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The European Heritage Academy: Elevating cultural heritage specialists through tailored and certified training



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# The European Heritage Academy: Elevating cultural heritage specialists through tailored and certified training

First-hand knowledge – an initial balance

**EDITOR** · DECEMBER 12, 2023 ·



Editor



**A**t the end of 2017, The European Heritage Academy was founded in Mauerbach, Lower Austria, as a cooperation between the Burghauptmannschaft Oesterreich and [BDA](#). Its purpose is to offer certified, tailor-made further training for specialists in the field of built cultural heritage. In the meantime, the academy has become a byword in specialist circles in the EU for targeted training of the target group at the highest level.

As Burghauptmann Sahl reports *“The Burghauptmannschaft Oesterreich is primarily responsible for the maintenance/preservation and best possible use of the historical buildings owned by the Republic. First and foremost, of course, this includes the Imperial Palace in Vienna, which has been awarded the European Heritage Label in 2016 and is the largest contiguous historical building in Europe by area. We are talking about secular buildings here.*

#### Imperial Palace Vienna

*Our buildings are extremely diverse and serve a wide variety of purposes. Which on one hand proves the cultural richness of Austrian history, but on the other hand confronts BHOe staff with great challenges”.*

For the proper maintenance of these historical buildings, the corresponding expertise of the specialists involved is indispensable. And this knowledge must be preserved in the organisation, i.e. BHOe. All this led to the founding of The European Heritage Academy (EHA) in 2017, which implements trainings certified by ECQA and developed in EU projects in a sustainable way.

#### **EU-funded training for maintenance managers**

With the decision to meet the training needs with EU projects, several objectives were achieved at the same time: firstly, there are course offers jointly developed by international experts; secondly, the content of the training is 100% exactly what organisations like BHOe needed; and thirdly, the certification, with simultaneous recognition of existing knowledge, enables the retention of knowledge in the organisation. The latter is one of the main reasons for running EU projects.

As Reinhold Sahl points out: *“Yes, the BHOe is a highly specialised service with excellent staff who always do their very best. In addition to the maintenance/preservation of the historical building stock, BHOe has also other tasks, namely the sensible use of the facilities under its care. [...] He continues: “Personally, I see Burghauptmannschaft Österreich as a service provider with customers – that is, our users, the other departments of the federal administration, the government and, of course, the visitors to our historic buildings.*

*But the whole thing actually started from a different perspective: namely, out of the desire to learn*

*from others – from experts at home and abroad.*

*Training and further education, including knowledge management, were the central topics for me, and it soon became clear to me that it was also a question of personnel. You have to imagine that we have permanent positions: if a staff member retires, I can only fill that position after that person has actually left. It then takes six to nine (!) months to get a new staff member. And then they need months for training.*

*This sometimes presents us with almost insolvable challenges, as all the knowledge of the departing employee is lost to the organisation before we have a successor! I have thought about this time and again – especially after a change in law in 2012. So we discussed ways to fill existing and expected knowledge gaps. This, among others, resulted in things like EU projects and involvement in other European initiatives, such as the Cultural Heritage Label or Voices of Culture in the Cultural Heritage Year 2018.*

*I looked at the situation and thought about what we could do. Of course, I also asked for advice from others, because admittedly I had no idea about EU projects at that time...*

*But I got interested and quickly realised that something could be done, especially in times of budget constraints. As I said, we don't really have a budget for training. Classic dilemma: great need, but no money! In 2013, I was made aware of the possibility of implementing my ideas through EU funded projects. And I was on board right away!*

*The first attempts were not immediately successful, but with perseverance we started an [Erasmus+](#) project in 2014. With [MODI-FY](#) – I confess that I don't recall the full name by heart – we were able to develop a certified continuing education programme for maintenance managers that meets international standards. This way we achieve a targeted further training of BHOe staff and can document the existing knowledge and keep it in the organisation.*

*Beside other projects, our first [FLIP](#) pilot got started on 15 June 2020. We are particularly proud of this! After all, it is something special to be allowed to run a pilot project of the EU Commission. And it is something special to be in a position to describe and document the newly defined European sector for Cultural Heritage and Creative Industries”.*

Intensive preparation and needs analysis prior to an EU project ensure that the training developed covers all elements of a relevant activity. This makes the necessary knowledge or the need for knowledge for this activity obvious, comparable and measurable. New employees can be specifically prepared and trained for the new task, which saves an enormous amount of time and, above all, money.

