

Article

Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Heritage in Secondary Education and Their Reception of Educational Materials from the Heritage and Museum Sector: A Case Study in Flanders (Belgium)

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Abstract: There has been a growing policy interest in establishing connections between heritage and education. Nevertheless, there seems to be very little evaluation or critical reflection on what actually happens in practice, and it remains unclear how heritage education is employed in countries throughout Europe. The aim of this paper is to assess the current status of heritage education in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking northern part of Belgium) via a literature review and an exploratory case study. The perceptions and opinions of pre-service teachers ($n = 17$) were investigated using three instruments: a questionnaire, document analysis, and the think aloud method. The results show that the pre-service teachers had a traditional interpretation of heritage, mainly relying on well-known and monumental examples and following a rather historical–artistic conception. However, it was found that their opinions were positive towards the use of heritage as an educational resource, and their evaluations of educational materials from the heritage and museum sector provided detailed information concerning teachers' desires and needs in this regard. The implications of this study should encourage initial teacher training in Flanders to further consider the epistemological and methodological challenges in the emerging field of heritage education.

Keywords: heritage education; museums; secondary education; educational materials; pre-service teachers; teacher training; conceptions of heritage



Citation: Van Doorselaere, J. Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Heritage in Secondary Education and Their Reception of Educational Materials from the Heritage and Museum Sector: A Case Study in Flanders (Belgium). *Heritage* **2024**, *7*, 948–964. <https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage7020045>

Academic Editors: Olaia Fontal-Merillas, Marta Martínez-Rodríguez and Andreas Aristidou

Received: 24 November 2023

Revised: 3 February 2024

Accepted: 8 February 2024

Published: 12 February 2024



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1. Introduction

There has been a growing policy interest in establishing connections between heritage and education. This interest was best echoed in efforts and regulations from supranational bodies during the past two decades, with UNESCO, the EU, and the Council of Europe making up the key players [1]. From the outset, for example, the Council of Europe defined heritage education as “a teaching approach based on cultural heritage, incorporating active educational methods, cross-curricular approaches, a partnership between the fields of education and culture and employing the widest variety of modes of communication and expression.” [2] (p. 31). After the turn of the century, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage that introduced a set of measures wherein education takes on a crucial role, while the Faro Convention stressed the value of heritage in society, in particular by aspiring to include it at all levels of education [3,4]. Ideally, policymakers should consider the recommendations of these supranational bodies. Nevertheless, Jagielska-Burduk and Stec [1] draw attention to the fact that cultural heritage does not seem well integrated in schools and, therefore, make a plea to reinforce teacher training in this regard.

Alongside a vast body of policy research that resulted from this growing attention, research concerning the practice of heritage education in formal and nonformal contexts in various countries is slowly increasing as well. In the Dutch context, for example, a great

effort was made by the research program that ran between 2009 and 2014 [5]. Its starting premise was that although heritage institutions and museums had increasingly found their way to schools and teachers, and vice versa, it was relatively unknown how this dialogue manifested in practice [6]. In a report presenting initial findings and key challenges, Klein [7] (p. 15) stated “Research is needed on the educational material produced by heritage institutions and on learning on location”. Although the research program shed light on educational practices from a scholarly perspective, there seems to be very little evaluation or critical reflection on what actually happens in practice, and it remains unclear how heritage education is employed in countries throughout Europe [8]. For this reason, Grever and van Boxtel [9] stress the need for quality criteria for the use of heritage in educational contexts.

The aim of this paper is to assess the current status of heritage education in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking northern part of Belgium) via a literature review and an exploratory case study focusing on the connection between the fields of education and culture. In this regard, Belgium has a complex state structure consisting of three regions and three communities. Communities are based on the three official languages—Dutch, French, and German—and thus are related to the people living within a territory. The regions are based on the geographical principle of territory and have legal responsibilities that include the environment, agriculture, and spatial planning. Therefore, there is a dichotomization of heritage at the policy level, as immovable heritage falls under the policy area of environment and thus belongs to the Flemish Region, while movable and intangible heritage is grouped as part of the cultural policy of the Flemish Community and denoted as cultural heritage [10].

It is worth noting for the purposes of this paper that in general terms cultural and educational policy both belong to the Flemish Community. Nevertheless, in past Flemish legislatures, the policy areas of culture and education have had separate ministers, each with their own administration. This is also the case for the legislature of 2019–2024 [11]. For this reason, educational policy in Flanders is mainly developed separately, leading to a disconnect from cultural policy. In the case of heritage education, for example, recent research shows that relevant attainment targets for secondary education, which describe what students need to learn, are formulated rather implicitly and came about without input from stakeholders in the heritage sector, thus confirming a disconnect between the two policy areas [12,13]. Therefore, at the level of practice, a better understanding from the perspective of schools and teachers could inform heritage institutions or museums and contribute to the educational materials they develop by establishing sustainable connections.

1.1. Developments Concerning Heritage Education in Flanders

In an effort to support the field of education throughout Europe, concrete materials and good practices were developed in Belgium between 2002 and 2005, as well as with partners in four other countries, and presented as part of the European-funded educational project HEREDUC [14]. Active educational methods and cross-curricular approaches with heritage served as guiding principles throughout this training and teaching manual.

