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CITIES AND DEMOCRACY

Revitalising Local Heritage through Participatory Democracy

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Good Practices from Velký Cetín – Background Study

1. Introduction

Preserving and passing on local heritage is no longer solely a matter of monument protection or culture. The long-term strength of a community is also determined by the extent to which its residents feel that the local history, traditions, built and natural heritage, and the community spaces where the past and present of the settlement meet are truly their own.

Velký Cetín is particularly well positioned in this respect. The settlement has a rich historical heritage, significant religious heritage, a centuries-old viticultural and winemaking tradition, active cultural communities, and community spaces capable of strengthening local identity.

Based on the available municipal material, several initiatives and community assets can be identified in Velký Cetín on which a participatory heritage-development model could be built. These include, in particular, the cemetery cross created through community cooperation, the wine culture organised around the KADAR Association of Winemakers, the tradition connected to the St. Urban Chapel, the new community function of the church square, and the network of the cultural centre and local civic and cultural organisations.

The key message of the Velký Cetín model is:

Local heritage is not only what we preserve, but also what we use, interpret and pass on together.

In this approach, participatory democracy is not merely a municipal decision-making technique. It is a community-based approach in which residents are not only participants in events or users of heritage, but also its shapers, interpreters and transmitters.

2. Veľký Cetín's Heritage and Community Profile

Veľký Cetín is located in the Nitra District, approximately 15 kilometres southeast of Nitra. The first written record of the settlement dates back to 1239. The municipality covers an area of 1,687 hectares and, according to the available data, has a population of 1,614 inhabitants. The natural environment of the settlement is defined by the combination of the Zobor Mountains, the vineyards, the Nitra River, and wooded and forested areas.

One of Veľký Cetín's strongest heritage assets is its centuries-old viticultural and winemaking culture. More than 500 wine cellars can be found in the vineyards, including both old cellars built of adobe and more recently constructed ones. The Cétényi white Kadar, historically associated with the settlement and known as "Nagycétényi Kadar", is not only an agricultural product but also an important bearer of local identity.

The central element of the settlement's built heritage is the Roman Catholic church, whose history dates back to the Middle Ages. In addition to the church, there are numerous religious and historical memorials: crosses, statues, memorial columns, the war memorial, and other commemorative sites located at various points throughout the settlement.

The cultural centre, the school, the outdoor stage and sports field, as well as various civic and cultural organisations, play an important role in community life. The source lists, among others, CSEMADOK, the KADARKA Men's Singing Group, the KÚTYIKA Women's Singing Group, the Cither Ensemble, the KADAR Association of Winemakers, the football club, the senior citizens' club, and other local communities.

This diversity of heritage and community assets is particularly important because it creates an opportunity for local heritage to be presented not as a collection of separate memorials, but as an interconnected community system.

3. Existing and Further Developable Good Practices in Veľký Cetín

Good practice / community element	Heritage content	Participatory significance
Community initiative in the cemetery	cemetery cross, religious heritage	direct community initiative and donations
KADAR Association of Winemakers and the Wine Route	viticultural and winemaking culture	community heritage preservation and knowledge transfer
St. Urban Chapel and vineyard tradition	religious and agricultural heritage	community tradition and intergenerational transmission

Good practice / community element	Heritage content	Participatory significance
Church square	religious, historical and cultural heritage	meeting and remembrance space for multiple communities
Cultural centre and event venues	cultural heritage, community life	platform for community programmes and partnerships
Civic and cultural organisations	living cultural heritage	foundation of a participatory network

It is important to make a methodological distinction: not all of the elements listed above can already be regarded as models explicitly based on participatory democracy. In several cases, they are existing community infrastructure and traditions with significant participatory potential.

4. Good Practice I – Community Initiative and Heritage Preservation

The history of the Velký Cetín cemetery provides a clear example of how a local heritage intervention can become a community matter.

The old and new cemeteries, together with the religious memorials located there, form an important part of the settlement's history. The source material specifically highlights that the new central cross was created at the initiative and through the donations of local residents. The original cross was preserved, restored and then placed in the new cemetery.

This initiative is particularly valuable from the project's perspective because community participation was not an afterthought: the residents themselves initiated and supported the heritage intervention.

This example demonstrates that the preservation of local heritage can be particularly strong when people do not merely accept a development, but are personally connected to it.

Further development opportunity

A local "Path of Memory" could be created around the cemetery heritage, focusing on the history of the cemetery, significant people buried there, and the story of the old cross.

The programme could involve:

- elderly local residents;
- families;
- the school;
- civic organisations;
- local historians;
- young people.

The aim would be for the cemetery to be understood not only as a place of remembrance, but also as an area where local memory can be documented and passed on.

5. Good Practice II – The KADAR Association of Winemakers and the Wine Route

One of Velký Cetín's most distinctive forms of living heritage is its viticultural and winemaking culture. More than 500 cellars are located in the settlement's vineyards, and the local tradition of grape cultivation dates back at least to the 16th century.

An organised community form of the local wine culture was the Viticulture and Horticulture Association founded in 1966, whose heritage is continued by the KADAR Association of Winemakers. Traditional wine tastings have been organised regularly since the 1970s.

