

REVIVING HERITAGE THROUGH PARTICIPATION: FAI SPRING DAYS AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP IN ITALY

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ABSTRACT. This paper examines the *Giornate FAI di Primavera* (FAI Spring Days), a prominent public heritage initiative organized by the *Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano* (FAI), as a lens through which to analyze contemporary practices of participatory heritage-making in Italy. In March 2025, marking FAI's 50th anniversary, more than 750 cultural and environmental sites—many of which are usually inaccessible—were opened to the public, attracting over 400,000 visitors and involving the active participation of over 50,000 student volunteers. Drawing on a multi-source qualitative analysis that integrates institutional discourse, digital ethnography and national media coverage, the article explores how FAI Spring Days operate as affective apparatus that shape collective memory, civic emotion and national identity. It argues that the initiative operates as a form of soft civic power, mobilizing aesthetic engagement, ritualized participation and digital storytelling to foster a sense of cultural stewardship. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook amplify the event's emotional and symbolic resonance, contributing to a digitally mediated public of belonging. By engaging diverse audiences across generations and regions, FAI Spring Days exemplify a civic model of heritage democratization and cultural citizenship in 21st-century Italy. This

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paper contributes to ongoing debates on participatory heritage, media rituals and affective publics, situating the case study within broader transformations in heritage governance.

Keywords: Italian culture, affective heritage, digital publics, cultural citizenship, FAI

JEL classification: Z11, Z18, H41, O52

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Introduction

In recent decades, the field of heritage studies has increasingly investigated how cultural heritage is produced, experienced, and circulated through participatory and affective practices. Scholars have challenged the notion of heritage as a fixed, institutional asset, emphasizing instead its performative and processual dimensions (Smith, 2006; Waterton & Watson, 2013). Public heritage initiatives that rely on large-scale citizen engagement therefore constitute rich sites of analysis—not only as moments of access to cultural goods, but as intricate assemblages of memory, identity, affect, and governance.

Within this broader context, Italy offers a particularly salient setting, given the centrality of cultural heritage to national identity and public life. This study examines the FAI Spring Days as a key instance of contemporary participatory heritage-making in Italy and as an entry point to explore how civic engagement, affective experience, and media circulation intersect within cultural events. The aim of this article is to understand how the FAI Spring Days operate as an affective apparatus of participatory heritage that combines institutional authority with grassroots involvement, ritual with spectacle, and memory with media. Specifically, it explores three interrelated research questions:

1. How do institutional narratives, volunteer practices, and social media content interact to shape the affective experience of heritage?
2. What forms of cultural citizenship are enacted through participation in the Spring Days?
3. How does this form of heritage engagement reflect broader transformations in the politics of memory and national identity in Italy?

To address these questions, the study adopts a mixed-methods design combining: (i) an archival analysis of FAI communications, reports, and promotional materials (2003–2025); (ii) a digital ethnography of social media activity during the 2025 Spring Days; and (iii) an analysis of national media coverage in outlets such as RAI and La Repubblica. This approach enables a comprehensive mapping of how the Spring Days are imagined, performed, and mediated across multiple publics.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines a focused Literature Review on public heritage initiatives, affective heritage, cultural citizenship, and media rituals. Section 3 provides an overview of the FAI Spring Days. Section 4 details the methodology and data sources. Section 5 discusses the results of the analysis, integrating social media data, institutional materials, and media coverage to examine how the 2025 Spring Days shaped public engagement, affective participation, and cultural citizenship. Section 6 concludes with reflections on policy and practice.

Literature review

Public heritage initiatives are increasingly understood as laboratories for rethinking the social, affective and civic functions of cultural heritage. Scholarship over the past decade has examined how publics participate in heritage through community-based practices, emotional experiences, and digitally mediated forms of engagement. This section synthesizes two major strands of research relevant to understanding the FAI Spring Days: (i) public heritage, participation, and cultural citizenship; (ii) affective heritage, atmospheres, and media-mediated forms of engagement.

