

Fortresses as Stages of Transformation: Negotiating Historical Memory, Spectacle, and Ambivalence

Tvrđave kao pozornice transformacije:
Pregovaranje istorijskog pamćenja, spektakla i ambivalencije

Jovana Škuletić

Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Novi Sad, Serbia
j.skuletic.arch@gmail.com | orcid.org/0009-0007-7739-0501

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Abstract Coastal fortifications in Montenegro constitute complex cultural landscapes whose functions have undergone profound transformations. Originally conceived as military and defensive structures, they are increasingly reinterpreted as cultural venues, tourist attractions, and event settings. The research addresses the evolving roles of fortresses by critically exploring the interplay between historical memory and contemporary aestheticization. Drawing on theories of architectural aesthetics (Scruton, Zumthor, Böhme), spectacle and hyperreality (Debord, Lefebvre, Baudrillard), and heritage studies (Riegl, Ashworth & Tunbridge, Graham), the research employs a comparative case study approach. Six fortresses—Budva Citadel, Kanli Kula, Španjola, Mamula, Traste, and Straznik—are analyzed as paradigmatic examples of how temporary events, festivals, and cultural programs redefine the symbolic and functional significance of heritage. Findings indicate that event-based transformations generate ambivalent outcomes. On the one hand, they revitalize heritage through economic sustainability, atmospheric experience, and enhanced public visibility. On the other hand, they risk its reduction to scenographic utility, privileging market logics over historical depth and collective memory. Our comparative analysis highlights diverse trajectories: inclusive cultural activation contrasts with processes of commercialization and exclusivity. It is argued that the aesthetic activation of fortifications can contribute to sustainable revitalization only when coupled with critical interpretation, inclusive cultural policies, and strategies that preserve historical narratives. Without such frameworks, the spectacularization of heritage may erode its authenticity and weaken its role as a shared space of memory and identity.

Keywords architectural heritage; fortifications; aesthetics of spectacle; historical memory; eventification.

Sažetak Obalna utvrđenja u Crnoj Gori predstavljaju složene kulturne pejzaže čije su se funkcije tokom vremena značajno mijenjale. Prvobitno zamišljena kao vojni i odbrambeni objekti, ona se danas sve češće reinterpetiraju kao prostori kulture, turističke atrakcije i mjesta održavanja raznovrsnih događaja. Istraživanje se bavi promjenljivim ulogama tvrđava kroz kritičko sagledavanje odnosa između istorijskog pamćenja i savremene estetizacije. Oslanjajući se na teorije arhitektonske estetike (Scruton, Zumthor, Böhme), spektakla i hiperrealnosti (Debord, Lefebvre, Baudrillard), kao i studija kulturne baštine (Riegl, Ashworth i Tunbridge, Graham), istraživanje primjenjuje komparativni pristup studije slučaja. Analizira se šest tvrđava – Citadela u Budvi, Kanli kula, Španjola, Mamula, Trašte i Stražnik – kao paradigmatični primjeri načina na koji privremeni događaji, festivali i kulturni programi redefinišu simbolički i funkcionalni značaj baštine. Rezultati ukazuju na ambivalentne ishode transformacija zasnovanih na događajima. S jedne strane, one doprinose revitalizaciji baštine kroz ekonomsku održivost, doživljaj ambijenta i povećanu javnu vidljivost. S druge strane, postoji rizik od njenog svođenja na scenografsku funkciju, pri čemu tržišna logika dobija prednost nad istorijskom dubinom i kolektivnim pamćenjem. Komparativna analiza ukazuje na različite razvojne putanje: inkluzivna kulturna aktivacija suprotstavlja se procesima komercijalizacije i ekskluzivnosti. Zaključuje se da estetska aktivacija fortifikacija može doprinijeti održivoj revitalizaciji samo ukoliko je praćena kritičkom interpretacijom, inkluzivnim kulturnim politikama i strategijama očuvanja istorijskih narativa. U odsustvu takvih okvira, spektakularizacija baštine može dovesti do gubitka njene autentičnosti i slabljenja njene uloge kao zajedničkog prostora sjećanja i identiteta.

Ključne riječi arhitektonska baština; fortifikacije; estetika spektakla; istorijsko pamćenje; eventifikacija.

1 Introduction

Coastal fortifications along the Montenegrin coast constitute a unique spatial and cultural palimpsest. Built across centuries of shifting geopolitical frontiers, from Venetian and Ottoman rule to the Austro-Hungarian period, these structures now stand as silent witnesses to changing notions of power, identity, and space. Once instruments of defense and surveillance, fortresses today occupy a paradoxical position within the cultural landscape: they are at once remnants of conflict and symbols of heritage, sites of collective memory and platforms of tourism and spectacle (Graham et al., 2000). Their stone walls, formerly barriers of exclusion, have become open stages of cultural production and aesthetic experience.

In the last three decades, Montenegro's coastal cities have undergone rapid transformation driven by the expansion of tourism and real-estate urbanism. Within this process, fortifications such as the Budva Citadel, Kanli Kula in Herceg Novi, Spanjola, and Mamula Island Fortress have been reinterpreted as cultural and economic assets. The adaptation of these spaces for festivals, concerts, and exclusive events has redefined their symbolic meaning, converting them from historical artefacts into performative environments. This shift reflects a broader global trend of the eventification of heritage, where cultural value is increasingly mediated through spectacle and experience (Richards & Palmer, 2010).

To address this transformation, the paper integrates three theoretical domains: heritage studies, architectural aesthetics, and theories of spectacle. These perspectives are utilized as complementary lenses for interpreting the interaction between memory, aesthetics, and contemporary cultural use.

As Böhme (2017) argues, the aesthetic perception of space is not limited to its material form but emerges from its atmospheric qualities. When historical spaces are reprogrammed as event venues, their atmospheres are inevitably altered, sometimes enriched through public engagement, but often reduced to scenographic utility. Similarly, Debord's (1995/1967) notion of the "society of the spectacle" underscores how the commodification of images transforms social relations into representations, turning cultural heritage into a consumable experience. These frameworks collectively highlight the tension between preservation and performance that underlies the current condition of Montenegrin fortifications.

The central research problem addressed in this paper concerns the transformation of coastal fortresses from defensive infrastructures into stages of aesthetic and cultural production. The aim is to critically investigate how processes of aestheticization and eventification reshape the perception, accessibility, and authenticity of these historical sites. The study focuses on the interplay between historical memory and the aesthetics of spectacle, seeking to understand whether the spectacular revitalization of heritage can sustain or distort its original meanings.

Accordingly, the principal research question guiding the study is: How do aesthetic and event-based transformations of fortifications affect their symbolic,

functional, and social roles within contemporary urban and cultural contexts?

