated by the Cultural Heritage Protection Act (ZVKD-1, 2012). The Act defines cultural heritage in detail, establishes measures and procedures for the protection of cultural heritage from damage, destruction, illegal export and other threats, establishes procedures for the recording, registration and documentation of cultural heritage, etc. Among other things, the Act also defines the competences and responsibilities of institutions such as the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (IPCHS), which is responsible for the monitoring and management of cultural heritage. The Institute is divided into 7 regional units covering the entire country. They deal with the registration of cultural heritage and monuments, their valorisation and the procedures for their announcement. As part of their administrative tasks, they also issue cultural protection requirements and authorisations or opinions for interventions (ZVKDS, 2024).

The Cultural Heritage Register is the central database for cultural heritage in Slovenia, which provides information to support the implementation of heritage protection and is also used for the presentation of cultural heritage and research, as well as for education, training and the development of public awareness of cultural heritage (Ministrstvo za kulturo, 2024b). The Cultural Heritage Protection Regimes (eVrd) layer, which consists of data on cultural heritage protection regimes and data from the Register of immovable cultural heritage, comprised 32,329 units in 2024 and covers 11.9% of the area of Slovenia (Ministrstvo za kulturo, 2024a) (Figure 1). The size of the heritage protection areas makes it difficult to coordinate needs and interests in spatial planning at all levels, which leads to conflicts and frequent unprofessional decisions. The systemic approach to conservation is (too often) adapted and withdrawn to large investment initiatives and high spatial pressure (Dolff-Bonekämper, 2010), while remaining too strict and restrictive for smaller private units.

Comprehensive management and long-term conservation of heritage would therefore require, on the one hand, identifying the most endangered units and preventing their deterioration through appropriate measures and, on the other hand, defining more clearly the potential for further development of immovable cultural heritage (ICH). The monitoring of the endangerment of cultural heritage, which should serve to act more actively and quickly in the case of more endangered but culturally valuable objects, is very limited due to the large number of objects and the lack of professional conservators on regional level. Cultural heritage is threatened on the one hand by neglect and abandonment and on the other hand by the rapid dynamics of spatial development and investment pressure. The latter lead to radical and rapid changes in the state of conservation and, above all, the value of immovable cultural heritage throughout Slovenia.

This paper presents the state of immovable cultural heritage (ICH) in Slovenia and critically evaluates the current management system of ICH. It outlines an approach for the systematic monitoring of the condition, use and threats to ICH in Slovenia that could lead to a more efficient use of public funds for its conservation and renovation that is also in line with sustainable development policies and strategies.

2. INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN SLOVENIA

The protection of cultural heritage in Slovenia is organised by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage. Intangible cultural heritage is protected under three basic protection regimes: cultural monument site, cultural monument of local importance and cultural monument of national importance. The inscription of a site on the register clearly defines its heritage value, and the designation of a site as a monument of local or national importance is the adoption of a legal act at local or national level that clearly defines the specific values of the site and specifies both the parts to be protected and the way in which they are to be protected.

In 2024, the spatial layer of cultural heritage protection regimes (eVrd) comprised 32,329 units with an area of 242,026 ha, i.e. 11.9% of the area of Slovenia, and includes various genera such as buildings, parks, archaeological sites, memorials and places, settlements and their parts, and cultural landscapes (Ministrstvo za kulturo, 2024a). The largest units are cultural landscape areas, archaeological sites and historical landscapes (e.g. the Ljubljana Marshes cultural landscape area, the Krnsko Pogorje historical area). The protection regimes, which cover a large part of the country and often overlap, are very important in the spatial planning process, but if they are not properly communicated with stakeholders and their needs and interests, they can lead to difficulties in balancing interests and hinder development and adapted reuse.