In the context of growing attention to heritage in cultural policy [15], a largescale study was conducted in 2007 with the aim of charting the field of heritage education in Flanders [16]. To this end, the education sector (with participants from primary and secondary education and initial teacher training) and the heritage sector (with participants from museums, archives, libraries and documentation centers, and heritage organizations) were questioned quantitatively using an online survey and qualitatively by means of focus groups. One of its main conclusions was that a gap was experienced by participants from both sides.

On the side of the education sector, it can be stated that although heritage education, both explicit and implicit, was present in the attainment targets set out by the Flemish Government, teachers felt that they were not sufficiently trained to get started with heritage as a resource. For example, one of the recommendations indicates that “the concept of

heritage needs a better framework in education. Very often teachers do not know that they are working with heritage and they do not see the interrelationships between different forms of heritage" [16] (p. 194). In regard to conceptions of heritage, the study found that teachers had a rather traditional interpretation that mainly, but not exclusively, focused on material (e.g., in museums) and immovable heritage (e.g., monuments). In addition, teachers also stressed a limited amount of lesson time to include heritage and a lack of familiarity with the heritage sector in Flanders.

Almost simultaneously, the evaluative study on art and cultural education conducted during the 2006–2007 school year found similar results concerning the place of heritage in the curriculum [17]. The study underlined the need for more alignment between heritage and the formal education sector and also pointed, in more general terms, to the enhancement of teacher training. Since then, however, very few empirical scientific studies have been undertaken in Flanders specifically targeting the connection between education and heritage. A more recent and general study focusing on cultural education and participation in secondary education indicated that the use of heritage is limited. In this study, 71.6 percent of the teachers surveyed ($n = 796$) mentioned that they have never referred to heritage in their lessons [18]. Although it is unclear why these teachers refrained from a didactical use of heritage or how they perceived or conceived heritage, it can be stated that teachers in Flanders seem unfamiliar with incorporating heritage into the classroom.

Nonetheless, in developing educational materials, teachers are mostly aided by cultural institutions and organizations. From this perspective, much of the initiative has come from actors in the heritage and museum sector (e.g., archives, heritage libraries, museums, and other organizations) during the past two decades in Flanders. For example, since 2021, the platform www.erfgoedwijs.be (accessed on 7 February 2024) was developed. It is part of a larger educational platform by the Flemish Administration and is specifically set up for actors from the heritage and museum sector to upload and disseminate their educational materials [19].

In most cases, actors within the heritage and museum sector have a limited educational department of their own. There exists a great diversity of such educational departments depending on the scale or the collection. However, in general, not much is known about how these educational departments take shape in practice, as they mostly lack a clear mission statement. This results in a staff that has a variety of backgrounds or training and is assigned multiple tasks in addition to education, such as communication and administration. These services are encouraged to valorize the cultural heritage of their institution or organization by making it accessible in a sustainable way for a broad audience and target groups such as schools [16]. For this reason, they try to appeal to teachers in primary and secondary education by developing educational materials such as podcasts and videos [20].

One of the most common practices amongst educational departments active in the heritage or museum sector in Flanders is the development of ready-made educational packages. These 'products' can be understood as concrete didactic lesson plans that are centered on collections of the institution or organization that has made them. On the one hand, they are developed and disseminated for use in classrooms. This takes shape, for example, with the aid of digitized (audiovisual) content provided by the Flemish Institute for Archiving or its successor organization *meemoo* [21,22]. On the other hand, they are designed for learning on location, such as in museums [23]. Although in both cases the educational departments attempt to tailor these materials to the needs of teachers, it remains unclear what the needs of the teachers exactly encompass concerning heritage education.

The above issue has already been raised and addressed from within the heritage sector. For example, the Flemish Institution for the Cultural Heritage (FARO), which acts as an interface for the cultural heritage sector, set up focus groups with participants from various cultural heritage institutions and organizations regarding heritage education [24]. According to the report, there is significant progress to be made when attempting to establish sustainable connections with the education sector. Moreover, the focus group

participants stressed the need for knowledge of the Flemish education in the formal sphere. For instance, they indicated a lack of familiarity with the attainment targets relevant to heritage education and, in this respect, called for an inside perspective to provide support during the development process of educational materials, such as packages [24]. Among the solutions cited to meet these needs, participants mentioned they had assembled an advisory group consisting of pre-service or in-service teachers, or had established cooperation with teacher training institutions.

Recent years have seen some research initiatives at the intersection of heritage education and teacher training. For example, Janssenswillen et al. [25] developed an instrument to create a shared framework in light of establishing a sustainable connection between heritage institutions and organizations and the formal education sector. However, the instrument was not implemented on a large scale [26]. It can be stated in general terms that much remains unknown about the use of heritage in educational contexts in Flanders, especially at the level of practice by teachers and educators, as it is an underresearched field of study.

1.2. Problem Statement

At present, there is a strong call from the heritage and museum sector in Flanders for an insider perspective into formal education regarding the use of heritage as an educational resource. More specifically, the knowledge and opinions of pre-service or in-service teachers are sought-after to evaluate and improve educational materials, such as packages, in order to establish or strengthen sustainable connections with the education sector. However, since 2007, there has been no new largescale study in Flanders concerning how the connection between education and heritage could be improved. The central premise of this paper is that teachers' perceptions are critical to the success of integrating heritage into classrooms.