From this question derives the central hypothesis of the paper: that event-based revitalization generates ambivalent outcomes. On one hand, it revitalizes heritage through economic viability, atmospheric experience, and public visibility. On the other hand, it risks reducing historical sites to scenic commodities, privileging market logic over memory and authenticity (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1996). The paper argues that sustainable heritage activation can only occur when aesthetic transformation is accompanied by critical interpretation, inclusive cultural policy, and participatory management frameworks (UNESCO, 2011).

To test this hypothesis, the study employs a comparative case-study approach. Four fortresses – Budva Citadel, Kanli Kula, Spanjola, and Mamula – are analyzed as paradigmatic examples of adaptive reuse, while two additional sites, Straznik and Traste, are included as counterpoints representing inaction and neglect. Together, these six cases form a structured comparative framework that captures both visible and latent trajectories of fortification reuse. The selection of these cases is based on three criteria: (1) differing historical origins and periods of use; (2) contrasting ownership and management models; and (3) divergent contemporary trajectories ranging from intensive commercialization to abandonment. Each case is examined through architectural observation, discourse analysis, and policy review.

While the selected fortresses differ significantly in their historical origins, spatial relationships to contemporary urban settlements, and legal and governance frameworks, they are connected by a shared context of uneven and fragmented heritage management. The cases range from municipally managed cultural venues to privatized luxury developments and neglected peripheral sites, reflecting the absence of a coherent, value-based approach to heritage governance. Rather than proposing a universal model of revitalization, the study focuses on examining the outcomes of such divergent and often uncoordinated practices within a transitional socio-political context, where heritage transformation unfolds through spontaneous, market-driven, and institutionally uneven processes.

This approach follows the interpretive logic outlined by Yin (2014), who emphasizes that case studies enable contextual understanding of complex socio-spatial phenomena. By analyzing both active and dormant fortifications, the paper captures the full spectrum of heritage dynamics, ranging from hyper visible cultural icons to silent ruins that resist commodification. The inclusion of inactive sites such as Straznik and Traste also introduces a critical dimension to the study, exposing the selective nature of heritage valorization and questioning whether the absence of visibility equates to absence of value (Harrison, 2012).

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to debates on the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of heritage transformation. While revitalization projects often claim to preserve history through creative reuse, they can simultaneously depoliticize memory by framing heritage as spectacle (Baudrillard, 1981). The Montenegrin context provides a revealing microcosm of these global

processes, where small coastal cities negotiate between preservation imperatives and tourism economies. Understanding this negotiation is essential not only for heritage management but also for rethinking the role of architecture as a medium of collective identity.

Methodologically, the research combines architectural observation, discourse analysis of cultural and media representations, and review of policy and governance documents. These methods allow for a qualitative, comparative evaluation of how historical narratives, spatial practices, and management structures interact in shaping the contemporary trajectories of fortification reuse.

The paper's structure is organized as follows:

- Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework, drawing on theories of heritage, aesthetics, and spectacle.
- Chapter 3 situates fortresses as urban and cultural actors, exploring their spatial and symbolic roles in the transformation of Montenegrin coastal cities.
- Chapter 4 presents detailed case studies of six fortresses – Budva Citadel, Kanli Kula, Spanjola, Mamula, Straznik, and Traste – illustrating different modes of activation and neglect.
- Chapter 5 discusses the ambivalence of spectacular revitalization, emphasizing the need for critical and inclusive approaches.
- Chapter 6 concludes by synthesizing findings and proposing principles for sustainable aesthetic activation of heritage.

This study approaches Montenegrin fortifications as architectural stages of ambivalent transformation, where history, aesthetics, and market forces intersect. By examining how these spaces mediate between memory and spectacle, it seeks to illuminate broader questions about the future of cultural heritage in the age of tourism and visual consumption.

2 Theoretical Framework: Heritage, Aesthetics, and Spectacle

The transformation of fortifications from military to cultural spaces cannot be adequately understood without a multilayered theoretical lens. This research draws on three analytically complementary frameworks: heritage theory, which interprets the cultural and political construction of the past; architectural aesthetics, which examines the perceptual and affective qualities of the built form; and theories of spectacle and hyperreality, which interrogate the mediatization and commodification of cultural experience. Rather than functioning as parallel or autonomous discourses, these frameworks operate as complementary analytical lenses addressing distinct but interrelated dimensions of fortification reuse. The convergence of these frameworks provides a critical basis for analyzing how Montenegrin fortresses are reimagined in contemporary urban and tourism-related contexts.

2.1 Cultural Heritage and Urban Context

Cultural heritage has long been a contested field of meaning, oscillating between preservation and reinterpretation. In his foundational essay *The Modern*

Cult of Monuments, Alois Riegl (1903) introduced the concept of value pluralism in heritage, distinguishing between historical, use, and newness values. For Riegl, heritage is not an immutable relic of the past but a product of contemporary cultural intentions. This recognition that every epoch redefines what is worth preserving has profoundly influenced later heritage discourse.

Building on Riegl's insights, Graham et al. (2000) argue that heritage is less about material remains than about processes of meaning-making. Within this framework, fortifications function not merely as remnants of historical conflict but as active components of urban identity formation. Their renewed visibility within the Montenegrin landscape demonstrates how local and national identities are being renegotiated through spatial symbols.

Urban theorist Spiro Kostof (1991) describes cities as "collective works of art," where layers of history coexist within the built environment. Fortifications, as elements of urban morphology, act as palimpsests – sites where successive historical moments leave traces without erasing what came before. This palimpsestic nature is especially evident along the Adriatic coast, where Venetian, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian fortresses coexist within the same cultural horizon. Contemporary revitalization thus entails mediating between overlapping historical narratives while acknowledging present-day social and economic pressures.

The UNESCO (2011) Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape redefines heritage as an integrated relationship between cultural, natural, and social dimensions. It emphasizes that conservation must account for "the dynamic nature of cities" and incorporate community participation in managing change. Similarly, ICOMOS (1999) insists that cultural landscapes are "living heritage," requiring continuous adaptation rather than static preservation. These institutional frameworks align with the interpretive approach of this paper, which views fortifications not as isolated monuments but as cultural systems embedded in urban and regional dynamics.

2.2 Architectural Aesthetics and Atmosphere

If heritage theory addresses the meaning of fortifications, architectural aesthetics illuminates their experience. According to Roger Scruton (1979), architectural beauty emerges from the harmony between form, purpose, and context. He posits that aesthetic judgement in architecture depends on understanding the building as an intentional object, one that carries both functional and symbolic dimensions. Fortresses exemplify this duality: their geometry is dictated by defense but simultaneously evokes sublimity, solidarity, and order.

