Restorative Justice (Vienna, 28-29 Oct 27)

Vienna, Oct 28–29, 2027
Deadline: Oct 30, 226
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Franziska Wasserberg, Wien

Restorative Justice. Heritage Practices, Narratives, and Futures of Conservation.

How can practices of care advance justice in museums and beyond? How can we connect the ethical responsibilities of archives, museums, and universities to urgent struggles for basic human rights, and the fights for land rights and access to natural resources led by minoritized peoples?
In the Global Conservation: Histories and Theories (GloCo) project, we understand the term "Restorative Justice" to describe the connection between political and social struggles for justice and the practices of preservation that take place in museums, universities, archives, and beyond. We propose moving beyond the concepts of care and conservation to a broader horizon that we call Restorative Justice. The concept draws on the field of law, where restorative justice has been conceptualized since the 1990s as a process involving all those affected by harm in addressing and repairing it, rather than focusing exclusively on the perpetrators (Zehr, 1990). In the field of heritage, the term "restorative" connects restoration and conservation to the memories, actions, and futures we want to create.

The conference, to be held in Vienna, Austria, in October 2027, emerges from the GloCo project (Horizon 2020, ERC Consolidator Grant no. 101087659, PI: Noémie Étienne, started in 2023), hosted at the Faculty Center for Transdisciplinary Historical and Cultural Studies at the University of Vienna. It aims to bring together scholars, practitioners, researchers, artists, and community members to explore how different forms of knowledge coexist, interact, and transform the ways in which we understand and practice heritage, repair, and justice.

We welcome contributions that question and examine the plurality of perspectives, methods, and experiences that shape heritage practices in the pursuit of restorative justice, to discuss the present we inhabit and the futures we want to build. Ultimately, we ask: What would it mean to practice radical and ethical care in order to rebalance unequal power dynamics? How are museums, archives, universities, and other sites of heritage active participants in the path towards more just futures? And how might we critically interrogate the concepts of care, fragility, and vulnerability?

We invite papers that address (but are not limited to) three core themes:

1. Justice in storage, conservation labs, and beyond
Justice is a continuous process shaped by labour, responsibility and power. Women, local communities and marginalized groups often undertake the everyday work of caring for heritage, while decisions about ownership, authority, and uses of heritage remain largely shaped at political

and institutional levels (Smith, 2006).
Questions related to care and restorative justice to be addressed in this session include: How are care responsibilities distributed, and how do these distributions reproduce or challenge existing inequalities? Who has the authority to define what constitutes care? How might practices of care contribute to more equitable, inclusive and sustainable futures? What alternative models of shared responsibility, participation and heritage-making can emerge from a politics of care that also centers justice?
2. Words, histories, and epistemologies
Reconsidering the intersection of conservation and justice also involves telling another history of care and conservation, focusing on situated practices, terminologies, and local epistemologies. We welcome historical contributions addressing the histories of care across time and place. We believe that Restorative Justice also means excavating and promoting different histories and epistemologies. The GloCo glossary, for example, provides a large variety of terms and terminologies to talk about heritage and conservation. Moreover, we wonder: Can we avoid replicating colonial terminologies such as “Indigenous” or “Western” to highlight multiple care practices? We aim to distance ourselves from terminologies such as “decolonization,” which ultimately continue to centre settler colonial frameworks.
Restorative Justice also invites a deep reconsideration of hierarchies inside the museum and beyond. Too often, local knowledge holders are regarded solely as “resources” and “guests” in conferences and institutions, yet remain on the fringes of the decision-making process. From this perspective, we will discuss the implications of notions such as fragility, vulnerability, and care, as well as their potentially patronizing dimension (Ndikung, 2021). Questions can include, for example: How is fragility used to justify seizure and prevent restitution? Is vulnerability innate, or the result of specific conditions, including politics, and sometimes created in museums themselves?
3. Memory, archives, and erasure
We welcome contributions that explore the relationships between archival production, erasure, language, and power, including through community archives, oral histories, embodied and intergenerational memories, counter-archives, activist practices, digital traces, and the creation and reclamation of vocabularies. We will focus in particular on LGBTQ+ archives, but also welcome perspectives from other marginalized groups. Rather than understanding absence from the archive simply as a lack of sources to be filled, we aim to examine what such absences reveal about the power relations that determine whose lives become history, whose knowledge becomes an archive, and whose existence remains difficult to name. Ultimately, we invite participants to discuss the practices of Restorative Justice through which histories can be produced, preserved, and transmitted, even when the languages, categories, and institutions conventionally responsible for the preservation of history have themselves been sites of erasure.
This session asks the following questions: How do we build an archive when our history, and even our lives, are constantly destroyed? What can even count as an archive? What kinds of materials, practices, memories, bodies, spaces, oral histories, images, objects, or digital traces can become archives? And what happens when the very existence of these materials is contested, criminalized, or rendered invisible?

Please submit proposals of up to 300 words and a short bio to Manon Fougère (manon.fougere@univie.ac.at) by 30 October 2026

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For more information, see also:
https://www.heritagestudiesvienna.com/gloco
https://www.heritagestudiesvienna.com/
https://glo-co.org/glossary/
https://fakzen-thks.univie.ac.at/

Reference:
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