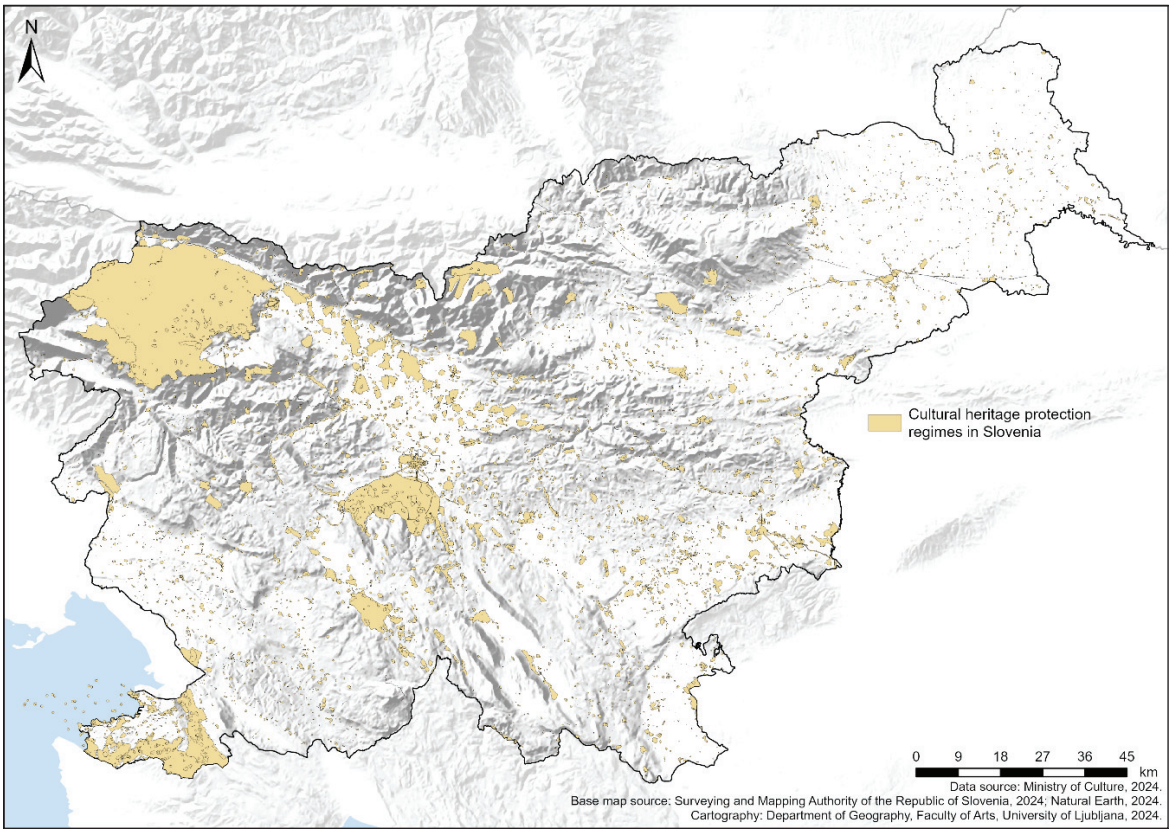

Figure 1. Units of the Cultural Heritage Protection Regimes (eVrd) in Slovenia.

As far as the protection status of cultural heritage is concerned, the proportion of cultural heritage sites is the highest (67.5%), followed by cultural monuments of local importance (26.1%) and cultural monuments of national importance (1.1%). Other entities (e.g. documentary protection) account for 5.2% of the immovable cultural heritage.

We distinguish between cultural heritage genera (9 genera, e.g. buildings, cultural landscape, archaeological sites) and cultural heritage types (10 types, e.g. memorials, built cultural heritage, profane built cultural heritage). The predominant genera are buildings (53.5%), memorials and places (25.7%) and archaeological sites (11.9%), which together account for over 90% of all immovable cultural heritage. The remaining genera (settlements and parts of settlements, cultural landscapes, parks and gardens) are represented to a lesser extent. Among the cultural heritage types, the most important are profane built heritage with 47.7%, the sacral built heritage with a good fifth (21.3%), the memorials with 12.5% and the archaeological heritage (11.7%).