Contemporary architectural phenomenology deepens this perspective by emphasizing atmosphere as the bridge between spatial form and human perception. Peter Zumthor (2006) writes that architecture communicates through the emotional resonance of materials, light, and sound, shaping the way spaces are felt rather than simply seen. In this paper, his notion of atmosphere is employed as an analytical tool for examining how spatial qualities shape experiential continuity and collective memory in reused heritage sites.

Within heritage studies, atmosphere and aesthetic experience are not treated as purely subjective impressions, but as recognized attributes of authenticity. UNESCO's Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention identify "spirit and feeling" as one of the attributes through which authenticity may be expressed, alongside form, material, use, and function. Although experiential in nature, this attribute is assessed through established heritage evaluation processes that combine expert judgment with participatory engagement of communities and users. In this sense, atmosphere is understood not as a stylistic preference, but as a value-bearing dimension of heritage, negotiated through both expert and social perspectives.

Philosopher Gernot Böhme (2017) expands this into a full-fledged aesthetic of atmospheres, arguing that architecture does not merely contain experiences but produces them. Atmosphere, as he argues, is the reality of the aesthetic, a spatially diffuse but perceptible quality that envelops both subject and object. This notion is particularly relevant for fortresses repurposed as event venues, where lighting, music, and crowd dynamics actively construct new atmospheres. This shift from defensive to performative use thus entails an aesthetic reprogramming of space, altering not only function but also perception and meaning.

However, this transformation raises critical ethical questions. The aesthetic enhancement of heritage through events can democratize access and emotional engagement, but it can also aestheticize history into surface spectacles. Scruton (1996) warns against the reduction of architecture to mere visual pleasure, insisting that beauty carries moral responsibility toward the community. When applied to heritage, this argument suggests that aesthetic interventions must respect the temporal and cultural depth of place rather than exploit it for ephemeral effect.

The concept of authenticity, central to heritage discourse, also acquires aesthetic significance. Lowenthal (1985) observes that authenticity is often less about historical accuracy than about the feeling of the past, what he calls "the aura of antiquity." In the context of Montenegrin fortresses, authenticity is therefore approached as an experiential and relational condition rather than a fixed historical state. Overly designed spectacles may erode the subtle atmospheres that sustain emotional continuity between past and present.

2.3 Spectacle and Hyperreality

The recontextualization of heritage as entertainment cannot be separated from the broader cultural condition that Guy Debord (1995/1967) termed the society of the spectacle. Debord describes modern life as dominated by representations, where everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation. Within this logic, cultural heritage becomes a stage upon which images circulate, and its value is measured by visibility rather than meaning. The fortress, once a site of defense, becomes a photo backdrop, a performative interface between visitors and mediated memory.

Expanding Debord's critique, Henri Lefebvre (1991) conceptualizes space as a social product shaped by

economic, political, and cultural forces. His triadic model – perceived, conceived, and lived space – offers a powerful tool for analyzing heritage transformations. Fortifications as lived spaces embody collective practices, but as conceived spaces they are redesigned according to urban plans, investor visions, or festival programming. The tension between these dimensions reveals how heritage is simultaneously experienced, managed, and commodified.

Jean Baudrillard (1981) radicalizes this discussion through the notion of simulacra – copies that no longer refer to an original. In the heritage context, simulacra emerge when historical environments are reconstructed or staged to fulfill aesthetic expectations rather than convey historical truth. Tourism driven heritage economies thus risk producing hyperreality, where visitors consume the appearance of authenticity while the underlying historical narratives are simplified or displaced. In this paper, hyperreality is treated as a potential outcome of certain heritage practices, not as a totalizing condition applicable to all forms of reuse.

Yet spectacle is not solely destructive. As Lefebvre (1996) later suggested, urban festivals can also act as moments of reconciliation, temporarily restoring communal bonds through shared experience. The ambivalence of spectacle lies in its dual capacity to activate heritage through participation while simultaneously aestheticizing and commodifying it. This ambivalence constitutes the central dilemma of contemporary fortification reuse.

2.4 Heritage as Capital and Dissonance

Heritage transformations unfold within political economies that privilege visibility and consumption. Ashworth and Tunbridge (1996) coined the term dissonant heritage to describe the conflicts that arise when different groups attach incompatible meanings to the same site. Fortresses, as symbols of past conflicts and shifting sovereignties, are quintessentially dissonant. Their reinterpretation as cultural venues often suppresses uncomfortable memories, such as military violence, occupation, or imprisonment in favour of marketable narratives of beauty and leisure.

For Brian Graham (2002), heritage operates as both cultural capital and a political resource. Its commodification is inevitable in globalized contexts, where economic sustainability increasingly dictates heritage policy. Nevertheless, commodification does not necessarily negate value; rather, it redefines it within new systems of exchange. The key question becomes how to ensure that economic activation does not eclipse historical and social depth.

Contemporary heritage theory recognizes this dilemma. Smith (2006) critiques what she calls the "Authorized Heritage Discourse" (AHD), a set of institutional practices that prioritize monumental aesthetics and expert authority over community narratives. Smith proposes an understanding of heritage as a performative practice – something enacted through use, participation, and negotiation. This perspective is particularly relevant for event-based fortification reuse, where heritage is continually reproduced through cultural programming rather than merely preserved as fabric.

International frameworks reinforce the need for such inclusive approaches. The UNESCO (2011) Historic Urban Landscape approach advocates integrating conservation with social and economic development, while the Council of Europe (2005) Faro Convention foregrounds the right of citizens to participate in heritage decisions. These documents collectively shift the focus from the preservation of fabric to the preservation of meaning, a principle crucial for balancing aesthetic revitalization with ethical responsibility.

2.5 Integrative Discussion

Together, these perspectives form an integrated analytical framework rather than a cumulative theoretical backdrop. In this integrative view, fortresses become testing grounds for the contradictions of contemporary heritage practice. Their massive forms embody the endurance of history, yet their new uses demonstrate its fluid reinterpretation. As Choay (2001) observes, the modern cult of heritage is a paradox: it seeks to protect the past by continually reinventing it. The fortresses of Budva, Herceg Novi, and the Bay of Kotor exemplify this paradox, where acts of preservation often coincide with acts of reinvention.

Consequently, the theoretical framework adopted here does not oppose aesthetic transformation but situates it within a critical understanding of its implications. Spectacle is approached as an ambivalent condition – capable of both enriching and undermining heritage – rather than as an inherently negative force. This dialectical perspective informs the subsequent analysis, where each fortress is interpreted as a case of negotiation between aesthetic experience, economic logic, and historical memory.

3 Fortresses as Urban and Cultural Actors

Fortifications are among the most visible and symbolically charged components of the urban landscape of Montenegro's Adriatic coast. As architectural artefacts, they embody the intersection between geography, power, and identity; as cultural artefacts, they mediate between memory and modernity. Once conceived as instruments of control, physical manifestations of territorial surveillance and military defense, fortresses today are increasingly repositioned within contemporary urban and cultural frameworks through processes of reuse, management, and interpretation. Their renewed presence within the contemporary city transforms them into active participants in the redefinition of urban identity and public space (Kostof, 1991; Graham et al., 2000).

