

CARVED IN STONE, CHALLENGED BY CHANGE: PARTICIPATORY PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE OF STEĆCI

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INTRODUCTION

Stećci are medieval tombstone monuments, with more than 70,000 recorded across the Western Balkans. In 2016, 28 necropolises were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, recognizing their Outstanding Universal Value. Despite this status, local community involvement in preservation has often been limited. This study addresses that gap by focusing on climate change impacts, community values, and participatory strategies for safeguarding stećci.

RESEARCH AIMS

- 1.To understand local perceptions of climate change.
- 2.To capture community values and concerns regarding stećci.
- 3.To identify participatory strategies for protection.

METHODOLOGY

- World Café method (STECCI WP5.1 Handbook).
- 17 participants: teachers, officials, heritage experts, NGOs, youth.
- 6 guiding questions (climate, values, history, benefits, tourism, suggestions).
- Data sources: transcripts, questionnaires, flip-chart notes, facilitator observations.

DATA ANALYSIS

- Inductive thematic analysis of transcripts, questionnaires, and notes.
- Codes → broader themes (e.g. Education & Awareness).
- Stakeholder contrasts: teachers vs officials.
- Triangulation with multiple data sources ensured credibility.
- Ethics: anonymity, informed consent, participant feedback.



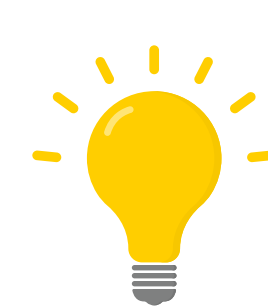
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CONCLUSIONS



Awareness & action

Local stakeholders understand climate threats and value stećci, and are eager to act.



Catalyst for change

Climate change, while a threat, motivates mobilization for protection.



Opportunity, not burden

Conservation reframed as development, education, and community pride.



Participatory approaches

Inclusive, people-centered heritage management unlocks knowledge and resilience.



Unity for the future

Stećci as a rallying point linking citizens, experts, and officials.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- local committees are formed to take care of stećci and coordinate activities throughout the year
- stećci are integrated into school programs and workshops so young people grow up as heritage guardians
- residents participate in periodic inspections and clean-up actions at necropolises
- sustainable cultural tourism is developed through trails, signage and guides, with benefits reinvested in preservation
- stronger legal and policy frameworks are secured to ensure long-term protection