A spatial analysis and a review of the official national Register of immovable cultural heritage shows that the inscription of monuments and sites often depends on the commitment of conservators (there are obvious regional differences), while the declaration of a cultural monument of local or national importance depends on the political will, awareness and commitment of the general public. A major problem is the overburdening of the heritage authority on regional level and the lack of a real overview of the situation of heritage sites and areas at national level. This contributes to a rapid and uncontrolled deterioration of the situation at local level, including the deterioration of important heritage sites.

3. APPROACHES TO MONITORING AND MANAGING CULTURAL HERITAGE ARE CHANGING

Monitoring the condition of cultural heritage sites and areas provides the necessary data to guide the implementation of customised measures and management. The 2013 edition of the Managing Cultural World Heritage Handbook defines monitoring as a means of determining the effectiveness of management actions and the condition of cultural heritage to ensure that the value of cultural heritage is adequately protected. In this way, the management process is monitored and its impact measured (UNESCO, 2013; Nared, 2014).

Contemporary approaches to heritage conservation and management, particularly of immovable cultural heritage, generally aim for greater inclusiveness, democratisation and shared responsibility within a 'values-led approach' (Wijesuriya et al., 2013; Wijesuriya, 2022). The latter emphasises that for lasting and effective conservation, it is necessary to involve all relevant stakeholders equally, from the initial phase of work, which involves collecting data on the significance of heritage itself, to the joint assessment of the significance (in the sense of a polyphonic, pluralistic assessment with the aim of finding consensus), to joint decision-making on interventions and subsequent management. While this approach has proven questionable since its inception over a decade ago, often privileging stronger interest groups over weaker ones (Wijesuriya, 2022), a more participatory and inclusive approach, known as 'people-centred' (or 'people-focused'), has recently taken hold. This focus is also key to understanding the overarching significance of heritage at risk. The main causes of deterioration can be diametrically opposed: Non-use and abandonment on the one hand and development pressure on the other, both of which stem from the loss or deprivation of the ability to care for (maintain) the building on a daily basis. It is maintenance - as a counter-model to large, expensive restoration projects - that is recognised in the conservation as the highest form of preservation (Fielden, 2003).

Maintenance and preventive care rely on regular/periodic care and minimal intervention to preserve as much of the historic fabric as possible, and the main actors in this activity are the daily stewards of these properties, i.e. the users/owners/occupants (Stulens et al., 2012).

In 2022, the Ministry of Culture also formally defined the Cultural Heritage Risk Assessment Level, which includes methods for assessing the threat to certain genera of cultural heritage - archaeological sites, buildings, parks and gardens, buildings with parks or gardens, memorials and places, settlements and parts of settlements, cultural landscapes and other buildings and sites. The degree of risk is assessed according to the English Heritage Methodology (EHM) (English Heritage Methodology and…, n. d.).

On the basis of the field data and in accordance with the Ministry of Culture's methodology, which follows the English Heritage Methodology (Table 1), we have provided a risk assessment for all the ICH units inventoried in the field. Six categories of risk are defined, but it is also possible to combine them for easier interpretation. The overall risk assessment is a combination of the condition (overall condition and condition of the main building elements) and degree of abandonment (occupancy) of the site.

Table 1. The ICH risk assessment (Ministrstvo za kulturo, 2022).