1.3. Theoretical Background

During the past two decades, an interesting subfield of scholarship has emerged that deals with teachers' opinions or perceptions on the use of heritage in the classroom. These contributions mainly came about in the Spanish context in the wake of the creation of the National Education and Heritage Plan and the Spanish Heritage Education Observatory [27]. Relying on a conception of heritage that combines past, present, and future perspectives [28], the general aim was to introduce teaching methods regarding heritage education in a holistic and interdisciplinary way. This ambition has led to a considerable increase in scientific output on the use of heritage from the perspective of different subjects taught, both in primary and secondary education [29–32]. In general, these studies mainly indicate that active teachers find it hard to incorporate heritage into their practice. For example, the study of Jiménez-Perez et al. [33] uncovered that primary and secondary teachers faced methodological problems, mostly during classroom use of heritage.

In contrast, the potential of heritage as an educational resource seems to be highly valued by active teachers. For example, Guerrero-Romera et al. [34] found that history teachers favored heritage, artistic productions, and museums as educational resources. From this perspective, heritage, through its connections with citizenship education, is ascribed the potential to bring about a new methodology in teaching practices that can foster a greater and more active engagement of students in contemporary society [35,36]. This renewal is a hoped-for change that is mostly contrasted with the more traditional teaching that seems to be present in history or social sciences education, wherein students play a rather passive role during the learning process.

From this perspective, the ascribed transformative potential of heritage in educational practice has led the focus toward pre-service teachers. From an aspiration to put the potential into practice, there seems to be a growing need to investigate their knowledge and perceptions in order to reinforce initial teacher training programs. Moreover, although the opinions of primary education pre-service teachers are not neglected in this regard [37–40], the attention is mostly drawn to secondary education. This appears to be an area where the

traditional teaching methodologies are considered prevalent and action seems to be most necessary, as research indicates that heritage is mainly employed didactically, rather in an illustrative way, with little attention to student participation [41].

In general, there seems to be a widespread interest in the use of heritage among pre-service history or social science teachers at the secondary education level. The mixed methods research of Felices-De la Fuente et al. [42] found that pre-service teachers positively assessed the incorporation of heritage as a resource, while related digital resources were valued considerably less. Moreover, the findings also stressed the importance placed on bearing in mind the local context when making content-related decisions. The quantitative study of Chaparro-Sainz et al. [43], which yielded similar results, exposed a connection with teaching approaches. Interestingly, heritage was considered a valuable resource more by pre-service teachers that held or favored a student-centered approach. In this respect, the comparative study of Gómez-Carrasco et al. [44] highlighted the value placed upon the use of cultural heritage by Spanish and English pre-service teachers in light of the emergent importance of active methodologies.

The studies above predominantly take as a starting premise the idea that heritage as a resource has limited incorporation into practice. Moreover, the broad interest and high value found in mental representations do not seem to reflect educational reality. Empirical evidence shows that a traditional approach to the teaching of heritage, and a conception based on predominantly local and monumentalist expressions, is still prevalent in classroom practice [45,46]. For this reason, a continuous effort is needed in the collection and analysis of the professional knowledge and skills of pre-service teachers in order to update initial teacher training programs and stimulate better cooperation between relevant actors, such as heritage institutions, academic scholars, and schools and teachers [33,47].

1.4. Research Questions and Aim

Although research is scarce in Flanders, as illustrated in Section 1.2, heritage as an educational resource seems to be valued, though its incorporation into practice by teachers is limited. In addition, it was found that teachers appeared to have a traditional conception of heritage. From this perspective, the situation seems to be in line with findings from the Spanish context. The little available evidence in Flanders points to teachers' unfamiliarity with heritage and the sector at large, seemingly causing them to remain hesitant to include it in the classroom. In response, a great variety of educational departments active in the broad heritage sector have been developing educational materials during the last two decades in an attempt to bridge this gap. Nevertheless, these departments have a need for more attuned support and feedback during the development of educational materials.

This paper addresses the need to spotlight the neglected issues above. Moreover, it seems particularly necessary to research the conceptions and opinions of pre-service teachers. Drawing on the recent developments in the specific context of Flanders, and informed by the ample research that has emerged in the Spanish context in this regard, it seeks to answer three research questions:

RQ1: What conceptions do pre-service teachers have of heritage?

RQ2: What opinions do pre-service teachers have on the use of heritage as an educational resource?

RQ3: How do pre-service teachers evaluate educational materials from the museum and heritage sector?

RQ1 and RQ2 serve as a first step in assessing the present status of heritage education in the Flemish formal educational context. These results will provide valuable recommendations for teacher training and the direction of future research. The results of RQ3 will inform educational departments from the museum and heritage sector by contributing to an evidence base regarding the needs of teachers during the development of educational materials.