The Montenegrin coast, from Ulcinj to Herceg Novi, contains an extraordinary density of fortifications, each reflecting the imprint of successive empires. Venetian bastions in Budva and Kotor, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian fortresses in Herceg Novi, collectively form a continuous defensive landscape. This military network, originally conceived to control maritime routes and political boundaries, has in the post-industrial era been subsumed into a new geography of cultural tourism.

Within this geography, fortresses no longer signify danger or exclusion but rather heritage value, symbolic visibility, and experiential potential.

3.1 From Defense to Display

The shift from defense to display encapsulates the broader transformation of fortresses from military to symbolic infrastructures. In urban theory, Lefebvre (1991) distinguishes between spaces of representation and representational spaces: the former designed by power, the latter reinterpreted through lived experience. Fortifications exemplify this dialectic. Originally conceived as spaces of representation, embodiments of political order, they have become representational spaces through tourism, cultural use, and artistic reinterpretation.

In Budva, for instance, the Citadel now serves as a curated symbol of the city's historical continuity, its stone bastions framing theatrical performances, exhibitions, and commercial and semi-public events. The same walls that once repelled sieges now host international audiences, demonstrating the fluidity of architectural meaning. This process aligns with Harvey's (1989) concept of postmodern urban spectacle, where cities commodify history as an image to be consumed. The fortress, therefore, transitions from being a defensive apparatus to a cultural interface, a medium through which urban identity is selectively represented and marketed.

3.2 The Fortress as an Urban Node

Urban morphologists have long emphasized that fortifications are not external additions to the city but integral to its spatial structure. As Kostof (1991) notes, the morphology of many Mediterranean cities emerged from the geometry of their walls and gates. In the case of Budva, Kotor, and Herceg Novi, the fortresses delineated the limits of civic life and organized spatial hierarchies. The modern dismantling and reprogramming of these boundaries thus transform not only physical space but also the social order previously structured by them.

Today, the fortress operates as a node of urban memory, a condensate of historical meanings in the expanding field of the tourist city. According to Rossi (1982), urban artefacts carry a permanent value capable of resisting time, acting as anchors of continuity within changing urban dynamics. Yet in the context of neoliberal development, these anchors risk being detached from their historical moorings. The transformation of fortresses into event venues or private resorts, while seemingly preserving their form, can sever their ties to collective experience and convert them into aesthetic commodities (Baudrillard, 1981).

This paradox manifests clearly in coastal Montenegro, where fortified structures are frequently integrated into high-end tourism masterplans. The case of Mamula Island, for example, illustrates how adaptive reuse can produce what Zukin (1995) calls the aestheticization of power. Heritage becomes a visual marker of exclusivity rather than a public resource. In contrast, Kanli Kula in Herceg Novi represents an alternative model, where the fortress is used as an open cultural venue for public events, maintaining its connection with the local community. The

divergent fates of these sites highlight how fortresses, as urban actors, can reproduce either inclusive or exclusive spatial logics.

3.3 Fortresses and the Production of Urban Meaning

The symbolic function of fortifications extends beyond their physical form. They participate in what Graham and Howard (2008) term the production of heritage meaning, a process through which societies construct narratives of belonging and difference. In Montenegro, fortresses are mobilized within a discourse of Mediterranean identity that reconciles local distinctiveness with European cultural aspirations. The visibility of restored fortifications in tourism marketing, cultural festivals, and film production illustrates how heritage becomes instrumental in branding the coastal city (Richards & Palmer, 2010).

At the same time, this visibility can obscure the more complex social histories embodied in these structures. Fortresses often carry memories of colonial domination, displacement, and imprisonment – dimensions that are rarely foregrounded in contemporary interpretations. The Mamula case, where a World War II prison is transformed into a luxury resort, epitomizes what Ashworth and Tunbridge (1996) describe as dissonant heritage, the selective remembrance of certain pasts and the silencing of others. The tension between memory and marketability thus becomes central to the cultural life of fortresses.

3.4 The Spatial Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion

The reactivation of fortresses as cultural spaces also brings to light questions of accessibility and spatial justice. The concept of spatial justice, developed by Harvey (1996) and Soja (2010), extends the idea of social equity into the spatial realm, emphasizing the right of all citizens to participate in and benefit from urban space. From this perspective, the privatization of fortresses through exclusive events or commercial concessions represents not merely an aesthetic issue but a form of spatial inequality.

In Budva, access to the Citadel is partly restricted during private functions, while the high cost of maintenance is offset through commercial rentals. Conversely, Kanli Kula operates under municipal management, offering free or low-cost entry for most cultural events, thereby fostering inclusivity. These differing management models demonstrate that spatial justice in heritage depends on governance as much as on architecture. As Smith (2006) argues, heritage must be understood as a cultural process that includes the negotiation of rights, values, and voices.

Peripheral sites such as Straznik and Traste, by contrast, exemplify spatial injustice through absence. Located outside major tourist circuits, they remain inaccessible, deteriorating, and largely invisible within policy frameworks. Their neglect reflects the structural bias of heritage valorization, which prioritizes visibility and profit over community relevance. The silence surrounding these sites underscores what Harrison (2012) calls the “politics of absence” in heritage, where certain spaces are excluded from narratives of progress precisely because they resist commodification.

3.5 Fortresses as Cultural Mediators

Despite these contradictions, fortifications continue to function as powerful mediators between the past and present. Their commanding locations and monumental forms give them enduring capacity to organize collective memory and imagination. In architectural and urban terms, they provide vantage points, both literal and symbolic, from which society observes itself. As Augé (1995) suggests, places of memory serve as anchors of identity in a world of transience. The challenge is to activate this mnemonic potential without reducing it to spectacle.

Recent restoration and cultural programming efforts reveal that fortresses can indeed operate as mediators of civic engagement. Projects such as the ongoing Spanjola Fortress revitalization, initiated through UNDP-organized architectural competition in 2020, represent a shift toward institutional and participatory models of heritage management. These initiatives demonstrate how international frameworks can support local empowerment, transforming dormant sites into platforms of inclusive culture. However, they also raise questions about the balance between global development agendas and local identity formation, issues that will be further explored in the case studies.

3.6 Toward a Dynamic Understanding of Urban Heritage

The conceptualization of fortresses as urban and cultural actors invites a dynamic rather than static understanding of heritage. Drawing on Rossi's (1982) notion of the collective memory of the city, these structures can be seen as repositories of urban continuity that actively shape new spatial practices. Their reuse is not merely a matter of conservation but of production: the production of meaning, experience, and identity.

