

# Olfactory Heritage Toolkit



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## Introduction: Outline of the Toolkit

The Olfactory Heritage Toolkit offers future-oriented recommendations and methodologies for sensory heritage policies and practices. It is an open access resource created for cultural heritage professionals and policy makers to help them recognize, document and safeguard olfactory heritage and help them to support heritage communities in this effort. The contents of the toolkit are based on the research carried out by the Odeuropa project, developed in close engagement with heritage communities and heritage institutes, and validated through discussions with heritage professionals.

This toolkit includes:

### (1) Olfactory Heritage White Paper

This policy document:

- a) explains the significance of scent as an aspect of cultural heritage materials, objects, places and practices;
- b) provides a description of the concept of olfactory heritage;
- c) explains the value of olfactory heritage for cultural heritage professionals and practitioners;
- d) outlines Odeuropa's strategy for the recognition of olfactory heritage.

### (2) Heritage Smell Library

The Heritage Smell Library is an initiative of the Odeuropa project in collaboration with the *Osmothèque Conservatoire International des Parfums*, aiming to document and safeguard historically significant smells. The library holds a collection of smells that have been described as significant for cultural communities, groups and individuals. The scents will be archived at where physical samples are stored and made available for future reference. In this publication we will briefly describe outline of the library.

### (3) Resources for the Olfactory Heritage Toolkit

The Olfactory Heritage Toolkit also offers four additional resources:

- **Olfactory Heritage Toolkit Resource 1. Values of Olfactory Heritage**  
This list provides value statements related to olfactory heritage. These statements can be used by heritage professionals to capture the significance of scents as part of cultural heritage, and support heritage communities to recognize the role of smell in heritage practices. GLAM professionals can also use the resource to capture the added value of working with smells in a heritage context.



- **Olfactory Heritage Toolkit Resource 2. Intangible Cultural Heritage Practices with Olfactory Components**  
This list can help cultural heritage policy makers explore in what intangible cultural heritage practices smell may play a significant role. Heritage communities can use the list as an inspiration for acknowledging the value of olfaction in their heritage practices.
- **Olfactory Heritage Toolkit Resource 3. Smells with Heritage Value**  
This list presents an overview of smells and olfactory objects that are often mentioned in European digitized historic texts as having significant value. The list can help cultural heritage policy makers explore what kinds of smells and olfactory objects may play a significant role in (European) cultures. Furthermore, the data may enable heritage documentation systems to include olfaction in their documents and resources.
- **Olfactory Heritage Toolkit Resource 4. Fragrant Places**  
This list presents an overview of places and spaces that are often mentioned in European digitized historic texts as having a specific /significant smellscape. This list is compiled to support cultural heritage policy makers to envision where smell may play a significant role. Furthermore, the data may enable heritage documentation systems to include olfaction in their documents and resources.

In this document we present the white paper, a description of the heritage smell library, and a short overview of relevant references. The additional resources can be downloaded separately on Zenodo.

## Olfactory Heritage White Paper

### Why Smells Should be Safeguarded as Part of Cultural Heritage

We experience heritage with all our senses. What is more, sensory experiences can be an important part of heritage engagements. Think about the sound of church bells, the taste of regional cheeses, the smell of a traditional pub, or the ways craftsmen such as millers and wine connoisseurs make use of their nose. Traditionally, however, policy bodies focus on the identification, protection, and transmission of heritage with little interest in the sensorial aspects of that heritage. This is all the truer for the sense of smell (olfaction).

Although culturally impactful, the significance of scents and olfactory practices connected with heritage are rarely recognized. This is caused by 1) fragmented knowledge of the sensory worlds of the past and the present, 2) the low awareness of the importance of smells and olfaction in intangible heritage practices, and 3) the lack of adequate methods to identify, record and safeguard smells, olfactory practices and their specific significance. Due to this, we are at risk of losing smellscapes and olfactory practices meaningful for certain regions and communities. Furthermore, we are neglecting opportunities to strengthen the strategic agendas of (inter)national heritage bodies with a sensory dimension, which could enhance their value and accessibility.

### Objectives

To mitigate these risks and capture these opportunities, we need to:

- a) provide evidence for the significance of smells and olfactory practices as part of heritage,
- b) work with heritage communities and policy makers to assist them in becoming more aware of the significance of olfactory heritage,
- c) develop methods and best practices to identify, document and preserve olfactory heritage,
- d) provide evidence of the crucial role that olfaction plays in our (engagement with) heritage.

These objectives are part of the policy and research agenda of the Odeuropa project.