This paper is part of an overarching research project that investigates the relationship between history education and heritage education in Flanders. This study serves as a first

step in assessing the current state of heritage education in the Flemish formal educational context. It does this by examining in depth a small sample of pre-service teachers prior to investigating in-service teachers. For this reason, the current study takes on an exploratory nature, drawing on a case study design.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Design

The study presented in this paper is characterized by a qualitative methodology that follows the interpretive research paradigm [48]. This approach made it possible to explore the participants' perspectives, focusing on their meanings and interpretations while also relying strongly on the data. To this end, a general case study design was deployed. Such a design is well suited to taking into consideration this study's explorative nature and use for education research purposes in an authentic context [49]. The aim of this study is to present the views of the participants regarding the three research questions as a whole; therefore, the cohort of pre-service teachers was considered as one unit of analysis. Consequently, informed by the methodological framework for case study design by Yin [50], a single case and holistic design was chosen.

2.2. Setting and Participants

In light of the research project on heritage education at Ghent University overarching this study, informal meeting sessions were held with various actors from the museum and heritage sector in Flanders between January and April 2021. Informed by these sessions, a teacher educator with a research background in history and heritage education was contacted in August 2021. In agreement with the teacher educator, a workshop was developed for students at Hogeschool PXL-Education in the context of the professional bachelor's degree that provides graduates with the required qualification to become teachers for the first (12–14 years old) and second grade (14–16 years old) in secondary education in Flanders. It was held during a project week wherein students could sign up voluntarily. The workshop consisted of a research phase (90 min) in which data were collected regarding the three research questions. After completion, a second phase (75 min) followed to introduce the pre-service teachers to several good practices. The actual research took place on 3 March 2022.

The current study used nonprobability convenience sampling. This sampling technique was chosen because the study design relied on voluntary participants that were readily accessible due to the teacher educator [51]. In total, $n = 17$ pre-service teachers signed up. The only condition for selection was to be studying in the second bachelor year of teacher training at Hogeschool PXL-Education. At enrolment, professional bachelor students in Flanders have to select two teaching subjects to learn throughout their teacher training. Table 1 presents a crosstabulation of the pre-service teachers' choice of subjects. Pre-service teachers who chose history make up most of the sample ($n = 13$), followed by English ($n = 5$), Dutch ($n = 3$), and art subjects ($n = 3$). Interestingly, pre-service teachers who chose a combination of physical education ($n = 3$) and recreational activity ($n = 3$) signed up for the workshop as well. In general terms, it is expected that humanities teachers display an interest in heritage. In this respect, the fact that not only history and language teachers self-select themselves when it comes to heritage education can be considered the first finding of this study. Other chosen teaching subjects in the sample include physics ($n = 1$), non-confessional ethics ($n = 1$), project general subjects ($n = 1$), and health education ($n = 1$).

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy of Ghent University. At the outset of the research, all the pre-service teachers received information about their participation and signed an informed consent form. As the research took place in the context of higher education, both the departmental leader of the institution and the responsible teacher educator signed an informed consent form as well. No personal details were asked for, and all the data collected (for example, names

expressed during the focus group discussions) were anonymized to ensure the full privacy of the participants. In this regard, each participant was given a random code number to replace their name to fill out the questionnaire and, subsequently, was allocated to a focus group (1–6: FG1; 7–11: FG2; 12–17: FG3).

Table 1. Crosstabulation of the teaching subjects chosen by the pre-service teachers.

Teaching Subjects	Dutch	English	Health Education	Non-Confessional Ethics	Physics	Project Art Subjects	Recreational Activity	Total
History	3	5	1	1	1	2		13
Physical Education							3	3
Project General Subjects						1		1
Total	3	5	1	1	1	3	3	17

2.3. Data Collection

Case studies draw on different kinds of data collection in order to capture rich data that provide an in-depth picture of the participants' views [49]. Moreover, considering the third research question, it seems imperative to rely on multiple sources to evaluate educational materials developed for teachers by cultural institutions [52]. This study relies on three instruments: a questionnaire, document analysis, and think aloud method. The instruments were administered to the pre-service teachers in the following order.

First, the questionnaire was given at the start of the research phase [53]. It was chosen as it is flexible and easy to distribute among the pre-service teachers. Moreover, it provided the advantage of assessing their individual perspectives considering the research aim before they engaged in group discussions [48]. Table 2 presents an overview of the questions used in the questionnaire.

Table 2. Overview of the questions used in the questionnaire.

Question(s)	Asked for	Question Type(s)
1	which teaching subjects they had chosen	open
2–3	their epistemic considerations regarding history (not relevant to the current study)	open
4–5	their opinions on the school subject of history (not relevant to the current study)	5-point Likert scale (agree, rather not agree, no opinion, rather disagree, disagree)
6	their conceptualization of heritage	open
7	their opinions on the educational potential of heritage	open
8	their familiarity with the museum and heritage sector in Flanders	5-point Likert scale (none, insufficient, sufficient, good, excellent) with the option to comment
9	their desires regarding educational packages	multiple-choice
10	which partners, if any, they would include to design lessons or projects with or about heritage	open

Second, they were divided into three focus groups. This technique was chosen as it initiates spontaneous interaction, generating rich data, and pairs well with questionnaires and document analysis to offer method triangulation [48]. The pre-service teachers were provided with six educational packages that were recently developed by museums or heritage institutions for use in secondary education. The packages that were selected used active methodologies and cross-curricular approaches relying on different types of heritage, in accordance with the general recommendations of the Council of Europe [2]. They were downloaded from the website www.erfgoedwijis.be (accessed on 7 February 2024). Three of the educational packages focused on a specific region (the Belgian province of Limburg, where the Hogeschool PXL-Education is located), while the three other packages had a more general focus. Table 3 presents an overview of the educational packages selected

for this study. The pre-service teachers were then asked to evaluate all six educational packages on the basis of both content and form. Although specific assessment categories were not offered, it was requested to report pros and cons of each individual package on a provided document. Next, they were asked to select which packages they would work with and which they would not and to elaborate on why this was the case. In a final step of the evaluation, they had to formulate three general quality criteria for future educational packages from a teacher's perspective.