In this sense, Montenegrin fortifications exemplify what Choay (2001) calls the heritage paradox, societies seek to preserve the past precisely by transforming it. The adaptive reuse of fortresses into cultural venues, tourist attractions, or even private enterprises reveals that heritage is never neutral, it is constantly negotiated between public interest and private investment, memory and marketing, authenticity and performance. Understanding fortresses as actors in this negotiation provides the conceptual bridge to the next chapter, which examines how these dynamics materialize in specific architectural and managerial contexts.

4 Case Studies: Six Fortresses of the Montenegrin Coast

The Montenegrin coastline, stretching from Ulcinj in the south to Herceg Novi in the north, contains a dense and heterogeneous network of fortifications that reflect successive geopolitical regimes and uneven contemporary heritage trajectories. While each fortress has a distinct historical origin and spatial context, they are connected by a shared condition of post-military transformation, whereby former defensive structures are

reinterpreted within contemporary cultural, economic, and governance frameworks. This chapter examines six case studies: Budva Citadel, Kanli Kula, Spanjola Fortress, Mamula Island Fortress, and the marginal sites of Straznik and Traste, selected to represent contrasting models of heritage activation, governance, and neglect.

The selection of cases reflects differences in historical origin, ownership and management structures, and contemporary modes of transformation, ranging from intensive commercialization to institutional revitalization and deliberate non-intervention. Through this comparative framework, the chapter maps a spectrum of outcomes produced by heritage transformation—from inclusive cultural reuse and participatory revitalization to luxury appropriation and infrastructural abandonment—thereby operationalizing the paper's central concept of ambivalence as an analytical lens.

The case studies are examined through three analytical criteria: governance, accessibility, and interpretation, addressing ownership and management models, degrees of public access, and the framing of historical narratives through contemporary use and cultural programming.

4.1 Budva Citadel: Commercial Aestheticization

The Budva Citadel, positioned at the southern tip of the Old Town, represents a paradigmatic case of commercially driven heritage transformation on the Montenegrin coast. Originally built in the 15th century under Venetian rule, the Citadel served as a defensive stronghold controlling maritime access to the Adriatic. In its contemporary condition, the Citadel operates within a market-oriented governance framework, functioning as a hybrid assemblage of museum space, private event venue, and high-end hospitality facility.



Figure 1 “Something historical happened on the Citadel. A fortress became a dancefloor!” – Instagram post by Exotica Experience, illustrating the transformation of the Budva Citadel into a contemporary event space. Source: [exotica.experience](#) (Instagram), accessed July 23, 2025.



Figure 2 Preparation of the space for an exclusive wedding within the walls of the Budva Citadel, illustrating the aestheticization and privatization of the historical setting. Source: Wedding in Montenegro – Malović Wedding Agency (Facebook), accessed July 23, 2025.

This mode of reuse corresponds to what Ashworth and Tunbridge (1996) describe as heritage commodification, whereby historical significance is increasingly subordinated to economic visibility and consumption. Its courtyard regularly hosts festivals, fashion shows, and private receptions, all framed by meticulously restored stone walls and panoramic sea views. Although such programming secures financial sustainability and physical upkeep, it also redefines the primary function of the site, reconfiguring its atmosphere from one of contemplation toward controlled spectacle and curated exclusivity, as illustrated in Figure 1.

From an aesthetic perspective, this transformation can be interpreted through Böhme's (2017) concept of atmosphere as a spatially produced and managed condition. The artificial lighting, amplified soundscapes, and curated events within the Citadel exemplify an intentional atmospheric reconfiguration, in which sensory elements are mobilized to enhance experiential appeal rather than historical interpretation. Crucially, this aesthetic and economic activation produces tangible effects on accessibility and public use. Entrance fees, commercial leasing, and private bookings periodically restrict access, as illustrated in Figure 2, transforming a historically collective urban landmark into a selectively accessible space.

The result is an ambivalent condition: a fortress preserved materially but symbolically redefined into a controlled heritage commodity operating within market logics rather than civic frameworks.

4.2 Kanli Kula: Public Cultural Inclusivity

In contrast to commercially oriented transformations, Kanli Kula in Herceg Novi represents a model of publicly oriented cultural reuse grounded in municipal governance and long-term cultural programming. Constructed during Ottoman rule in the 16th century and later modified by the Venetians, Kanli Kula dominates the upper part of the old town, offering sweeping views over the Bay of Kotor. Restored in 1966, the fortress gained a new function when its interior was redesigned into an open-air amphitheatre with a stage and stands, which has since served as a

setting for the Herceg Novi Film Festival and numerous cultural gatherings, as shown in Figure 3.

This transformation exemplifies what Richards and Palmer (2010) term cultural activation, the process of integrating heritage into the living cultural life of a city. Unlike privatized or concession-based models, Kanli Kula remains publicly owned and municipally managed, ensuring stable governance structures and relatively unrestricted public access. The fortress thus operates as a social condenser, strengthening the relationship between built heritage, collective use, and civic participation.

From an aesthetic standpoint, Kanli Kula preserves what Zumthor (2006) calls the authentic atmosphere of place. Its rough stone textures, minimal intervention, and open-air character maintain continuity without excessive scenographic modification. Within this context, contemporary performances function not as aesthetic overlays but as extensions of what Smith (2006) conceptualizes as heritage-as-process, whereby meaning is continually produced through use, participation, and repetition. Rather than presenting a universally replicable model, Kanli Kula illustrates how sustained public ownership, cultural continuity, and moderate architectural intervention can generate a relatively stable balance between historical memory, functional use, and social accessibility within a transitional heritage context.



Figure 3 The 38th Herceg Novi Film Festival held at Kanli Kula Fortress, representing the integration of heritage and contemporary cultural production. Source: bokaneews.me, accessed August 1, 2025.

4.3 Španjola Fortress: Institutional Revitalization and Participatory Reuse

The Španjola Fortress, located above the historic core of Herceg Novi, represents a distinct model of heritage transformation characterized by the transformation from informal grassroots activation to institutionally coordinated revitalization. Erected by the Spaniards in 1538 and expanded during Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian periods, Španjola has functioned historically as a strategic military structure while remaining marginal to the city's everyday social and cultural life. For decades it remained physically intact but socially dormant, its vast interior spaces lying beyond the everyday cultural life of the town.

In the decade preceding formal institutional intervention, local artists and cultural collectives were



Figure 4 The Španjola Fortress Festival, Herceg Novi, 2017 – an example of cultural activation through artistic and community events within a heritage setting. Source: arh.bg.ac.rs, accessed August 3, 2025.

among the first actors to identify the fortress's potential as a space for creative and educational experimentation. Through informal workshops, site-specific installations, and open-air performances, they initiated a bottom-up process of spatial activation that preceded official revitalization efforts, as illustrated in Figure 4. These grassroots initiatives reframed Španjola as a space of experimentation and dialogue, illustrating how heritage meaning can be reconstituted through use rather than formal designation. This dynamic aligns with Smith's (2006) conception of heritage as a cultural process sustained through practice, participation, and repetition rather than solely through expert classification.