The Burghauptmanns/Castle Governor's decision to use EU projects as a way to provide the required training has so far reached a total volume of EUR 3.2 million. Money that BHOe and partner organisations – like ECQA -from all over Europe have invested extremely wisely in course modules that are now offered by The European Heritage Academy (EHA). In the meantime the Academy offers 5 certified course modules for professionals in built Cultural Heritage.

## **EU project results: Training 24/7 on 365 days and certified by ECQA**

Of course, in today's fast-paced world it is not enough to simply offer a few courses that interested people can attend in Mauerbach. That is why a so-called "blended learning approach" was used from the very first project. This means nothing more than a combination of learning elements available online that are linked to courses in the classical sense. On the EHA eLearning&Exam portal there are course materials that can and should be worked on in self-studies, while the practical parts, the group work, peer learning and professional exchange take place in the Charterhouse Mauerbach.

And since after the end of the first project entitled: "Maintaining Historic Buildings and Objects through Developing and Up-grading Individual Skills of Project Managers: Fostering European Heritage and Culture for Years to come", also known as MODI-FY for short, there was a need to run this new course on a regular basis, The European Heritage Academy was therefore founded in December 2017.

With the clear mission to organise all existing and future course modules several times a year and to establish an ongoing training track for both existing and new staff members of the BHOe and BDA, as well as subcontractors, other owners of historic buildings and heritage professionals. Behind the founding of The European Heritage Academy stand Burghauptmannschaft Oesterreich (BHOe) and Bundesdenkmalamt (BDA), which currently operate the academy as cooperation partners.

The declared aim is to implement the BDA guidelines as best as possible as guidelines for the further training of specialists in the cultural heritage sector, thus ensuring the "species-appropriate" maintenance of our cultural treasures such as the Imperial Palaces Vienna and Innsbruck, Belvedere Palace, Prince Eugene's Winter Palace and Charterhouse Mauerbach. At the same time, the challenges of our time are taken into account through further education in the areas of energy efficiency, digitalisation and climate protection.

In the words of the castle's governor: *"With The European Heritage Academy we finally have an EU-wide recognised instrument for the targeted – and above all certified – further training of our staff. And I will have fewer sleepless nights when a third(!) of them will retire within the next 5 years and I have to fill their positions ...."*

A key benefit of the training offered by The European Heritage Academy is that all course modules are certified by ECQA – European Certification & Qualification Association. ECQA was already involved as a partner in the first Erasmus+ project MODI-FY and contributed significantly to the success of the project. By focusing on so-called "Learning Outcomes", i.e. learning results that are the same for all participants, measurability is achieved, which is then used for certification.

## **EU Commission launches Year of Skills 2023**

A key issue in cultural heritage is the maintenance of necessary traditional crafts and related knowledge and skills. Without these crafts, our European heritage treasures are at great risk, as there is no one left, who can work competently with them. However, many of these skills and professions are no longer found in some EU countries, or are only practised in a few.

Passing on these so-called “Skills at Risk” or “Trades at Risk” and training people in them in the future is the command of the day. The European Commission has also recognised this as essential and declared 2023 the “Year of Skills”, whereby the dying professions and skills are only part of the planned activities of the Commission.