Table 3. Overview of the educational packages.

Package	Topic
1	Censorship and free speech from the Middle Ages to the 20th century
2	Traces of Belgian-Congolese colonialism in the province of Limburg
3	The Belgian province of Limburg from the Middle Ages to the present
4	Archaeological remains of World War II in the Belgian province of Limburg
5	What is heritage and how can it be employed in the classroom?
6	Traces of refugees in the archives

Third, a think aloud method was used. This provided the opportunity to gain an in-depth insight into the group dynamics and discussions, leading to the evaluation of the educational packages and the formulation of general quality criteria according to the pre-service teachers [54]. The focus group discussions lasted approximately 30 to 40 min. They were recorded digitally and, subsequently, transcribed manually nonverbatim by the researcher to eliminate participants' repetitions while they were dictating and notating during the focus group.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis process was conducted using the software package Atlas.ti. The qualitative interpretivist approach allowed for the collection and interpretation of the pre-service teachers' perspectives [48]. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, employing a predominantly inductive approach [55]. In this regard, a research diary and memos were kept to reflect on the analysis. At the outset, an index was created using the three research questions as a structure for familiarization with the data. The analysis for each research question followed a recursive and nonlinear process consisting of six phases, developed by Braun and Clarke [56,57].

For the analysis of RQ1, responses from the open question regarding pre-service teachers' conception of heritage were coded close to the data and organized using the categories identified by López-Fernández et al. [28]: past, present, space, identity, and heritage type. The analysis of RQ2 was based on the open questions aimed to assess the pre-service teachers' educational use of heritage and their familiarity with the museum and heritage sector, together with relevant fragments from the think aloud transcripts. The analysis of RQ3 drew on responses from the questionnaire regarding the pre-service teachers' use of educational packages, the documents used to evaluate the educational packages, and the focus group discussions leading up to these evaluations. For RQ2 and RQ3, initial codes and categories were developed inductively from the data. After all the data items were coded, distinctive categories were identified. Next, these categories were reviewed by going through the data again and, moreover, assessing how they related to each other. The categories were then defined, and, in a final phase, relevant data excerpts were selected in support of the generated categories.

3. Results

In this section, the results of the analysis are summarized and presented according to the research questions, along with supporting quotations taken from the questionnaire, documents, and think aloud transcripts.

3.1. What Conceptions Do Pre-Service Teachers Have of Heritage? (RQ1)

Regarding the item in the questionnaire that asked the pre-service teachers to describe 'heritage' according to their understanding of the concept, two participants indicated they could not provide a definition. In the remaining descriptions, references that could be grouped into the category 'heritage type' were most frequent, with 23 mentions. There was a noticeable tendency to define heritage as material. Twelve participants mentioned material elements, of which nine did so exclusively. This is echoed in the frequent use of the words "building(s)" and "monument(s)". Three responses provided a description using a combination of material and intangible elements. The other three participants remained vague in their descriptions, making no concrete references to a particular type of heritage, such as "everything we inherit". Descriptions relying on temporal references were common, with most of them relating to the category 'past'. The category 'present' received less attention among the pre-service teachers, with only two mentions. The category 'identity' was also prevalent in the sample, accounting for eight mentions. References that could be grouped into the category 'space' were less common, with only three mentions. Table 4 provides an overview of the categories. It is worth noting that natural forms of heritage were not mentioned.

Table 4. Overview of categories for Research Question 1.

Category	N°	%	Examples
Past	19	34.6	"inherited", "from earlier", "historical background"
Present	2	3.6	"today", "remaining"
Space	3	5.5	"for an area", "land or region"
Identity	8	14.5	"from our ancestors", "meaning", "family", "we, as Belgians"
Type	23	41.8	"monuments", "buildings", "statuettes", "objects", "traditions"
Total	55	100.0	

With regard to the question of where the pre-service teachers would employ heritage in the curriculum of their subjects, the predominantly monumentalist conception of heritage continued. The descriptions they provided in their answers were mainly focused on material and especially well-known examples of heritage. The most mentioned example was "beguinage" [architectural ensemble where lay religious women lived together], which was cited by three participants. Other examples cited were "the historical city of Tongeren", "Roman and Gothic architecture", "castles", "remains of a world exhibition", "Stonehenge", "mines", and "burial mounds". Beyond these examples of immovable heritage, artistic expression in museums, for instance, "Flemish pictorial art", was mentioned only twice, while traditions as an expression of intangible heritage were mentioned just once, with "carnival". All references mentioned were local or regional examples, with "Stonehenge" making up the only exception. In addition, the participants did not seem to describe or discuss relationships with other forms of heritage.