CONDITION	OCCUPANCY/USE	THE RISK LEVEL
1.Very poor	1. Vacant	At extreme risk
	2. Partially occupied	At high risk
	3. Occupied	At risk
2.Poor	1. Vacant	At risk
	2. Partially occupied	At risk
	3. Occupied	Vulnerable
3.Fair	1. Vacant	Vulnerable
	2. Partially occupied	Vulnerable
	3. Occupied	Low risk
4.Good	1. Vacant	Low risk
	2. Partially occupied	Low risk
	3. Occupied	Not at risk

The main purpose of the assessment is to identify the need for action for each of the units under consideration in order to ensure the conservation of the cultural heritage as a whole, which is in line with legislation and conventions (Ministrstvo za kulturo, 2022). In practise, the risk assessment

is mainly carried out for newly registered units, as the form is a mandatory annex in this procedure. However, for other immovable heritage assets, conservators have only fully assessed about 5,000 (out of a total of 32,329) heritage assets since 2011. We therefore do not have a comprehensive overview of the state of threats to immovable cultural heritage in Slovenia.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The risk to immovable cultural heritage (ICH) has long been emphasised by the geographical community, which has been systematically monitoring functionally derelict areas (FDA) in Slovenia since 2017. FDAs are "underutilised or abandoned areas with visible impact of previous use and reduced use value" (Lampič et al., 2017), and at the level of Slovenia as a whole, we have found that a number of unused areas coincide in whole or in part with areas of immovable cultural heritage (ICH) (Foški et al., 2019).