The Wine Route and the network of open cellars provide a particularly interesting example of how local heritage can become a tourism and community resource. Visitors do not merely purchase a product; they can meet the winemakers, discover the cellars and encounter local knowledge directly.

Participatory significance

In the case of Velký Cetín's wine culture, the bearers of the heritage are the local people themselves. Knowledge, grape cultivation, winemaking, the cellars and the stories together constitute the living heritage.

Further development opportunity

The Wine Route could be developed into a participatory heritage programme, for example through:

- by collecting local winemaking stories;
- by conducting life-story interviews with older winemakers;
- by involving young people in the creation of digital content;
- by documenting family wine cellar and vineyard histories;
- by creating a joint local history and winemaking map.

In this way, the Wine Route could become not only a tourist route but also a community archive of local knowledge.

6. Good Practice III – The St. Urban Chapel and the Vineyard Tradition

The St. Urban Chapel is an important sacred element of the vineyard culture of Veľký Cetín. Local winemakers and villagers honour St. Urban in connection with viticulture and a good harvest.

Mass is celebrated at the chapel twice a year: in May, praying for a good harvest, and in October, as a thanksgiving service. The source materials also preserve a petition dated 18 May 1772, requesting permission for the consecration of the chapel and for Masses to be celebrated there. The chapel was renovated and reconsecrated in 2023.

This example shows that a historical heritage site remains alive when it is also connected to the community's present-day life.

Participatory development opportunity

An annual “St. Urban – Veľký Cetín Vineyards” community day could be organised around the chapel and vineyards, bringing together:

- religious traditions;
- local wine production;
- local history;
- nature and hiking;
- gastronomy;
- intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Winemakers, the parish, the municipality, the school and civic organisations could all be involved in designing the programme.

7. Good Practice IV – The Church Square as a Community, Historical and Cultural Space

In Veľký Cetín, a renewed community space has been created around the church, suitable not only for religious events but also for historical and cultural commemorations, celebrations and performances.

The significance of the site is further enhanced by the memorial to the settlement's war heroes located there. The Veľký Cetín war memorial was created in 1993 and is situated in the landscaped area in front of the church. The available heritage research likewise associates the memorial to the victims of the First and Second World Wars with the area between the church and the parish house.

The church square therefore combines several community functions:

Religious space → historical memory → cultural space → community meeting place.

This is particularly important for the project because it illustrates how a site originally of primarily religious significance can become a heritage space usable by the entire community.

The participatory significance of the space

The war memorial is not simply a material monument. Remembrance is accompanied by community action: through commemorations, performances, stories and shared rituals, the past is brought into connection with present generations.

The space can therefore provide an opportunity for local history to be addressed not only through formal ceremonies, but also through community dialogue and the transfer of knowledge.

Involving school-age children and young people can be particularly important in this process. Young people could, for example:

- conduct local history research;
- collect family memories;
- conduct interviews with older residents;
- prepare programmes for commemorative events;
- create digital stories or short videos;
- participate in developing local history exhibitions related to the memorial.

In this way, the church square can become not only a venue but also an active tool for passing on local heritage.

Development direction: “Velký Cetín Memory and Culture”

Building on the church square, an annual “Velký Cetín Memory and Culture” programme series could be developed in the longer term.

Its components could include:

- historical commemorative events;
- local history lectures;
- life-story interviews with elderly residents;
- school history projects;
- folk music and cultural programmes;
- local art exhibitions;
- presentations of family memories;
- joint exhibitions.

The most important feature of the programme could be that it involves the local community not only in carrying out events, but already in shaping their content.

8. Good Practice V – The Cultural Centre as a Community Platform

Veľký Cetín's cultural centre is located in the centre of the settlement and plays an important role in community life. It hosts weddings, balls and various events, and was built between 2001 and 2004.

The settlement also has an outdoor stage and sports field. The covered outdoor stage can accommodate up to 1,000 people and hosts summer events and competitions.

These spaces already constitute available community infrastructure.

From the project's perspective, the next development step could be to ensure that these venues are not merely "hosts" of events, but also forums for community planning and community initiatives.

For example, an annual "Veľký Cetín Heritage – Community Planning Day" could be organised, during which residents would jointly decide which local stories, values and traditions they would like to present in the following year.

9. Good Practice VI – The Network of Civic and Cultural Communities

Veľký Cetín has several organisations that are important actors in local community and cultural life. These include CSEMADOK, the KADARKA Men's Singing Group, the KÚTYIKA Women's Singing Group, the Cither Ensemble, the KADAR Association of Winemakers, the football club, the senior citizens' club, the Red Cross, the hunting association and the majorette group.

This diverse organisational background can provide an important foundation for a participatory heritage model.

The different communities represent different perspectives and forms of knowledge:

- winemakers: the heritage of the vineyards and wine culture;
- cultural groups: musical and folk traditions;
- the older generation: personal memories and oral history;
- the school: the involvement of young people;
- sports communities: community engagement and participation;
- the parish: sacred heritage.