**Odeuropa** is an international research project aimed to develop innovative methodologies to capture smells and olfactory experiences as part of the cultural heritage of Europe. It is the first European initiative to use artificial intelligence (AI) to investigate the cultural significance of smelling, to discover how scents have molded our communities and traditions, and how these practices have in turned shaped our olfactory environments. The policy agenda of the Odeuropa project includes the development of a framework for olfactory heritage research, for recognition and safeguarding, drawing from material and intangible cultural heritage approaches. As a first step towards this framework, we have drafted a definition of olfactory heritage, and a description of its values.



## What is Olfactory Heritage?

**Olfactory Heritage:** materials, objects, places and practices whose significance is defined by, or notably associated with, smells and olfactory experiences meaningful to communities, groups and individuals.

We can distinguish four different types of olfactory heritage:

- **olfactory objects such as perfumes** and other designed smells
- **cultural practices with a notable olfactory component** (e.g. incense burning in churches, mosques and temples, or the use of olfaction in certain crafts and during festive events)
- **materials and material objects with smell as a significant attribute** (e.g. myrrh, civet, tobacco, gunpowder, books, pomanders)
- **natural and cultural sites with 'smellscapes' integral to their 'sense of place'** (e.g. the smellscape of a library, cocoa factory, food market, botanical garden, mining site).

## Values and opportunities

The values of olfactory heritage and the opportunities that could come with its recognition are manifold:

**Sensory literacy & craftsmanship.** Various communities make use of their noses as a diagnostic tool, or as part of craftsmanship. Millers use their noses to assess the quality of the flour, (home) cooks to assess the readiness of a traditional meal, librarians to assess the degradation of historic paper. These abilities and skills come with expert vocabularies and are transmitted from one generation to the next. Olfactory heritage is living heritage.<sup>1</sup> However, this embodied knowledge is at risk. When barcodes indicate food expiration dates, and computer-generated technologies establish material qualities, the human nose can be seen as irrelevant.

**Social values & wellbeing.** The Covid-19 pandemic signified a wake-up call for the recognition of the social significance of smell. Patients who suffered anosmia reported social isolation and depression. Research has shown how much people appreciate scents as meaningful for their social lives. Smells bring structure and motivation in daily practices, create intimacies between family members, and can cause a strong sense of belonging, safety and enjoyment in life.

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<sup>1</sup> What is Intangible Cultural Heritage? <https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>

**Identity & Resilience.** This sense of wellbeing is also connected to the fact that smells play an important role in identity formation for cultural communities (Leemans & Verbeek 2023). Recently, French regional heritage bodies have started to recognize how olfactory practices can reinforce a sense of temporal continuity, essential in collective identity building, and can help communities to transmit their sense of *terroir* to people outside of the community (Elpers et al. 2022). Furthermore, olfactory heritage can foster resilience, as it provides a new intake into heritage, supporting the recognition of heritages of underrepresented groups.

**Engagement with heritage.** Smells can also play a powerful role in heritage experiences. Recent studies on the value of smell in galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAMs) reveals that sensory interaction enables meaningful learning experiences, bringing heritage to life and leading to an enhanced understanding and increased enjoyment (Alexopoulos et al. 2023; Verbeek et al. 2022). Smells have the power to evoke personal memories, fostering deeper connections with the past. The survey also found that sensorial experiences within heritage settings fostered accessibility and diversity, as well as community value.

**Environmental sustainability.** Our sense of smell forms a strong connection with nature and non-humans. The concept of olfactory heritage urges us to acknowledge our kinship with non-human noses and the footprint we imprint on the world. Olfactory storytelling in heritage environments can help to create awareness about climate change and invite people to more sustainable behaviour.

Considering these values, we state that historical smells and olfactory practices are valuable and merit to be identified, studied and safeguarded, so they can be transmitted to future generations.

## How smells linger in the periphery of the heritage policy landscape

At this moment, olfactory heritage is hardly recognized in heritage policies. Although UNESCO's World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) conventions do not specifically *exclude* smells and olfactory experiences, they also do not indicate them, or invite possible nomination groups to think about these aspects. As a result, hardly any mention is made in the current lists, nominations and communications about these issues.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the present categorization of heritage is particularly challenging for olfactory heritage recognition, as it dissects these domains. Another domain of relevance here is Digital Heritage.

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<sup>2</sup> A search for 'smell' at the [UNESCO website](#) renders six results in total, while 'olfactory' renders zero results. 'Sound' renders 233 results, 'food' 392, 'taste' 53. World Heritage Centre, *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (2021).



**World Heritage.** The definition of Cultural and Natural Heritage in Articles 1 & 2 of the *World Heritage Convention* does not include sensory aspects. Cultural Heritage is considered as: Monuments (Architecture, Sculpture, Paintings), Groups of buildings (outstanding for their architecture, homogeneity, or place in the landscape), and Sites (valued for their historical, aesthetic, ethnological, anthropological value). The definitions are mainly designed with the aesthetics of the *visual landscape* in mind. Smell, olfaction, senses, sensory are not amongst the list of keywords in the UNESCO [list of nominations](#).

**Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).** The definition of ICH in the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003) entails language, (performing) arts, rituals, knowledge, and craftsmanship, but does not specify sensory experiences or embodied knowledge. Sensory elements are not indicated in nomination files for inscription on the 'List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding' (Form ICH-01), 'Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity' (Form ICH-02). Supporting documents are requested in audio-visual form, but not in material form (e.g. perfumes, fragrant materials).<sup>3</sup>

### Strategy: What needs to be done to achieve the objectives?

To work towards a solution, a robust strategy is required, involving multiple stakeholders. The Odeuropa project has embraced the ambition to help further this cause: developing knowledge, organising discussions with stakeholders, and developing recommendations for cultural heritage practitioners and professionals, to help preserve and safeguard our past, living and future olfactory heritage. Below, we list some of the actions the Odeuropa project has already been undertaking in the years 2021-2023 related to Credibility, Conservation, Communities & Capacity-building, Education and Communication. Furthermore, we provide some suggestions as to follow-up steps that could be taken in the coming years:

#### **Credibility - Provide evidence of the significance of smells and olfactory practices as part of our living heritage**

An essential prerequisite of the effort is to develop and implement research strategies to recover the (nearly) lost knowledge about the cultural role of the sense of smell. Progress is being made in this case by an expanding network of sensory studies scholars.<sup>4</sup> As this effort often relies on (digital) heritage repositories for the collection of documentary evidence, it also connects to the Memory of the World project.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> [Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage](#) (2022).

<sup>4</sup> E.g., the Sensory Studies Center (Canada), Odeuropa, [Odotheka](#). Cf. Howes 2022.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.unesco.org/en/memory-world>

Actions undertaken:

- 2021-2023: Interviews with & questionnaires for ICH communities to capture their 'nose knowledge' and olfactory practices, mapping the values of olfactory heritage;
- 2021-2023: Documentation and preservation of culturally significant smells and their value for communities, groups and individuals;
- 2023: Publication of: 1) The Odeuropa [Encyclopaedia of Smell History and Heritage](#), 2) [Odeuropa Smell Explorer](#), 3) [PastScent Bibliography](#), 4) Monograph on [Smell and the Past](#) (Tullett 2023).

### **Conservation - Develop methods and best practices to identify, document and preserve-safeguard olfactory heritage**

Actions undertaken:

- 2022-2023: Develop and publish the Olfactory Heritage Toolbox, containing:
  - a **definition** of Olfactory Heritage
  - a sample list with **olfactory heritage objects, places, practices**
  - a sample list of **olfactory heritage values**

Actions foreseen:

- 2024: **Academic publication** in a cultural heritage journal, presenting the olfactory heritage white paper, accompanied by **case studies** on olfactory heritage documentation.

### **Communities & Capacity-building - Help heritage communities and policy makers to become more aware of the significance of olfactory heritage**

Actions undertaken:

- 2021-2023: Collaborate with intangible heritage communities to **raise awareness** around the olfactory aspects of their practices;
- 2022-2023: Participate in **lectures**, organise **round table** discussions and workshops for cultural heritage professionals;
- 2023-2024: Develop a **collection of heritage smells** and make these scent reconstructions accessible to GLAMs, policy bodies and the public;

Actions foreseen:

- 2024-2027: Achieve the **insertion of a short statement** on the importance of the sensory dimension of heritage in the **Application Forms** for (intangible) cultural heritage for **(inter)national UNESCO committees**;
- 2024-2027: Support the development of **heritage nominations** with a meaningful sensory-olfactory dimension;
- 2024-2027: Encourage heritage bodies to adopt **best practices in olfactory heritage** through the dissemination of and hands-on training with the Olfactory Heritage Toolkit



## Education

Actions undertaken:

- **2021-2023:** Raise awareness around the relevance of olfactory heritage among GLAM professionals and heritage policy makers. Develop a definition of olfactory heritage.

Actions foreseen:

- **2024-2027:** Develop training programmes for heritage professionals and cultural heritage related graduate programmes (heritage management and conservation, material culture studies, heritage science, sensory archaeology, critical heritage studies).

## Communication - Provide evidence of the crucial role our noses (can) play in our engagement with heritage

Actions undertaken:

- 2021-2023 Provide **General communication** about / promotion of olfactory heritage

Actions foreseen:

- 2024: Publish & promote **Olfactory Heritage Toolkit**

## Heritage Smell Library

*What if you could smell historical scents: smells that were of importance to your ancestors, but have long since evaporated? If you could capture the smellscape of a natural space or monument: what would you choose? How valuable would it be to store these culturally significant scents and safeguard them for future generations?*

The **Heritage Smell Library** is an initiative of the Odeuropa project, aiming to safeguard and document historically significant smells. The library holds a collection of smells that have been described as significant for cultural communities, groups and individuals. The scents will be archived at the *Osmothèque Conservatoire International des Parfums*, where physical samples are stored and made available for future reference.