Building on these locally initiated practices, Španjola became the subject of a structured revitalization process following a 2020 architectural competition organized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with the Municipality of Herceg Novi, as shown in Figure 5. This moment marks a transition from informal activation toward institutionally coordinated heritage management, in which international development frameworks intersect with local cultural initiatives and municipal governance. The UNDP project emphasizes sustainability, accessibility, and the integration of cultural and educational functions. In this sense, Španjola exemplifies what Graham et al. (2000) describe as the transformation of heritage from static object to a process of negotiation among multiple actors and interests.

Importantly, the revitalization framework incorporates participatory mechanisms for community engagement,



Figure 5 The first-prize winning design proposal for the Španjola Fortress revitalization competition, illustrating the institutional approach to heritage reuse. Source: enforma.me, accessed August 3, 2025.

aligning with the principles of the Faro Convention (Council of Europe, 2005), which affirms citizens' rights to access, interpret, and shape heritage. The initiative positions Spanjola not as a closed monument but as an evolving civic platform, rooted in both artistic experimentation and institutional collaboration. This new momentum distinguishes it from earlier ad-hoc interventions and signals a maturing process-oriented phase in Montenegrin heritage management.

Aesthetically, the fortress retains its atmospheric power, massive stone bastions overlooking the bay, while its renewed cultural activity redefines the site's presence in public consciousness. Following Böhme's (2017) understanding of atmosphere as relational and produced through use, this transformation can be interpreted as a shift from abandonment toward anticipatory engagement, generated through collective presence rather than scenographic intervention.

4.4 Mamula Island Fortress: Dissonant Heritage and Luxury Appropriation

If Spanjola represents inclusive revitalization, Mamula Island Fortress stands at the opposite end of the spectrum. Built by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the mid-19th century, the circular fortress occupies a small island at the entrance of the Bay of Kotor. During World War II, it served as an Italian prison camp, a site of confinement, forced labor, and collective trauma. In the 2010s, the Montenegrin government leased the island to a private company for conversion into a luxury resort, sparking intense public controversy and international criticism.

This transformation epitomizes Ashworth and Tunbridge's (1996) notion of dissonant heritage: the tension between competing narratives of memory and economic development. By rebranding the site as an exclusive leisure destination, the project reframes its historical narrative, privileging consumption-oriented experiences over commemorative functions, as illustrated in Figure 6. Baudrillard's (1981) theory of simulacra is relevant here, as the renovated Mamula offers a carefully curated experience of "heritage" that abstracts architectural form from historical suffering.



Figure 6 Mamula Island Fortress, 2023 – the transformation of a former prison site into a luxury resort, exemplifying the commodification of memory. Source: rhapsody-magazine.com, accessed August 3, 2025.

Public opposition to the project highlighted the ethical dilemmas of privatizing memory. Civil society groups, former prisoners' families, and local historians organized petitions, performances, and commemorative gatherings to contest the commodification of the site. Their activism led to the subsequent inclusion of a memorial component within the resort, an exhibition that narrates the fortress's wartime history. However, as Harrison (2012) notes, such gestures often function as symbolic compensations rather than genuine reconciliations. The memorial, enclosed within the boundaries of a luxury enclave, risks becoming part of the same spectacle it seeks to critique.

Mamula thus serves as a cautionary emblem of how heritage can be appropriated by market forces under the guise of preservation. It also exposes the fragility of ethical frameworks when historical memory is managed through private capital. Rather than presenting Mamula as an unequivocal failure or success, this case demonstrates the ambivalent outcomes of market-driven heritage activation, where material conservation may coexist with symbolic displacement. The case reveals that without transparent governance and active public dialogue, the aesthetics of restoration can drift toward the aesthetics of amnesia.

4.5 Straznik and Traste Fortresses: Marginalized Heritage and the Politics of Absence

Beyond the well-known fortresses of Budva and the Bay of Kotor lie smaller and largely forgotten structures such as Straznik and Traste, located near Tivat. These fortifications, dating from the Austro-Hungarian period, occupy elevated sites overlooking the coast but remain physically deteriorated and institutionally neglected. Unlike the previously discussed case studies, these two fortresses are neither formally protected cultural properties nor integrated into any active management or revitalization framework. Access to both sites is extremely limited – overgrown paths, collapsed retaining walls, and the absence of basic infrastructure render them almost invisible even to local residents. Once strategically positioned to control maritime approaches, they now exist on the periphery of both physical and cultural maps.

Straznik and Traste exemplify what Harrison (2012) defines as the politics of absence, the structural invisibility of sites that fall outside dominant regimes of value, protection, and investment. Their isolation is not only physical but administrative: neither fortress has been included in national or municipal revitalization programs, nor are they accessible to the public or signposted from main roads. In the case of Traste (Figure 7), the fortress is recorded in the cadastral registry as property of the Municipality of Kotor, yet without heritage protection status or a defined management plan. Straznik (Figure 8), by contrast, is not recorded in the real estate registry as a fortress at all, no cultural asset is formally registered on the parcel where the remains are located, despite their documented historical existence. The lack of maintenance has allowed vegetation to engulf their masonry, transforming the remains into ambiguous landscape features that oscillate between ruin and terrain.



Figure 7 The current condition of the Traste Fortress – illustrating neglect and physical decay as forms of silent heritage. Source: dneвно.me, accessed August 28, 2025.

The condition exposes the criteria by which heritage is selected for recognition and investment – legal visibility, administrative clarity, accessibility, and economic potential. In a system where value is tied to spectacle, sites without immediate touristic or aesthetic appeal are left to decay. Yet from a critical heritage perspective, these “silent fortresses” challenge the assumption that revitalization is inherently positive. Their very inertia reveals alternative temporalities of heritage, spaces where decay, rather than restoration, preserves authenticity.

As DeSilvey (2017) suggests, allowing certain ruins to persist in their entropy can serve as a form of curated decay, maintaining the integrity of material and memory outside market logic. In this sense, the overgrown paths and inaccessible approaches to Straznik and Traste become spatial metaphors for the marginalization of less profitable histories. Their neglect, while symptomatic of systemic disinterest, also constitutes a kind of resistance – a quiet refusal to be absorbed into the economy of spectacle.

The absence of intervention at these sites functions as a critical indicator of the limits of contemporary heritage policy, revealing how non-designated and administratively unresolved sites are excluded from both protection and discourse. It raises the question: Does the lack of events signify the lack of value, or does it preserve a deeper, unspectacular authenticity? Addressing this question requires rethinking the metrics of heritage significance beyond economic visibility and tourist performance and acknowledging that silence and distance can also embody forms of cultural memory.