From the perspective of participatory democracy, one of the most important development opportunities is to connect these communities through a shared heritage platform.

10. Shared Lessons from the Velký Cetín Model

Based on the examples above, five important principles emerge in Velký Cetín.

1. Heritage is alive when it is used

The church, cemetery, chapel, vineyards or community centre do not, by themselves, ensure the continuation of heritage.

Heritage becomes living heritage when community activity is connected to it.

2. People can participate not only as an audience, but also as creators

The example of the cemetery cross clearly shows that local residents themselves can initiate and contribute to heritage preservation.

3. Different heritage areas should be connected

The church square, the war memorial, cultural programmes, the school and civic organisations can reinforce one another.

4. There is no long-term heritage transmission without involving young people

Local history and tradition cannot remain solely the knowledge of older generations. Young people should be given opportunities to explore Velký Cetín's heritage using their own tools, such as videos, interviews and digital maps.

5. Participation also means shaping decisions together

The most important next step for the project could be to ensure that local residents are not merely participants in already organised events, but also take part in deciding which heritage, which stories and in what form the community wishes to preserve and pass on.

11. Proposed methods for preserving and passing on cultural heritage

11.1. Velký Cetín Heritage Walk

The settlement's important heritage sites can be organised into a thematic route:

church – church square – war memorial – cultural centre – cemetery – vineyards – St. Urban Chapel – cellars.

Different generations and organisations could take part in leading the walks.

11.2. “Velký Cetín Stories”

Collecting the personal memories of older residents.

Interviews could focus on:

- old celebrations and traditions;
- viticulture;
- wine cellars;
- the school;
- the church;
- community life in the past;
- wartime and historical memories.

11.3. Community Heritage Map

Residents could identify which places are important to them.

The map could include not only monuments, but also:

- popular meeting places;
- places associated with family memories;
- old wine cellars;
- streets connected to memories and stories;
- community spaces;
- locations associated with local stories could also be included.

11.4. Young People's Digital Heritage Project

Young people from Veľký Cetín could present the settlement's heritage through short videos, podcasts or digital stories.

The church square and the war memorial could be particularly suitable as themes for such a project.

11.5. Heritage Roundtable

Once a year, the municipality, the parish, the school, cultural and civic organisations, winemakers and residents could jointly review:

What do we want to preserve?

What do we want to showcase?

What do we want to pass on?

12. Proposed "Veľký Cetín Heritage Workshop"

One concrete outcome of the project could be an informal but regularly operating Veľký Cetín Heritage Workshop.

This would not mean creating a new institution, but establishing regular cooperation among the local communities that already exist.

Participants

- municipal government;
- parish;
- school and kindergarten;
- CSEMADOK;
- KADAR Winemakers' Association;
- singing groups;
- cimbalom and folk music ensembles;
- senior citizens' club;
- sports communities;
- young people;
- interested residents.

Tasks

The Workshop could determine each year:

1. which local heritage elements should be placed at the centre of attention;
2. which stories should be documented;
3. which community programmes should be organised;

4. how young people can be involved;
5. which heritage elements require further attention;
6. how the results can also be presented outside the municipality.

The essence of the model is not the creation of a new bureaucratic organisation, but the linking of existing community resources.

13. Measurable Results and Indicators

The effectiveness of participatory heritage development should also be monitored using concrete indicators.

Possible indicators:

- number of residents involved;
- number of young people involved;
- number of cooperating local organisations;
- number of jointly implemented programmes;
- number of local history interviews collected;
- number of family stories documented;
- number of digital stories created;
- number of heritage sites mapped;
- number of volunteers;
- number of suggestions submitted by residents;
- number of initiatives implemented based on residents' suggestions.

A particularly important indicator could be how many residents' proposals become actual community programmes or development measures.

This makes the functioning of participatory democracy directly measurable.

14. Conclusion

The example of Velký Cetín shows that revitalising local heritage does not necessarily mean creating new attractions.

The settlement already possesses significant heritage and community resources:

- a history spanning several centuries;
- a Roman Catholic church and sacred heritage sites;
- cemeteries and historical memorials;
- a World War memorial;

- a renewed church square;
- a cultural centre and community spaces;
- a vineyard area comprising more than 500 wine cellars;
- the KADAR wine culture;
- the St. Urban Chapel;
- active civic and cultural organisations.

The task is therefore primarily not to create new heritage, but to connect existing values through the community.

The church square can play a particularly important role in this system. In addition to its religious function, as a place of historical memory and cultural life it can connect the settlement's past and present. The presence of the war memorial provides a further opportunity for local historical memory to appear not merely as material heritage, but as community dialogue and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

The story of the cemetery cross demonstrates that Velký Cetín already has an example in which residents contributed to preserving a heritage element through their own initiative and donations.

The next step in development could therefore be to establish a participatory model in which the municipality, the church, the school, civic organisations, winemakers, cultural communities and residents jointly determine which values of Velký Cetín they wish to pass on to future generations, through which stories and using which means.

In this model, local heritage is not a closed past, but a shared present and a shared future.

Local heritage becomes part of democracy when the community is able not only to inherit it, but also to interpret, use and shape it.