The starting point of the Heritage Smell Library are the olfactory representations of heritage smells and smellscapes developed by the Odeuropa project between 2020-2023, and its sister project *In Search of Scents Lost* (2014-2019). The library holds both 'single' smells that are or have been significant for specific cultures (e.g. rosemary oil), and scent compositions. Scent compositions can be:

- **'reconstructions'** based on **chemical analysis** of cultural objects or smellscapes of monuments and heritage sites (such as the Royal Car P5B, a reconstruction of the smellscape of the interior of a historic car used by Queen Elizabeth II, based on analytical data),
- **'recreations'** based on **historical recipes** (such as Helene's gloves, a 16th-century Italian recipe for perfuming gloves), or
- **'recreations'** based on the **historical analysis** of fragrant practices, events and spaces (such as the smell of hell, or the canals of Amsterdam in the seventeenth century).

The Heritage Smell Library does not only hold physical samples of these historical smells, it also provides detailed descriptions of the olfactory reconstructions, and of their cultural significance. Visitors to the *Osmothèque Conservatoire International des Parfums* can directly engage with the smells, while heritage institutes can potentially make use of the reconstructions in their exhibitions.



The Odeuropa project aims to enhance the impact and understanding of (intangible) cultural heritage. All the heritage scents included in the Heritage Smell Library are therefore presented with the documentation on their cultural historical significance. This is essential for:

- 1) **Archiving** –archive cultural significant scents for future research
- 2) **Reuse** – in the future it should be possible for GLAMs and other parties to make use of the safeguarded heritage smells
- 3) **Communication** - to foster a broader public's development of olfactory knowledge rather than mere immersive experiences

These issues require a **standard** for scent development. This is a challenge since there is no agreed terminology for heritage scents and their development processes. Odeuropa has developed a first framework for this (Bembibre et al. 2023; Leemans et al 2022; Bembibre & Strlič 2017; Ehrich et al. 2023), while *Osmothèque Conservatoire International des Parfums* is working on a nomenclature project (*Nomen*). The documentation on the cultural historical value of the heritage smells as well as the method of reconstitution outlined by the project and its associated scent creators will be made freely available through the Odeuropa website (<https://odeuropa.eu/the-heritage-smell-library/>).

## A Living Archive

The Heritage Smell Library will be launched in 2024. The library is intended to support preservation, documentation, and dissemination of smells that are considered to be of considerable cultural value.<sup>6</sup>

### Heritage Smell Library - first collection (2024)

1. Battle of Waterloo
2. Beuningen Room
3. Canal
4. Cheese
5. Civet
6. Frankincense
7. Helene's Gloves
8. Hell
9. Liberty Smells
10. Linden Tree

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<sup>6</sup> Over the last years, more and more academic research groups, heritage institutes, perfumers and olfactory artists have experimented with reconstruction methods and historical scent representations. See for instance the projects [Odotheka](#), [In Search of Scents Lost](#), [Smell of Heritage](#), and the olfactory exhibitions in museums such as the Mauritshuis The Hague, the Prado Madrid, the Louvre Paris. The interest for olfactory storytelling is recently documented in: Ehrich et al. 2023.

11. Myrrh
12. Odeuropa Olfactory Logo
13. Orange/Blue
14. Piège
15. Pleasure Garden
16. Pomander
17. Rosemary
18. Royal Car PB5
19. Tanned Leather

After the launch of the Heritage Smell Library, a designated Advisory Board will review applications for new scents to be added to the collection.

Twelve samples of the Heritage Smell Library scents have also been presented in the Odeuropa x IFF Historical Scent Collection.<sup>7</sup> Heritage professionals and curators interested in olfactory storytelling and the heritage of smell can use this collection as a 'starter kit' for learning about and communicating the history, heritage and value of smell. To support heritage professionals in these efforts, the Odeuropa project has also developed the *Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit: A 'How-To' Guide for Working with Smells in Museums and Heritage Institutions* (Ehrich 2023), which is freely available on internet. Furthermore, the *Encyclopedia of Smell History and Heritage* offers an engaging environment to explore the significance of past smells and their continuing value in the present.<sup>8</sup>



The limited-edition Historical Scent Collection. Photo courtesy of IFF.

<sup>7</sup> <https://odeuropa.eu/historical-scent-collection/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://encyclopedia.odeuropa.eu>

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## Colophon

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