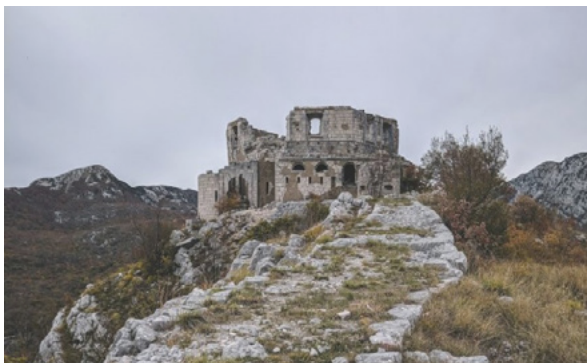


Figure 8 The current condition and access road to the Straznik Fortress – representing marginalization and inaccessibility within contemporary heritage policy. Source: sharemontenegro.me, accessed August 28, 2025.

4.6 Comparative Synthesis: Models of Transformation

The six case studies enable a comparative synthesis of fortification transformation along the Montenegrin coast, based on clearly defined criteria of ownership, legal status, governance, and functional outcome.

Rather than constituting a linear spectrum, the cases demonstrate how similar fortification typologies generate divergent outcomes depending on legal recognition, ownership structures, and governance mechanisms. The comparison reveals five dominant modes of transformation: commercial aestheticization, public cultural reuse, institutional participatory revitalization, luxury appropriation of dissonant heritage, and non-activation resulting in neglect.

The active fortresses – Budva Citadel, Kanli Kula, Spanjola, and Mamula – reveal differing balances between commercialization, public participation, institutional mediation, and historical interpretation. The latent fortresses – Straznik and Traste – expose the structural consequence of non-protection and absent governance, where infrastructure absence and physical inaccessibility directly correlate with neglect, inaccessibility, and physical decay.

Across all cases heritage value is shown to be institutionally produced rather than inherent, amplified through legal protection, management structures, and programmed visibility. At the same time, the non-activated sites complicate the assumption that visibility and activation are prerequisites for heritage value, suggesting that non-intervention may preserve material integrity outside market-driven logics. The comparative analysis thus confirms the study’s central hypothesis – that aestheticized and event-based revitalization of fortifications generates ambivalent outcomes, oscillating between preservation and performance, inclusion and exclusion, remembrance and erasure.

5 Discussion: Ambivalence in Heritage Transformation

The comparative analysis of Montenegrin coastal fortresses reveals an ambivalent relationship between heritage conservation, aesthetic transformation, and economic activation. Processes of revitalization can both sustain historical structures and expose them to visual and experiential consumption that challenges their integrity. This duality constitutes the central condition of contemporary heritage practice in Montenegro and comparable tourism-driven contexts. The initial hypothesis concerning the ambivalent effects of event-based revitalization is operationalized here through three interrelated evaluative criteria: governance structure, degree of accessibility, and modes of historical interpretation. These criteria translate the theoretical discussion into an analytical framework that enables systematic comparison across the six case studies.

Table 1 Comparative synthesis of fortress transformation based on governance and outcome. Source: Author's own elaboration (2025).

Fortress	Budva Citadel	Kanli Kula (Herceg Novi)	Spanjola Fortress (Herceg Novi)	Mamula Island Fortress	Traste Fortress	Straznik Fortress
Historical period	Venetian (15th c.)	Ottoman (16th c.) + later phases	Spanish (1538) + Ottoman / AH layers	Austro-Hungarian (19th c.) WWII prison camp	Austro-Hungarian (late 19th c.)	Austro-Hungarian (late 19th c.)
Ownership / Governance	Private / Private commercial use within heritage setting	Municipality of Herceg Novi / Municipality of Herceg Novi	Municipality of Herceg Novi / UNDP-led revitalization framework	State-owned / Long-term private lease	Municipality of Kotor / Municipality of Kotor	Municipality of Kotor / Municipality of Kotor *Site not formally registered as a built heritage structure in the cadastral registry (Parcel exists)
Legal protection status	Protected (within Old Town heritage zone)	Protected cultural monument	Protected; revitalization in progress	Protected fabric; memory interpretation contested	Not under cultural protection	Not under cultural protection
Current function	Museum, event venue, restaurant	Open-air theatre, festivals	Cultural, educational, participatory reuse (emerging)	Luxury resort with memorial component	No active use	No active use
Accessibility	Partly restricted (fees, private events)	Broad public access	Increasing, project-based	Restricted (exclusive access)	Very limited / informal	Very limited / informal
Transformation model	Commercial aestheticization	Public cultural inclusivity	Institutional revitalization (participatory)	Luxury appropriation (dissonant heritage)	Latent heritage (neglect)	Latent heritage (administrative absence)
Outcome	Financially sustainable, high visibility, but socially exclusive and partially privatized	Strong civic role, balanced reuse, heritage as living public infrastructure	Transitional model; long- term outcome depends on governance continuity	High economic activation, ethical controversy, selective remembrance	Institutional invisibility; physical decay and absence from cultural policy	Double marginalization: legal non- recognition and advanced physical deterioration

5.1 Preservation and Performance: Divergent Models of Activation

The comparative analysis demonstrates that event-based transformation is not inherently problematic; its effects depend on governance, accessibility, and narrative framing. The distinction becomes evident when comparing two contrasting governance trajectories: Budva Citadel and Kanli Kula.

At the Budva Citadel, cultural programming operates within a predominantly commercial framework. Access is frequently regulated through entrance fees and private events, and historical interpretation is subordinated to visual appeal and market-driven aesthetics. In this configuration, the site aligns with Debord's (1995/1967) notion of spectacle, where heritage operates primarily as a controlled visual experience rather than a space of public interpretation.

Kanli Kula, by contrast, demonstrates how performance can reinforce rather than diminish heritage values. As

a municipally managed open-air theatre, it remains accessible and embedded in the everyday cultural life of Herceg Novi. Here, performance functions as a mechanism of continuity between historical fabric and contemporary use. In line with Smith's (2006) understanding of heritage as practice, meaning emerges through collective use and shared authorship rather than visual consumption.

Taken together, these cases confirm that the effects of event-based activation depend not on the presence of events themselves, but on governance arrangements, accessibility, and interpretive responsibility.

5.2 Governance, Economy, and Memory

The cases of Mamula and Spanjola further reveal how governance models shape the relationship between economic activation and historical memory. Although both sites have undergone revitalization, their governance frameworks produce markedly different outcomes.

Mamula represents a model of privatized heritage development. The conversion of a former wartime prison into a luxury resort illustrates what Ashworth and Tunbridge (1996) define as dissonant heritage: the coexistence of incompatible historical meanings within a single site. While a memorial component has been formally incorporated, its placement within a luxury hospitality setting constrains interpretive autonomy and public access, subordinating memory to commercial logic.