Public heritage, participation and cultural citizenship

Research on public heritage initiatives has highlighted a broad shift from expert-driven conservation models to participatory frameworks that emphasize social inclusion, shared governance and community empowerment. The emergence of **public-private-people partnerships (P4)** exemplifies this transformation, placing local actors at the center of heritage co-production (Bonioti, 2023). Comparative studies further demonstrate that community-driven heritage projects contribute to local development by activating collective narratives and enabling intergenerational engagement (Butters *et al.*, 2017) while shaping which heritage values are recognized or contested (Apaydin, 2017). These participatory transformations extend to professional practices: heritage specialists increasingly work within **networked ecosystems** characterized by co-

creation and negotiated expertise (Van der Hoeven, 2019). Similar dynamics appear in collaborative models involving universities, volunteers and civic actors that generate hybrid forms of public engagement (Fruzzo & Mattone, 2024). Yet scholarship also notes persistent tensions: public participation often remains formal rather than substantive (Swensen *et al.*, 2012), and participatory initiatives may surface conflicts around contested or “difficult” heritage (Macdonald, 2008).

This literature intersects with research on **cultural citizenship**, which conceptualizes participation in heritage as a form of civic practice through which individuals negotiate identity, belonging and recognition. Building on classical formulations (Rosaldo, 1994; Isin & Nielsen, 2008), recent studies show how heritage participation fosters civic learning, social cohesion and intergenerational ties while redistributing interpretive authority to non-experts (Lahdesmaki, 2016; Ceginskas *et al.*, 2025). Within the Italian context, Fiorillo & Ofria (2024) demonstrate that human and social capital strongly shape participation patterns, aligning with the volunteer-based model of the FAI Spring Days, where students and volunteers act as mediators of heritage and agents of informal cultural citizenship.

Despite extensive international scholarship, relatively little work addresses volunteer-driven heritage events in Italy. Existing studies focus more on museums or archaeological sites than on large-scale civic ritual events such as the FAI Spring Days, making this case particularly relevant.

Affective heritage, atmospheres and digital participation

A second major strand of literature concerns the **affective dimensions** of heritage, exploring how emotions, atmospheres and embodied encounters shape heritage experiences. Foundational frameworks (Knudsen & Stage, 2015; Wetherell, 2012) have inspired research into the sensory, relational and emotional qualities of heritage spaces. Recent contributions emphasize how affective atmospheres mediate feelings of authenticity, attachment and belonging (Bondi, 2016; Bissell, 2025), while Maddrell (2025) provides a comprehensive account of the interplay between affect and emotion in cultural geography. Affect also functions as a tool of governance: heritage organizations mobilize emotions to cultivate civic dispositions and forms of “affective responsibility” (Waterton & Dittmer 2014). These dynamics are highly relevant to events such as the FAI Spring Days, where exceptional access to closed spaces generates heightened emotional responses—wonder, intimacy, nostalgia—that reinforce the symbolic power of the event.

The affective and experiential dimensions of heritage are increasingly mediated through **digital platforms**. Expanding Couldry’s (2003) concept of media rituals, recent research analyses how social media environments create networked publics that co-produce and circulate heritage narratives (McCarthy &

Schorch, 2018; Villaespesa & Murphy 2021). User-generated images, storytelling and hashtag campaigns act as forms of collective witnessing, extending the temporal and spatial boundaries of heritage experiences. Building on Papacharissi's (2015) notion of *affective publics*, scholars argue that digital participation amplifies emotional dynamics, shaping interpretive communities and national imaginaries.

Despite a growing body of international research, the application of media ritual and affective-publics frameworks to Italian heritage events remains limited. The FAI Spring Days therefore offer a valuable case for understanding how affect, ritual and digital participation intertwine in contemporary civic heritage.

The FAI Spring Days: background and significance

The *Giornate FAI di Primavera* (FAI Spring Days) represent a flagship initiative of the *Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano* (FAI), founded in 1993 to promote the appreciation and protection of Italy's cultural and environmental heritage. Originally conceived as biannual open days to grant temporary access to normally closed sites, the initiative has progressively expanded its geographical reach, volunteer base, and institutional partnerships.

By 2025, marking FAI's 50th anniversary, the Spring Days mobilized over **750 sites** across more than **400 municipalities**, attracting over **400,000 visitors**. The event relies on an extensive volunteer network—more than **16,000 FAI members** and over **50,000 students** serving as *Apprendisti Ciceroni*—whose pedagogical training and local knowledge are central to the event's intergenerational and educational mission (Cinieri & Zamperini, 2019).

