

Peer Review

# Review of: "Who Owns the Past? Symbolic Authority and Heritage Revitalization in Czech Borderlands"

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This paper examines the way the restoration of heritage assets in the current border areas of the Czech Republic played a crucial role in the reinterpretation of these sites, as well as in the debate about who conveys the interpretation of assets that are inextricably related to German-speaking communities that were forced to abandon these territories after World War II.

At first glance (e.g., in the title), the article seems to encompass some of the most relevant trends in heritage interpretation and focuses on an intriguing topic that deals with historical memory and the current perception of locals about some assets that were abandoned. However, despite the statements and the intention, the article does not provide a clear answer to the main problem that should be discussed. Instead, most of the text is dedicated to general assumptions with reference to an abundant bibliography about theoretical aspects. In the end, the reader feels that the article is more about those issues than about Czech borderlands.

The relationship between these references and the topic discussed is far from being clear, especially because the main topic is not sufficiently explained to the reader. That is, the author presents a pertinent problem but does not delve into the case studies. It would be a good idea to dedicate more space to the heritage assets of the former "Sudetenland." For example, to provide some images of the buildings instead of just talking generally about churches, castles, small objects, etc.

The article could be improved if some historical information were added, especially because it deals with memories about those places. Here are some questions to contextualize it: when were the cities of Karlovy Vary and Ústí nad Labem regions founded? What is the chronology of the buildings? What are the buildings the author is dealing with? Is there some information about current demography (useful to know better the context of the ones surveyed)?

As said before, the article presents a thought-provoking issue that deals with several interesting aspects. One of them is perhaps less developed: the question of interpretation. There are several works about heritage interpretation since F. Tilden's "Interpreting our heritage" (1957) that would be useful. For example, a recent book about good practices of heritage interpretation (<https://handbook.tehic.eu/>) discusses some aspects that would be interesting for the research undertaken in these border regions and provides a good-quality bibliography that can be useful. On the other hand, the key concepts are not explained properly. Instead, the author provides bibliography throughout the text. As said above, this option led to an excessive quantity of space dedicated to theoretical issues. So, for the sake of the article's purpose, I would recommend reducing these chapters and improving the space dedicated to field research. Furthermore, there are several works about tourism and heritage in borderlands (see, for example, the recent Timothy and Gelbman's Routledge Handbook of Borders and Tourism) that deal with these particular situations.

Regarding field research, the author could improve the way it is presented. Firstly, there is no information about the number of people surveyed in each city. For example, figure 3 refers to the percentage of age groups without reference to exact quantities (for example, 23% of 140 people). It is not clear whether the author carried out interviews in one city, two, or more.

Moreover, the conceptual map presented does not simplify the information: the explanation about it is clear in the text, so it can be eliminated. If some graphic or conceptual map was made with AI, the author should mention it. I would also eliminate the word cloud, especially because there is no explanation of it and no reference to it in the text. Why is it relevant for the argument?

Regarding the cultural heritage of this area, it would be useful to provide images to illustrate restorations, the abandonment of buildings, the objects, etc. I would pick some examples of restoration works in the mentioned buildings to enrich the central argument and comments about who carried it out.

The method for citing bibliography should be homogeneous throughout the paper. Sometimes there is a reference to a number, and sometimes the bibliography is cited in the text (Scholz, 2015). Also, Scholz is not cited in the final bibliography.

To sum up, the article is potentially impactful, not only for the understanding of the historical complexity of border heritage, but also for future debates about the question "who owns the past?" However, it can be improved in future publications.

## **Declarations**

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.