3.2. What Opinions Do Pre-Service Teachers Have on the Use of Heritage as an Educational Resource? (RQ2)

The results from the questionnaire reveal that most pre-service teachers answered in terms of employing heritage within a single subject without referring to the potential of cross-curricular approaches. Other than a few vague descriptions, they expressed uses that remain within the curricular boundaries of their school subjects (e.g., history, art, and physical education). However, the think aloud transcripts provide additional insight into this matter. The results show that when the participants were confronted with the educational packages, they were not reluctant towards the cross-curricular approaches adopted. Reactions expressing a positive attitude were found in all three focus groups. More specifically, connections with the subjects of geography, Dutch, or project general subjects were perceived as beneficial, providing added value to the educational package.

The active methodologies adopted in the educational packages initiated rich discussions about the methods applied. In all three focus groups, a predominantly positive attitude was found regarding activating students through heritage, regardless of the subject. The participants explicitly dismissed a didactic use of heritage that is too reliant on knowledge and is presented to the students in a rather “dry” manner. In contrast, they expressed the need to put students to work. According to them, this can be done preferably by designing assignments that let students investigate topics or present findings to each other. This seems to indicate they hold a positive opinion towards social interaction when using heritage in the classroom. To a lesser extent, the participants pointed to the ability of heritage to stimulate the interest of students during such active assignments. The main reason for this is the belief that heritage responds to the students’ everyday living environment.

Opinions in the data expressing why participants would implement heritage were scarce, as there were no questions targeting this explicitly. Therefore, the questionnaire provided limited insight, with only a few participants providing extra comments, mostly addressing the aim of transmitting knowledge to the students. For instance, one participant found it useful that students would know examples of *beguinages* in Flanders and would be able to sum up their different characteristics and functions. Three participants elaborated on the use of heritage to acquire skills in the school subject of history, such as being able to critically assess and interpret historical sources. The additional data collected during the focus groups seemed to confirm these findings, with comments made in the focus groups expressing a positive attitude towards didactic choices in the educational packages that aimed to promote the critical use of historical sources. Table 5 provides an overview of the categories and subcategories.

Table 5. Overview of categories and subcategories for Research Question 2.

Category	Subcategory	Examples
Subjects	Single subject	“When you tell about the middle ages, you can use heritage as sources” Q
	Cross-curricular	“I think it would be nice to interact with the geography teacher” FG1
Uses	Transmitting knowledge	“The students can name <i>beguinages</i> in Flanders and link characteristics to them” Q
	Acquiring skills	“Anything else positive?—Working well with sources” FG3
Methods	Interest	“Close to the living environment. Just write down living environment, as positive” FG3
	Assignments	“I think that is interesting for students, otherwise they will have to constantly read text and watch videos” FG1
	Social interaction	“I think those children have to do a lot on their own” FG2

Q: Questionnaire; FG: Focus group.

Finally, it is also worth noting that the participants predominantly rated their familiarity with cultural institutions from the heritage sector as rather poor. A majority of the sample described it as “insufficient” ($n = 8$), while others indicated they were “not familiar at all” ($n = 4$). In this respect, one participant commented “I always enjoy using it myself, but I do not always know where I can find heritage”. Moreover, the predominantly material and rather limited conception of heritage was also found here, as one participant stated “I know there are some things or buildings that are considered heritage, but that is actually all I know”. The rest of the participants in the sample rated their familiarity as “sufficient” ($n = 2$) or “good” ($n = 3$). The questionnaire also asked which relevant partners the participants know if they were to design lessons or projects revolving around heritage. A majority ($n = 9$) could not give an example. Among the other answers, universities, museums, and regional or municipal public services were mentioned most, such as libraries or tourism offices.

3.3. How Do Pre-Service Teachers Evaluate Educational Materials from the Museum and Heritage Sector? (RQ3)

The data can be grouped into two categories: evaluations the participants made regarding if and how they would use the educational material themselves, and statements they made in relation to perceptions regarding students' appreciation. Table 6 presents an overview of categories and subcategories.

Table 6. Overview of categories and subcategories for Research Question 3.

Category	Subcategory	Examples
Teachers' perspective	Connection with school subjects	"It can be linked with content they have to learn anyway" FG1
	Cross-curricular opportunities	"Positive, then you are working across subjects" FG2
	Policy indications	"It's a pity there are no attainment targets added explicitly" FG3
	Feasibility	"You can't get this done" FG3
	Professional autonomy	"But maybe if you could put your own spin to it, it could be fun" FG1
Students' perspective	Overall structure	"I think this package has a nice coherence" FG2
	Differentiation	"There are many options to differentiate" FG2
	Interactive methods	"However, I clearly miss assignments" FG3

FG: Focus group.

In the first category, the participants seemed to find it important that the educational packages could be linked to the content of their school subjects, for example when specific terminology was explicitly used. Further, in line with the results from RQ2, the participants evaluated cross-curricular opportunities that were integrated into the packages as positive. However, whether a single subject or cross-curricular use was pursued, they reacted negatively towards packages that did not reference relevant attainment targets set out by educational policy. Moreover, the participants were also critical of certain didactic choices in light of feasibility. This was the case, for example, when unrealistic expectations were set in relation to time management or the indicated target group. In this regard, they predominantly expressed their appreciation of packages that left room for the input of teachers concerning content or didactics. For example, they preferred materials that had a modular approach with a range of suggestions to a lesson plan that had to be strictly followed. Nevertheless, the participants also spoke out clearly in favor of packages that were coherent and logically structured and that followed a common thread.