The Spring Days operate as a ritualized public practice: ephemeral access to private or restricted sites produces heightened affective responses (wonder, intimacy, civic pride), while curated narratives and guided tours encourage shared meanings and collective memory. Digital mediation—particularly through Instagram and Facebook hashtags such as **#FAIprimavera** and **#GiornateFAI**—extends the event's temporal and spatial reach, creating crowdsourced visual archives and affective publics that amplify the initiative's symbolic presence.

Although the FAI Spring Days receive substantial media and institutional visibility, scholarly attention to the event is limited. Journalistic and curatorial commentary (e.g., *The Flora Journal*, 2019; *Finestre sull'Arte*, 2018) offers useful historical context, but there remains a clear gap in peer-reviewed literature analyzing the event's affective, civic and media dynamics—a gap this study seeks to begin to fill.

Material and methods

This article employs a qualitative, mixed-methods approach to investigate the civic and affective dimensions of public engagement during the 2025 edition of the *Giornate FAI di Primavera*. The study draws upon a triangulated corpus of institutional, media and social media data to examine how the event operates as a participatory heritage *dispositive*, mobilizing emotional investment, cultural values and performative expressions of belonging.

Three main data sources were analyzed:

1. Institutional materials and grey literature: this dataset includes official reports, press releases, promotional materials and newsletters published by the Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano (FAI) between 2003 and 2025. Particular emphasis was given to documents and digital communications produced in the lead-up to and during the 2025 Spring Days, alongside retrospective institutional messaging related to FAI's 50th anniversary.

2. Media coverage and public discourse: A targeted review of Italian mainstream media sources — particularly *La Repubblica*, *RAI Cultura*, and local newspapers — was conducted to assess the broader discursive framing of the event. This helped contextualize public narratives around civic participation, youth involvement and national heritage valorization.

3. Social media content analysis: To assess real-time public engagement and participatory dynamics online, a digital ethnographic analysis was conducted using the analytics tool Social Searcher. The analysis focused on user-generated content posted between 22 and 27 March 2025, corresponding to the period immediately surrounding the Spring Days event. The analysis focused on content associated with the hashtags #GiornateFAI, #FAIprimavera and #ApprendistiCiceroni. Key metrics examined included total mentions, number of unique users, sentiment ratio, media type (text, image, video) and thematic content.

The hashtag-based analysis facilitated the identification of key trends in digital participation, including the visual and affective dimensions of engagement, as well as the prominence of specific social actors—most notably student volunteers (*Apprendisti Ciceroni*). Although not exhaustive, this methodology offers useful analytical perspective through which we examine how heritage experiences are publicly shared, emotionally framed and digitally amplified.

Data were coded inductively to identify recurrent patterns and themes, particularly those related to affective citizenship, visibility and ritualized practices of cultural engagement. In line with heritage studies' focus on performativity and everyday practices (Waterton & Smith, 2009), the approach prioritizes thick description and interpretive depth over representativeness or statistical generalization. Ethical considerations were adhered to throughout this research

process only publicly accessible posts were analyzed, and user data were anonymized unless accounts were official or institutional in nature. The integration of institutional discourse, media representation and user-driven content enables a multi-perspectival analysis of the FAI Spring Days, capturing both top-down messaging and bottom-up expressions of heritage participation. This framework enables a nuanced understanding of how civic rituals such as the Spring Days mediate relationships between citizens, memory and place in the digital era.

To contextualize the scale and institutional support for cultural participation in Italy, this study also draws on public expenditure data from ISTAT and the Ministry of Culture (2018–2022), comparing Italy's investment levels with those of other major European countries.

Results and discussion: participatory heritage in action

Public investment and cultural infrastructure

To contextualize the socio-cultural ecosystem in which the FAI Spring Days operate, it is essential to consider the broader landscape of public investment in culture in Italy and across Europe. While the primary focus of this study is qualitative, national statistics provide key insights into the institutional conditions that enable participatory heritage practices to thrive.