**12/10/2022:** *“As announced in President Ursula von der Leyen’s 2022 State of the Union address, the Commission today adopted its proposal to make 2023 the European Year of Skills, focused on education and training.*

“ The environmental and digital changes are opening up new opportunities for people and the EU economy. Having the right skills will enable people to successfully manage changes in the labour market and fully participate in society and democracy

*Ursula von der Leyen*

The EU Commission’s initiative to declare 2023 the “Year of Skills” fits perfectly with the 5th anniversary of The European Heritage Academy – in fact, it was made for it! Since 2017, the Academy has been educating built heritage professionals and training them in maintenance and energy efficiency.

Areas of digitalisation in cultural heritage, such as the digital recording of structural damage using drones, or the attempt to train traditional crafts online, form the next development steps of a highly specialised, standardised and certified further training.

All this is no coincidence! The individual components of the further training offered by The European Heritage Academy follow a clear and far-sighted concept. The choice of topics is based on current and future needs, while the development follows the sometimes opaque laws of project approval .....

With the approval of a new EU project, another piece of the puzzle falls into place and another part of the overall concept is realised. Seen in this light, The European Heritage Academy always operates in an environment of increased competences and can be seen as emblematic of the Year of Skills. So there is hardly a better time to celebrate the 5th anniversary of the Academy.

### **EHA 5-year Success Story: Celebration on 22.03.2023**

Since its foundation at the end of 2017, around 75 professionals from the field of architectural heritage management have participated in EHA trainings in Mauerbach; about 50 of them have completed all modules and can be certified – and this without any marketing, despite Covid19 and all limitations faced in training. As said, these course modules are part of an overall concept consisting of self-study respectively existing prior knowledge, the actual course including practical work.

Those who have successfully mastered these elements can register for the examination to receive the desired certification. This certification is always based on a person's skills and competences and must be renewed from time to time. In this way, the level of competence is maintained at a high level and at the same time increased through targeted follow-up training.

The European Heritage Academy fulfils all the requirements set by its founders:

1. EHA has built up an impressive portfolio of relevant certified training courses.
2. EHA is well respected and well known among professionals in the German-speaking countries/ region.
3. EHA gives feedback on the need for further course modules.

And as many bright minds have worked hard in these last five years for what has been achieved, it is now also time to celebrate. For this reason, The European Heritage Academy invites you to its 5th anniversary on 22 March 2023. *"This is the celebration of successes achieved so far. We would like to toast the successful first 5 years with our partners, companions and all participants. Some graduates will also receive their personal certificate on this occasion"* says Burghauptmann Sahl, enthusiastic about the success of EHA and fully motivated to continue working towards it.

The celebration will take place during [INCREAS'](#) Final Conference, which will present all the results from the Pilot Project from 22-23 March 2023.

You find the programme of the event on 22.03.2023 on the [EHA website](#).

### **Comments from EHA trainers & participants**

The practical parts of the course are carried out by trainers from [BDA](#) and [UBW](#), who have themselves undergone ECQA certification and have extensive experience in training. Astrid Huber, head of the IWBZ – Information and Further Education Centre for Architectural Conservation – Charterhouse Mauerbach and certified EHA trainer, says:

*"In order to maintain a historical building for future generations, the repair measures must first of all be correct from a structural point of view; this means that the materials used should correspond to the existing building, they should be repairable, maintainable and serviceable – we must return to the tradition of care, maintenance and repair. However, this requires special expertise [...] And that's where our cooperation project with Burghauptmannschaft Oesterreich comes in: The European*

*Heritage Academy (EHA), which was founded in 2017 with its headquarter in the Charterhouse Mauerbach.*

*This further training in maintenance of Cultural Heritage now also offers international certification for the first time and is primarily aimed at construction managers and site managers of historic buildings. The existing IWBZ further education programme, which is oriented towards the craft and which we have been offering for over 30 years, concludes with a certificate of participation, which has also been used for years as a quality criterion in tenders. In recent years, some target groups have increasingly expressed the wish for international certification – with The European Heritage Academy, this is now a perfect synergy.*