With regard to the second category, the participants seemed to appreciate educational packages that provided options to differentiate for individual students within the classroom. Packages that catered to the interests of students were found more valuable. For example, this was the case when heritage was selected that could connect to their living environments, or where room was left for personal interpretations of heritage. It is also worth noting the importance the participants gave to the inclusion of a glossary of terms at the end of an educational package or additional online content, which would be helpful as the level of each student can differ. Further, the participants evaluated the use of interactive methods as predominantly positive. This was reflected in the appreciation of assignments in groups where the students had to be creative, such as investigating local heritage or designing a fictional museum and then presenting it to each other. In this respect, the participants appeared to appreciate packages where an explanation of the concept of heritage was provided in the introduction.

Regarding the selection of educational packages the pre-service teachers would work with, there was a noticeable diversity of responses. No package was selected by all focus groups. This diversity continued in their motivations. Here, the pre-service teachers noted "cross-curricular approach", "they have to see this anyway", "ICT", "sufficient freedom", "clearly written", "most complete and more structured", and "closer to the living environment of the students". The pre-service teachers were clearer on which packages they would not work with. Although no package was selected by all focus groups in this regard, they all referred to feasibility issues by writing things such as "not

achievable”, “not realistic for secondary education”, and “unrealistic timing”. Other issues mentioned were a lack of structure and too little freedom to shape the materials according to their own desires.

At the end of the focus group, the pre-service teachers formulated three general quality criteria for future educational packages from a teacher’s perspective. Table 7 presents an overview of the quality criteria as noted by each focus group. It can be stated the pre-service teachers directed the evaluation predominantly towards the general form and methods of the educational packages. They made almost no remarks on the way heritage was employed.

Table 7. Overview of the quality criteria formulated by the focus groups.

Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3
Feasible for classroom use	Glossary of terms	Conformity with the attainment targets
Correct attainment targets and motivation why they are relevant	Interactive methods	Clear structure
Differentiation	Coherence	Well-structured glossary of terms

4. Discussion

The results show that the pre-service teachers described heritage mostly in material terms, following a rather historical–artistic conception. This appears to correspond with results from studies in the Spanish context [45,46]. In particular, it seems interesting to compare these results to the study of López-Fernández et al. [28], as the present study was also based on a sample of pre-service teachers (early childhood and primary education) undertaking a bachelor’s degree, and, more importantly, the analysis of RQ1 drew on the same categories used by them. Although the sample size of López-Fernández et al. [28] was significantly larger ($n = 149$) and, consequently, the results should be compared with caution in regard to generalization, it appears the current study yielded predominantly similar results. This was the case, for example, regarding the prevalence of terms related to ‘type’ (41.8 vs. 50% and 35.71%) and ‘identity’ (14.5% vs. 12.1% and 23.38%). However, the low occurrence of the category ‘space’ in the current study (5.5% vs. 24.19% and 19.48%) seems to be worth noting and could be explained by the lack of participants in the sample who had chosen the subject of geography. However, the discussions during the focus groups revealed that some participants did have a sense of the connection between heritage and place.

In addition, López-Fernández et al. [28] found an imbalance in the occurrence of temporal references in favor of historical terms over references to the present. This led them to claim that the pre-service teachers in their sample had little insight into the connection between heritage and a present-day perspective. When compared to the current study, this seems in general terms to correspond with the relationship of the categories ‘past’ (34.6% vs. 12.9% and 20.13% and ‘present’ (3.6% vs. 0.81% and 1.3%). Thus, the pre-service teachers in the current study also tended to describe the concept of heritage in historical terms and placed less emphasis on the present. Although this could be explained by the number of participants that had chosen the subject of history ($n = 13$), it has to be stated that the remaining participants ($n = 4$) with a subject combination of, for example, physical education and recreational activity provided a description that focused on the historical dimension of heritage as well. Interestingly, in some cases, the temporal references were written down in rather passive and stringent terms, such as “were passed on” and “must be preserved”. Such definitions seemingly leave little room to take up an active role from the perspective of the present and, thus, tend to ignore the dynamic aspects of heritage that draw on a human-centered approach to the concept as a contemporary sociocultural construct. Nevertheless, various scholars [30,58] assert that in light of citizenship education, for example, when dealing with social or environmental

concerns regarding conservation, it is necessary for teachers to understand and implement such an approach with a present-day focus.

In general, the opinions of the pre-service teachers were positive towards the use of heritage as an educational resource. This seems to be in concordance with results from Felices-De la Fuente et al. [42]. Individually, the pre-service teachers tended to implement heritage only within the limits of their school subject(s). However, when introduced to the perspectives of other pre-service teachers in their focus group and confronted with a wide array of options to include heritage across different subjects presented in the educational packages, a more cross-curricular approach was preferred as well. In line with the results of Ferrera-Listán et al. [41], examples were found of pre-service teachers that would didactically employ heritage in a descriptive or illustrative way. However, it is worth noting these were rather few in contrast to the prevalent views in favor of student-centered methodologies. The findings from Chaparro-Sainz et al. [43] and Gómez-Carrasco et al. [44], which exposed a connection between a positive attitude towards the educational integration of heritage and a student-centered approach, seem to be confirmed in this sample of pre-service teachers.