Italy continues to hold the highest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites globally, with 59 sites recorded in 2023. According to official statistics published by the Italian Ministry of Culture (*Minicifre della Cultura*, 2024), this rich cultural endowment is further reflected in the extensive network of museums, monuments and archaeological sites open to the public. Between 2018 and 2022, however, the number of such institutions declined slightly—from approximately 4,908 in 2018 to 4,416 in 2022—likely due to temporary or permanent closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Museum attendance data confirm this trend, showing a sharp decline in 2021 followed by a strong recovery in 2022. In 2021, Italy registered 11.5 million paid and 13.3 million unpaid entries, whereas in 2022 these figures almost doubled, reaching 23.5 million and 35.1 million respectively. Public museums accounted for the majority of these visits, with 42 million paid entries in 2022 compared to 19.6 million in 2021. This post-pandemic rebound suggests a renewed interest in cultural experiences among both residents and tourists. The high proportion of non-paying visitors—particularly in public museums—highlights the importance of accessibility policies and sustained state support.

A broader understanding of this institutional framework emerges when examining cross-national trends in public cultural expenditure. As shown in Figure 1, Italy's investment in cultural services and related media sectors increased steadily between 2018 and 2022, rising from €7.73 billion to €8.85 billion. Of this total, €5.72 billion were dedicated to cultural services—including museums, monuments, archives and heritage conservation—while €3.13 billion supported broadcasting and editorial activities. Despite this growth, Italy continues to invest less than other major European countries such as Germany (€26.3 billion), France (€22.5 billion) and Spain (€9 billion).

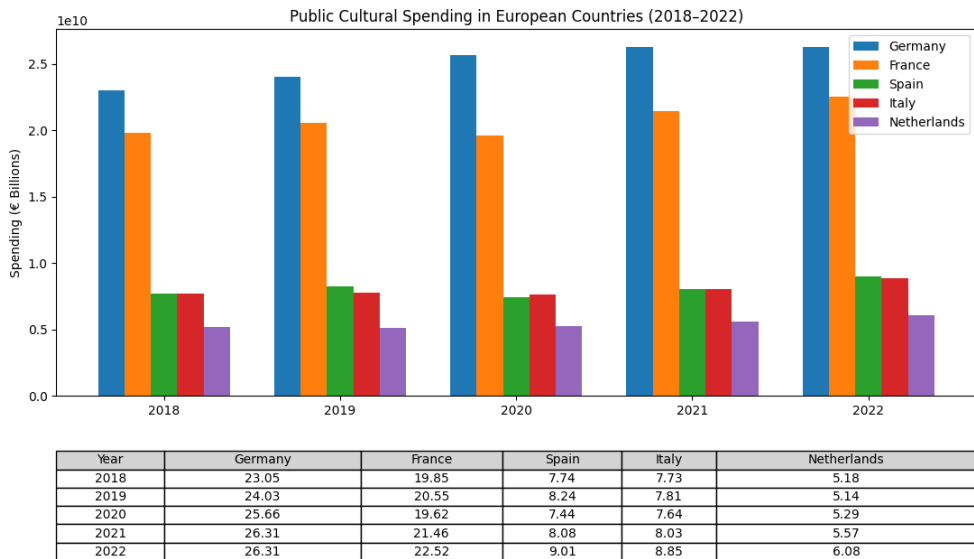


Figure 1. Public Cultural Spending in Italy and Selected European Countries (2018–2022).

Source: Authors' elaboration based on *Minicifre della Cultura* (Ministero della Cultura, 2024).

Nevertheless, Italy's sustained financial commitment to culture reflects the centrality of heritage within its national policy framework, particularly when considering the combined contributions of both central government institutions (e.g., Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and local authorities (e.g., regional and municipal governments). Between 2018 and 2022, national cultural expenditure increased by more than €1.1 billion, driven in part by post-COVID recovery funds and a renewed emphasis on regional cultural programming.

These conditions provide the material and policy landscape within which initiatives like the FAI Spring Days emerge and gain traction. They show that such events are not merely symbolic performances of civic culture but are instead grounded in structural investments and governance mechanisms that enable their growth. As the following sections will demonstrate, FAI strategically leverages this institutional infrastructure to activate large-scale volunteerism, foster emotional engagement with heritage and promote a democratized model of cultural citizenship.