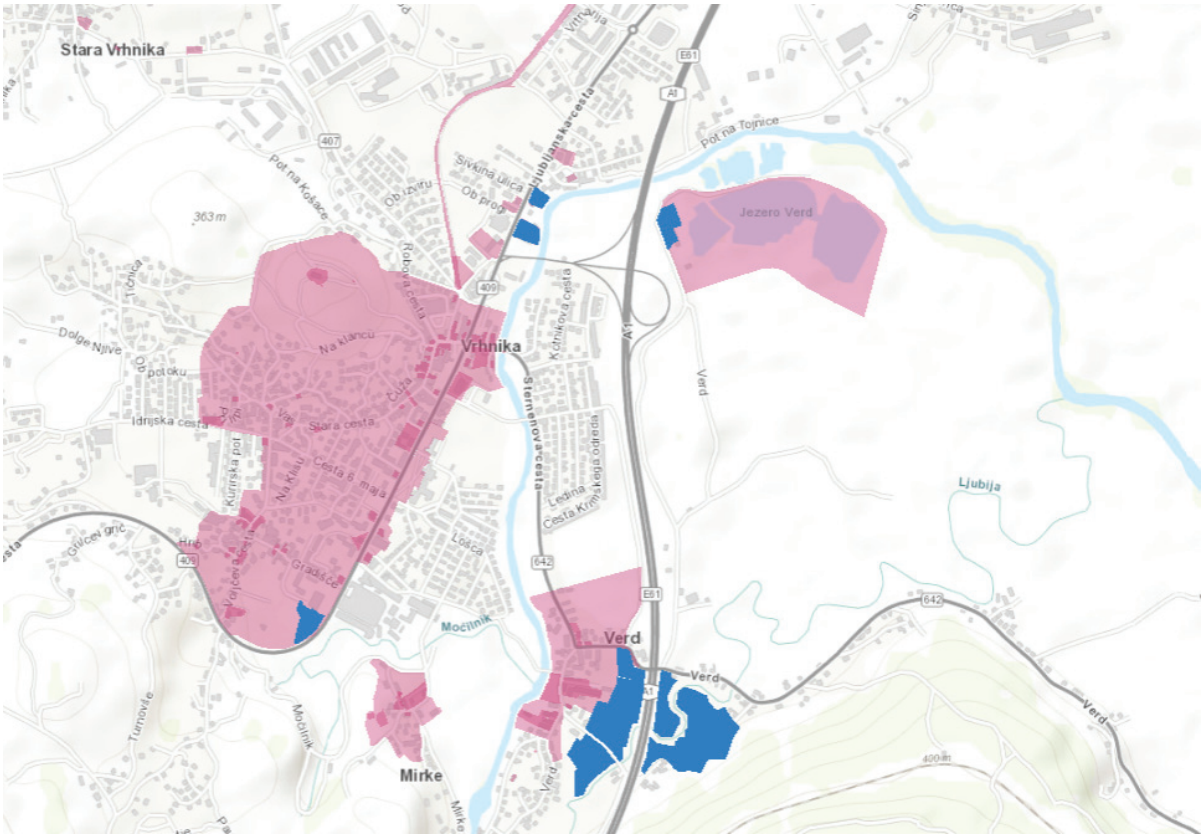

Figure 2. Example of coincidence of FDAs (blue) and ICH (red) in the suburbanised area of Ljubljana.

The national FDA inventory is updated every three years through a combination of fieldwork and participatory mapping (involving municipal representatives), and for systematic monitoring we have developed a web-based mapping application in ArcGIS Online that is easy to use, fast, and time- and cost-efficient (Lampič et al., 2020). It systematically monitors over 40 attributes at the national level in terms of identification and location of FDAs (e.g. municipality, size), changes in use/activity on FDAs (e.g. detected changes, year of change, new activity), characteristics and description of FDAs (type and subtype of FDAs, level of abandonment, physical condition), assesses environmental degradation (e.g. water, soil, land) and planned development of FDAs (e.g. development plans, barriers to development, time dimension of revitalisation).

Based on the experience gained during the regular updating of the FDA inventory data (2017-2023), a small project task on field inventory and risk assessment of immovable cultural heritage in Slovenia was designed in 2024 as part of a transdisciplinary group of staff from three departments of the Faculty of Arts (Geography, Art History, Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology) in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture. The project was carried out in the field by students who preferably made the inventories of ICH units in their home environment, their home municipality.

For data collection in the field, we developed a collaborative mapping application in ArcGIS Online. We loaded a refined eVrd layer into the application containing only selected attributes (e.g. identification number, name, protection regime, heritage type). We refined the layer by protection regime (including cultural heritage sites, cultural monuments of local and cultural monuments of national importance) and by genre (including categories buildings, buildings with parks and gardens, parks and gardens, other buildings and devices). The inventory contained over 20 attributes for each ICH unit. The attributes relate to basic information (e.g. ID, name of the registrar), location (e.g. settlement, municipality), condition of the ICH unit (e.g. protection regime, type, genre) and condition of the site or object (e.g. degree of abandonment, use, physical condition, degree of preservation of the object). All data collected enabled further analysis of the ICH units.

Figure 3. The data capture application was designed in ArcGIS Online, the colour shows the occupancy of ICH units.

In three months, together with students, we inventoried 1067 units of immovable cultural heritage in more than 20 Slovenian municipalities. In terms of protection regimes, cultural heritage sites dominate among the inventoried units (63.6%), followed by cultural monuments of local importance (341 or 31.9%), while only 4.5% are cultural monuments of national importance. In terms of the type of ICH, 847 units of profane built heritage were inventoried (79.3%), followed by sacral built heritage with 162 units (15.2%), 42 units of the garden architectural heritage type (4%), eight units of the sacral-profane architectural heritage type (0.7%), four units of memorials (0.4%), one unit of the settlement heritage type (0.1%) and three other units (0.3%).

With regard to possible renovation, revitalisation and adaptive reuse, it is crucial to gain an insight into the (former) use of the sites. In the ICH units analysed, housing in multi-family or single-family houses (43.6%, 466) clearly predominates. Public services were recorded in almost 30% (317) of the ICH units. The other uses, which occur in smaller proportions, are hospitality, industry, crafts and storage, infrastructure, agricultural use, defence, protection and rescue, shops and services, and tourism and sports.

In general, the majority of the inventoried ICH units were in good physical condition (734, 70%), 177 units were in suitable condition (17.1%), 88 units were in bad condition (8.5%) and 38 units were in very bad condition (3.7%). No information is available for 30 units. The units with a stricter protection regime are in a slightly better physical condition (Figure 4).