Based on the pre-service teachers' evaluations of educational packages concerning heritage education, it can be stated that the incorporation of active methodologies, the stimulation of social interaction, and the possibility to cater to the needs and interests of students are highly valued. However, in addition to these assessments from the perspective of students, understanding the teacher's perspective also seems crucial in light of establishing sustainable connections between heritage and education. It is the teachers who decide whether or not an educational package that focuses on heritage will be used in the classroom. In this respect, it was noticeable that the pre-service teachers spoke positively of packages that provided clear linkages with their subjects by explicitly relying on the specific terminology of the discipline. For the pre-service teachers of history, for example, the use of historical sources and the reliance on historical questions during the assignments seemed to trigger their interest. Although potential cross-curricular connections were noticed and discussed as well, it can be stated that these remarks were rather limited and were mostly initiated when explicit references in this regard were included in the educational packages.

Moreover, these evaluations illustrate what pre-service teachers seem to appreciate in educational packages with or about heritage. In this respect, it is worth noting the assessments mostly revolved around general issues of form and methods employed. There were almost no remarks regarding the specific use of heritage. This could be explained by the limited conception of heritage found in the sample of pre-service teachers. Nevertheless, Grever and van Boxtel [9] put a dynamic understanding of the concept to the fore in light of quality criteria when heritage is used in educational contexts.

5. Conclusions

This study had the aim of assessing the present status of heritage education in Flanders by means of a literature review and an exploratory case study. It started from the fact that little was known since the last largescale study, which had identified a gap between heritage and education [16]. For this reason, the conceptions and opinions of a small sample of pre-service teachers were investigated.

The current study found that a traditional interpretation of heritage, mainly relying on well-known and monumental examples, is still prevalent among pre-service teachers in Flanders. This conception of heritage is also characterized by a strong focus on the past, while perspectives on the present and future appear underdeveloped. In such an understanding, heritage is approached as a given from the past while neglecting its potential for contemporary dialogue and cultural reflection concerning its transmission to future generations. In this way, heritage is rendered a static concept with limited educational use, creating the pitfall of employing it in a rather illustrative or academic manner. Nevertheless, when confronted with more integrative views of heritage in the educational packages, the pre-service teachers seemed to embrace active, student-centered methodologies with cross-

curricular approaches. Although in general terms this appears to be in accordance with the recommendations from the Council of Europe [2] (p. 31), it does not seem to qualify as a “partnership between the fields of education and culture”. Based on this exploratory study, it can be considered that there is still an apparent mismatch, with actors from the museum and heritage sector reaching out while teachers, despite their appreciation when confronted, seem to remain rather unfamiliar with heritage and how to integrate it into the classroom.

This study has two main implications. First, and in line with international research in other contexts [30,42–44,59], the implications, both epistemologically and methodologically, need to target initial teacher training. It should be the aim of teacher training programs in Flanders to develop pre-service teachers’ ability to design interactive lessons or projects themselves, bolstering a teacher-initiated and broad use of heritage. In addition to giving attention to the concept of heritage as a crucial starting point, this training needs to focus on the capability to find relevant partners, both inside schools (e.g., other teachers) and beyond (e.g., museums, heritage organizations, communities, etc.). Second, the evaluations of the educational packages should inform educational departments from the museum and heritage sector. It is worth noting that the materials they produce can be seen as both an inspiration and stimulation for (pre-service) teachers, contributing to an evolving understanding of the didactic potential of heritage within the field of education.

There are several limitations to this study. The first limitation can be found in the nature and size of the sample. The sample in this study only consisted of $n = 17$ pre-service teachers engaged in teacher training at the same higher education institution and was a nonprobability sample relying on voluntary participants. Moreover, data were collected in the second year of their bachelor degree. The pre-service teachers were therefore just over halfway through their teacher training, which could have an effect on the findings. Second, the teacher educator that was contacted had a background in history and heritage education. This may have distorted the findings. A third limitation is the context of this study, which is highly specific. Only $n = 6$ ready-made educational packages were presented for evaluation to the pre-service teachers, on the basis of which conclusions were drawn regarding the third research question. Therefore, the generalizability of the results is limited.

Future research should investigate whether the findings of this exploratory study are also found in larger samples of pre-service teachers. In addition, similar research could be conducted with in-service teachers as well. Moreover, the majority of participants who signed up voluntarily were involved in history teacher training ($n = 13$), indicating that they somehow acknowledge the potential of heritage for the subject of history. This perceived close connection between history education and the use of heritage was also previously found in the largescale study in Flanders [16]. Therefore, and in line with scholarship in other contexts [42,43,60,61], research could focus specifically on history teachers’ perceptions and didactic use of heritage as a resource in classroom practice in Flanders. Finally, the perceptions and opinions held by educators from the museum and heritage sector should be investigated as well to contribute to their specific professional development and establish a sustainable connection between education and heritage [33].

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: The data (in Dutch) used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgments: The author thanks Els Vinckx for helping set up the research workshop.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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