

Participatory Mapping at the UNESCO-listed Tower of Hercules (Galicia, Spain)

Bringing Local Perspectives into Heritage Interpretation

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INTRODUCTION

The Tower of Hercules, an ancient lighthouse in A Coruña, Galicia (Spain), has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2009.

The inscribed area also includes the Atlantic coastline, prehistoric remains, and a sculpture park.

Some places within the site refer to collective memories, such as a 1992 oil tanker disaster off the coast and the execution of anti-Francoist fighters during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939).



Fig. 1. The lighthouse and its landscape (photograph by the author)

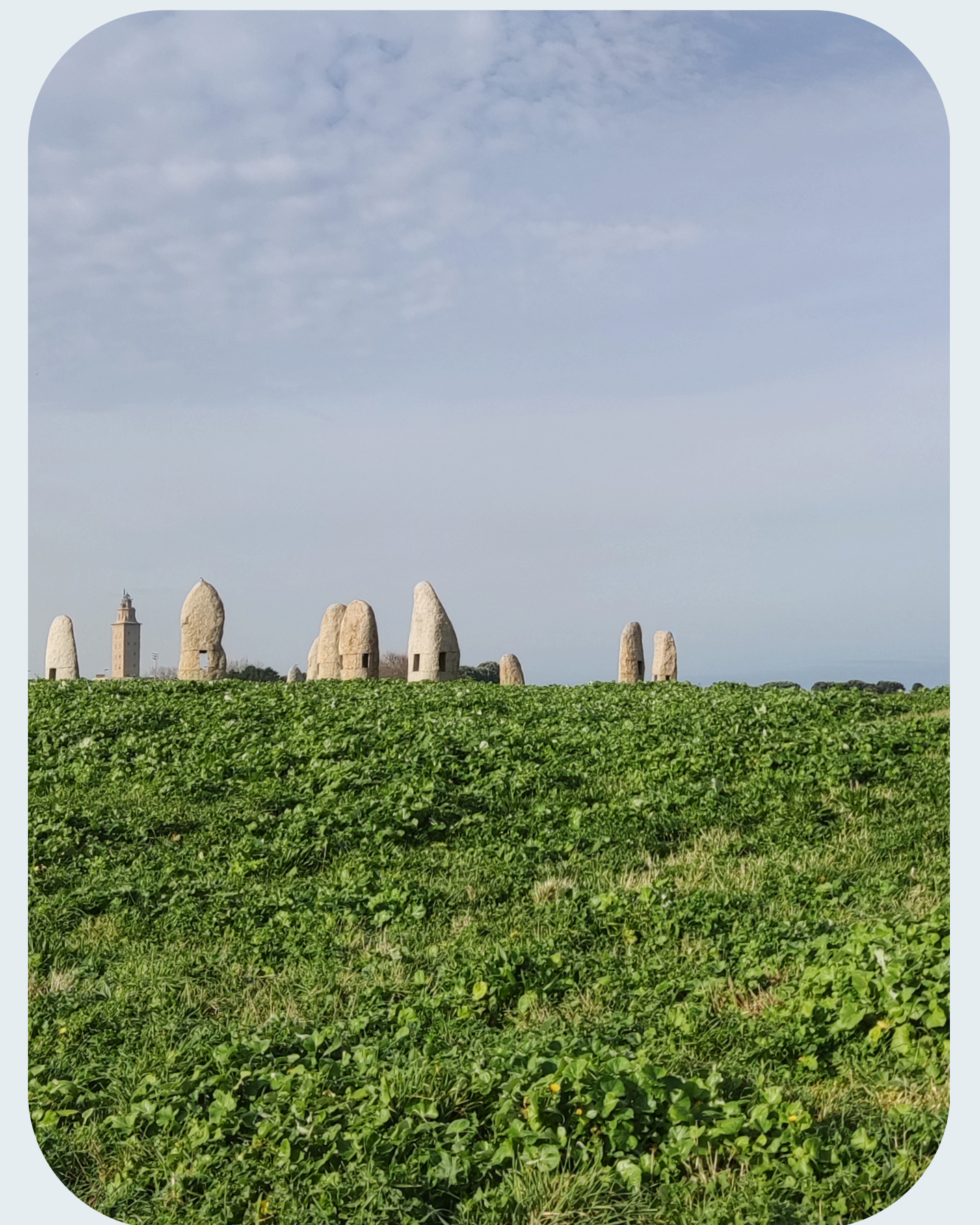


Fig. 2. View of the "Menhires for Peace" sculpture group, erected in 1996 (photograph by the author)

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do A Coruña's inhabitants and local groups perceive and understand the UNESCO site?

What interpretations, reflections, and memories associated with the lighthouse and its surrounding landscape do they believe should be represented?

The small UNESCO interpretation centre, originally intended as a temporary facility, has since become permanent. It offers a chronological account of the lighthouse's history and does not present the perceptions and meanings that local communities associate with the site. Existing collaborations between the UNESCO site, the Archaeological Museum, and local groups provide opportunities to address this gap.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on Critical Heritage Studies (Smith, 2021) and the concept of landscape biographies: landscapes are shaped through interactions between people, the built environment, and meaning-making practices (Kolen, Renes & Hermans, 2025). It also explores whether the UNESCO site can act as a hub for institutional and grassroots perspectives (Nikolić Đerić, Neyrinck, Seghers & Tsakiridis, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODS

A **questionnaire** was developed with the Archaeology and History Museum of A Coruña and distributed during its public activities. It explored participants' relationships with the site and informed the design of the following steps.

The subsequent **participatory mapping workshop**, hosted by the museum, consisted of the following activities using a large map:

- **Photo mapping:** placing selected photographs on the map;
- **Post-it mapping:** identifying places through short notes grouped into four themes (changes, culture, nature, memories);
- **Thread connections:** linking places through real routes and symbolic associations;
- **Collective reflection:** discussing emerging themes and additional observations.



Fig. 3. Detail of the participatory mapping activity after completion (photograph by the author)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- Participants highlighted environmental stewardship in relation to past human-made maritime disasters, while also describing the site as a place of everyday engagement with the Galician Atlantic landscape and biodiversity.
- The memory of executions by the Francoist dictatorship within the present UNESCO area emerged as a significant theme. One participant noted, "We rarely talk about it, yet we would like it to be more discussed", highlighting the site continuing role in memory-making and public debate.
- Overall, the study suggests that the site should be understood less as a fixed monument than as an evolving relational landscape shaped by multiple actors, memories, and personal accounts.

REFERENCES

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