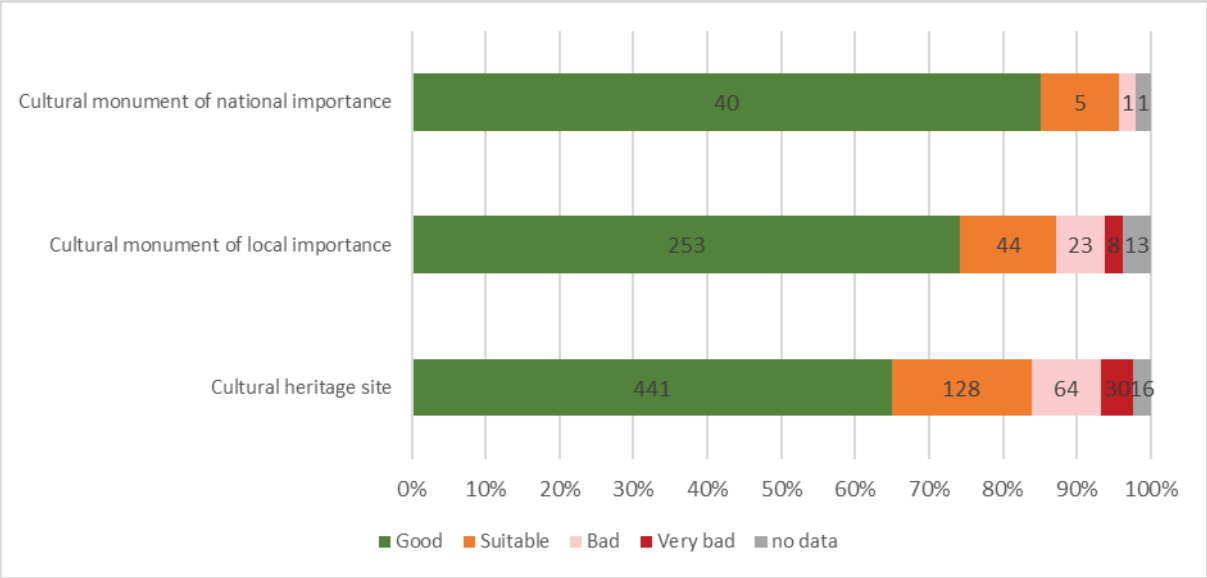

Figure 4. Physical condition of the ICH in relation to the protection regimes.

The degree of abandonment was defined by four levels: not abandoned, partially abandoned (from 10% to less than 50%), moderately abandoned (from 50% to less than 99%) and completely abandoned. Most ICH units were not abandoned (849, 79.6%), 82 units were partially abandoned (7.7%), 57 units were moderately abandoned (5.3%) and 72 units were completely abandoned (6.7%). Monitoring the occupancy of buildings is important as it is also directly related to the physical condition of the buildings. The absence of functions is often accompanied by a deterioration of the physical condition and also a faster deterioration of the condition and decay of the buildings, which means that such units are also more at risk. In the case of renovation, such ICH units require more extensive planning and greater financial investment for the renovation.

In a final step, the data obtained was used to perform a risk assessment of the ICH units inspected on site. To get a better idea, we start with the condition of the ICH units inspected by the conservators in the past in the period from 2011 to 2023. Of the 7000 ICH units inspected, almost half (49.1%) are not at risk, a good quarter (26.4%) are at low risk and 15.8% of ICH units are categorised as vulnerable based on physical condition and use. A total of 8.8% of all ICH units inspected were categorised as at serious risk (at risk, at high risk and at extreme risk).