*EHA consists of five modules, which also have a different quality: here the contents are taught in compressed form in small groups with very intensive support. We also notice this as lecturers: Working with a small number of specialised experts is more demanding, much more individual and intensive, because you can also respond more to the interests of the participants. The modules are intensive and challenging, both for the participants and the trainers.“*

Gerald Wagenhofer, a trainer from the beginning and partner in most of BHOe's EU projects, can draw on 30 years of training experience. He says: *“During the project work on MODI-FY, memories of my school days came up, a déjà vu, so to speak, as I was already dealing with inorganic building materials back then. I therefore know how to make lime or cement – and thus have the advantage of prior knowledge. I understand the contents of the course modules, I know what it is all about. Thermal engineering was also one of my school subjects. I understand how traditional buildings work roughly, but I always find that there are still exciting details that I can still learn. But I know the basic concepts and know what I'm talking about. So my broad knowledge makes me the ideal trainer for The European Heritage Academy.”*

Every course also thrives on the contributions of the professionally competent participants, and the modules of The European Heritage Academy have a lot to offer in this respect. In addition to BHOe staff, many of the partner organisations have of course had their staff qualified or certified.

### **Read what they have to say about the EHA courses here:**

- Thomas S.: *“This is the best professional training I have ever attended. Despite 20 years in historic preservation, I learned a lot of new things!”*
- Christoph W.: *The European Heritage Academy promotes, indeed demands, committed dialogue. In small groups, authoritative knowledge and skills in the Architectural Protection of historical monuments are illustrated and, last but not least, a basic attitude towards the architectural heritage is initiated. I am already looking forward to future trainings.*
- Patrick S.: *„Many thanks for the great documents, which also have something for the forgetful and visually oriented to read. Thanks again for the all-round harmonious event...”*

### **EHA Future at the EU Competence Centre Mauerbach**

With the two pillars, the traditional further training offered by the IWBZ of BDA and the certified further training of EHA, Charterhouse Mauerbach today offers training for all target groups in the maintenance of historical buildings – a perfect combination. But that is not all! There are ambitious plans for the future.

Mag. Astrid Huber on further development: *“The IWBZ is intensively involved in further education and research. One example of research are the projects we have started with BHOe – here I would like to mention above all the **INCREAS** project, which was approved by the EU Commission in 2020. The Charterhouse Mauerbach will play a decisive role as it is further developed into an international Centre of Excellence for the maintenance of historical monuments and traditional crafts. We are already known in professional circles far beyond the country’s borders. The INCREAS project now offers a unique opportunity to make Charterhouse Mauerbach even more widely known internationally as a Centre of Excellence.”*

The FLIP2 pilot project INCREAS aims to establish a prototype for a European Competence Centre for Architectural Conservation, in addition to numerous other topics such as describing the Cultural Heritage sector, researching the relevant professions and their competences, and finding solutions for dying crafts.

An essential part of this EU Competence Centre Mauerbach – and its sister organisations in other EU countries – will be The European Heritage Academy in the future. In order to be able to cover the sector’s training needs in the field of built heritage ever better and more comprehensively. For this purpose, it is of course necessary to extend the range of offers; but even more important is the training of suitable trainers for this field. At the moment, mainly 4 Austrian and two British trainers are working with the course participants. In order to be able to cover future and increased demand, more trainers are needed, especially trainers in other languages, e.g. Italian, Spanish or French.

The current challenges posed by climate change and the energy crisis are therefore also an important topic for EHA. In the future, careful and professional training will depend more and more on international knowledge exchange. As the EU project work has taught, experts from different countries and cultures achieve a much better and broader result.

EU projects therefore seem to be the ideal means to an end for the highly qualified training of specialists in the field of heritage protection. Networking does not end with the end of the project. On the contrary, EU projects generate numerous contacts that are useful and valuable in many areas of Architectural Heritage Conservation.

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