Spanjola, in contrast, illustrates institutional ambivalence rather than outright commodification. The ongoing UNDP-led revitalization builds upon earlier grassroots cultural initiatives, combining international development frameworks with local participation. This hybrid governance structure aligns with principles articulated in the Faro Convention and UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape approach, emphasizing accessibility, education, and community engagement. Rather than replacing historical meaning, the process foregrounds negotiation among institutional goals, local cultural practices, and long-term public use.

Taken together, Mamula and Spanjola demonstrate that economic activation alone does not determine heritage outcomes; rather, governance structure and interpretive control are decisive in shaping how memory is preserved, transformed, or constrained.

5.3 Ethics, Access, and Spatial Justice

Questions of access and visibility are central to the ethical evaluation of heritage transformation. Across the analyzed fortresses, exclusion operates through different mechanisms rather than through a single uniform process.

At the Budva Citadel, access is conditioned by commercial logic, where economic and symbolic thresholds regulate who can enter, participate, and interpret the site. At Mamula, exclusion takes the form of luxury enclosure, where heritage is embedded within a privatized resort environment and access is restricted to a limited user group. Straznik and Traste represent a third mode of exclusion: institutional absence rather than active control.

Straznik and Traste are neither commercialized nor curated, remaining absent from formal management frameworks, heritage registers, and cultural programming. As Harrison (2012) argues, such absence constitutes a form of heritage politics in itself. Their exclusion results not from conflict or contestation, but from limited economic visibility and institutional priority.

From the perspective of spatial justice (Harvey, 1996; Soja, 2010), investment, visibility, and governance unevenly distribute heritage value. This comparison demonstrates that access to heritage is shaped less by physical openness than by institutional recognition and governance choices.

5.4 Event-Based Activation and Heritage Interpretation

Event-based activation appears across the case studies as a contingent interpretive mechanism, not a uniform revitalization strategy. Its effects depend on how events are framed, governed, and connected to historical meaning.

Three criteria are central for evaluating event-based activation: (1) purpose – whether events support historical interpretation or prioritize entertainment; (2) duration – whether events function as temporary interventions or lead to permanent reprogramming of the site; (3) relationship to historical narrative – whether events engage with, reinterpret, or obscure the site's historical significance.

Where these criteria are met, as in Kanli Kula and early initiatives at Spanjola, event-based activation reinforces heritage relevance and public engagement. Where they are subordinated to exclusivity and visual consumption, heritage risks reduction to a scenographic backdrop.

This evaluative framework shifts the discussion from subjective impressions toward explicit and comparable criteria. Event-based activation produces divergent outcomes depending on governance, accessibility, and interpretive responsibility.

5.5 Ambivalence as Method

The analysis confirms that ambivalence is not an incidental outcome of heritage transformation but its defining condition. Across the examined cases, heritage reuse unfolds through uneven negotiations between historical memory, governance models, economic activation, and public access. No single revitalization model proves universally applicable, nor should it.

The finding aligns with the ICOMOS premise of living heritage, which understands heritage as a dynamic process shaped by changing social and cultural contexts rather than a fixed state to be preserved. The cases demonstrate that attempts to impose uniform revitalization strategies – commercial, institutional, or curatorial – risk erasing site-specific values and historical complexity.

When approached methodologically rather than normatively, ambivalence enables a more precise and ethically grounded evaluation of heritage outcomes. Rather than categorizing interventions as successful or failed, this approach evaluates how different configurations of governance, access, and interpretation produce distinct forms of inclusion and exclusion.

Within this framework, the diversity of outcomes observed across the case studies is not a weakness of heritage practice but evidence of its contextual nature. The coexistence of activation and neglect, participation and exclusion, remembrance and erasure reflects broader governance and policy conditions rather than isolated design decisions.

Recognizing ambivalence as a method thus shifts the focus from prescribing universal solutions toward developing criteria-sensitive, value-based approaches to heritage management. It encourages adaptive strategies that remain responsive to local context, historical layers, and evolving community needs.

In this sense, ambivalence becomes a productive analytical tool: it enables heritage practitioners and scholars to navigate transformation without reducing heritage to spectacle, commodity, or static monument. Instead, it affirms heritage as a field of ongoing negotiation – one that must remain open to multiple meanings, temporalities, and futures.

6 Conclusion

This paper examined the transformation of Montenegrin coastal fortifications through a comparative, criteria-based analysis of six case studies, focusing on governance models, accessibility, and modes of interpretation rather than on subjective impressions of events. The findings demonstrate that contemporary heritage revitalization operates within a fundamentally ambivalent condition, shaped by uneven negotiations between historical memory, economic activation, institutional capacity, and public access.

The analysis confirms that fortification reuse does not follow a universal model but produces distinct outcomes depending on governance, access, and historical interpretation. Commercially driven models, such as Budva Citadel and Mamula, tend to privilege visibility and revenue, often at the cost of interpretive depth and inclusivity. By contrast, Kanli Kula and the emerging revitalization of Spanjola illustrate how participatory and publicly oriented governance can sustain heritage values while enabling contemporary use. The neglected fortresses of Straznik and Traste further reveal that absence and non-intervention are not neutral conditions, but outcomes of institutional and economic priorities that shape what is allowed to remain visible within heritage policy.

Rather than treating these divergent trajectories as successes or failures, the study adopts ambivalence as an analytical lens for evaluating heritage transformation. This approach aligns with the ICOMOS understanding of living heritage, recognizing heritage as a dynamic and

context-dependent process rather than a fixed state to be preserved or optimized. Ambivalence allows for a critical evaluation of how different configurations of governance, access, and interpretation generate both inclusion and exclusion, activation and erasure.

By shifting the focus from spectacle-driven outcomes to evaluation criteria, the research contributes to a more grounded and applicable framework for heritage analysis. It emphasizes that event-based activation, institutional revitalization, or deliberate non-intervention are not inherently positive or negative practices, but contingent strategies whose implications must be assessed in relation to site-specific values and social context.

Ultimately, the Montenegrin fortresses examined here demonstrate that heritage transformation entails continuous negotiation between preservation and change. Acknowledging ambivalence as an inherent condition of heritage practice enables more transparent, adaptive, and ethically responsible approaches – ones that resist uniform solutions and instead remain attentive to the multiple temporalities, meanings, and communities embedded within historic structures.

Beyond the Montenegrin context, these findings speak to broader challenges in heritage policy and practice in tourism-driven and post-socialist regions, particularly where fortifications and former military landscapes are used as cultural and economic assets. By foregrounding governance, accessibility, and interpretation as evaluative criteria, the paper offers a framework applicable to other contexts negotiating similar tensions between economic activation, public access, and historical responsibility.

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