The risk status of the 1,067 ICH units inspected in 2024 differs slightly from the previous situation, mainly due to the high proportion of inspected ICH units in Ljubljana (305 out of a total of 1,067), where the general condition and use of the ICH is appropriate and the cultural heritage is in good condition. According to the field data, 70% of the inspected ICH units are not at risk, 12.8% are at low risk, 6.9% are vulnerable, and a total of 10.5% of the inspected NCH units are categorised as at serious risk (at risk, at high risk and at extreme high risk). During the fieldwork, the students also recorded 4 physically removed ICH units (which are still listed in the official register). The risk assessment of the ICH units by type revealed that the profane heritage is more threatened than the sacral heritage (the latter is better preserved due to public interest and the possibility of funding renovation works). When analysing the risk to cultural heritage by protection regime, cultural monuments of national importance are, as expected, the least threatened, as they usually receive more funding for maintenance and renovation (and are more accessible) in addition to the strict protection regimes.

It is important to note that the high proportion of not at-risk ICH units in Slovenia suggests that a certain level of use and management of ICH is appropriate. More worrying, however, are the 10% of ICH units that we have found to be in very poor condition and at serious risk, both in the past and during fieldwork in 2024.

5. CONCLUSION

We can conclude that despite the lack of and poorly functioning monitoring of ICH risk in Slovenia, we see further opportunities for cooperation and support for the Ministry of Culture and that inter-institutional cooperation can fill this gap. In addition to the important contribution of the fieldwork to the Ministry of Culture itself, the fieldwork, detailed examination of the condition of the heritage, inventorying basic attributes, photographing the objects and obtaining additional information (e.g. interviews with owners) have provided students with completely new skills, and the experiential learning has improved their knowledge and application of different working methods. Through project work, students were familiarised with new content, the management of the ICH and the challenges of spatial planning in practise. Most importantly, they felt how important the cultural heritage aspect is at the level of local community action and how much ICH can contribute to the quality of life.

It is important to note that at the national level, about 10% of the threatened ICH units are expected to require intervention and various measures for their restoration and conservation.

The lack of a systematic approach to regularly monitor the condition of ICH and thus effectively control its risk reflects the current state of the Slovenian conservation profession, which has undergone an intensive bureaucratization process in the last decade (Čebron Lipovec, 2021). The latter has affected the decreasing time available to the individual responsible conservator to carry out monitoring as one of their core tasks. The above-mentioned bureaucratization of conservation work and thus overload is also accompanied by a generational change of responsible conservators working in the regional units in this field. Slovenia is facing a serious shortage of personnel who could (or should) perform the basic tasks of monitoring ICH. Also, the existing methodology for assessing the risk of cultural heritage (which is the starting point for identifying the components at risk and thus the factors of risk) still presents many challenges in terms of internal harmonisation, rethinking and upgrading.

The collaborative approach presented here, carried out in an interdisciplinary manner by geographers, and ethnologists and cultural anthropologies, can make an important contribution to the efficiency and timeliness of the conservation profession. Knowing the domestic situation and considering foreign best practises (e.g. The Heritage at Risk Programme running in the UK) demonstrate very clearly the importance of knowing the actual situation on the ground and monitoring the risk of ICH entities. Due to the lack of systematic monitoring in Slovenia, we are not sufficiently informed about where, which and to what extent ICH units are critically threatened (or have even been removed) due to neglect or inappropriate development. As a result, measures are often not appropriate and timely.

The involvement of students in applied project activities organised as part of the study process ensures a quick and direct transfer of new knowledge and, most importantly, contributes to a more responsible, cooperative and professional younger generation. The cooperation between geographers from the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana and various ministries has been an integral part for several years. The example of the connection with the Ministry of Culture, researchers in geography, art history, ethnology and cultural anthropology, and students (their involvement in research through the teaching process) has produced tangible results and reflects the strength of the connection.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks go to the students of Geography (Master Study Programme) and Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology (Undergraduate Study Programme) for their fieldwork. We would like to thank the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS) for supporting the research, which is financed under the grant agreement J7-4641 and P6-0229.

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