A closer look at institutional support further reveals the growing operational integration of public bodies within the FAI Spring Days. Although the event relies primarily on civil society and student participation, a distinct layer of structured institutional engagement has emerged in recent years. Figure 2 illustrates the stable annual contribution—since 2021—of volunteers from the Civil Protection service, the Italian Red Cross (CRI) and the Carabinieri, whose presence ensures the safe and coordinated management of hundreds of site openings across the national territory. While smaller in number compared to the broader volunteer base, these actors play an essential role in enabling the logistical and safety infrastructure required for large-scale heritage events.

This pattern reflects not only logistical necessity but also the deepening entanglement between civic participation and state infrastructure. In an environment where public investment in culture continues to grow—particularly through recovery plans and regional programming—the presence of institutional volunteers signals a shift toward hybrid models of cultural governance. The FAI Spring Days, in this light, are not merely festive or symbolic interventions but increasingly constitute a coordinated exercise in public–private collaboration for heritage activation. These conditions provide the material and policy landscape within which initiatives like the Spring Days gain traction. They indicate that such events are not simply symbolic performances of civic culture, but are grounded in structural investments and governance mechanisms that enable their expansion. As the following sections demonstrate, FAI strategically leverages this institutional infrastructure to mobilize large-scale volunteerism, foster emotional engagement with heritage, and promote a democratized model of cultural citizenship.

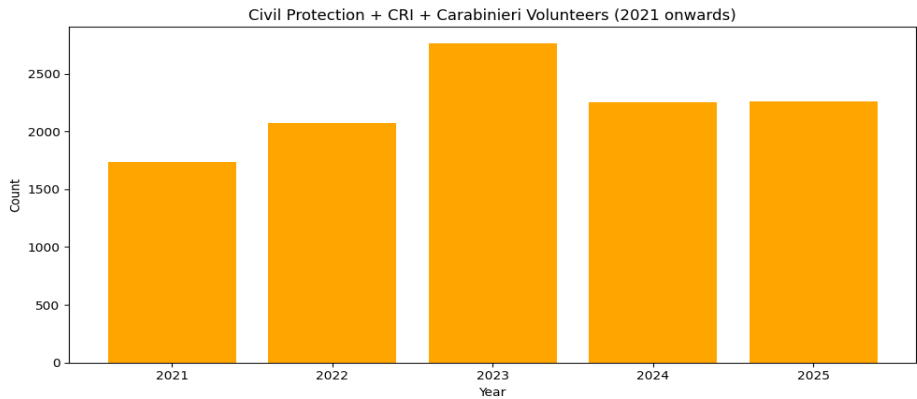


Figure 2. Institutional Volunteer Involvement in FAI Spring Days (2021–2025).

Source: Authors’ elaboration based on FAI annual reports and event archives.

While the Spring Days have become a fixture in the Italian cultural calendar, academic literature on the subject remains scarce. The earliest sustained commentaries can be found in cultural magazines such as *The Flora Journal* (2019) and *Finestre sull’Arte* (2018), which framed the initiative as a national awakening to overlooked heritage and as a ritual of civic identity formation.

Digital ethnography and social media analysis

To assess public engagement and digital participation surrounding the FAI Spring Days 2025, a social media analysis was conducted using the platform *Social Searcher*. The analysis focused on relevant hashtags circulated between 22 and 27 March, 2025, particularly: #GiornateFAI, #FAIprimavera and #ApprendistiCiceroni. Key metrics collected include hashtag frequency (mentions), number of unique users, sentiment ratio (positive:negative), diversity of web domains, and the types of media attached (e.g., videos, photos, external links). The quantitative distribution of hashtag engagement is summarized in Table 1, which details the relative visibility of each hashtag and shows that #GiornateFAI was the most widely used, followed by #ApprendistiCiceroni and #FAIprimavera.

Table 1. Hashtag Analysis of the FAI Spring Days 2025 Social Media Campaign

Hashtag	Mention Users		Sentiment	Domains	Video	Photo	Link	Status
FAIprimavera	71	51	3:0	8	50	14	7	0
GiornateFAI	331	210	9:1	86	56	99	175	1
ApprendistiCiceroni	97	80	5:0	80	0	14	83	0

Source: Authors’ elaboration of hashtags based on the platform Social Searcher.

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#GiornateFAI emerged as the dominant tag, generating 331 mentions from 210 unique users and displaying a predominantly positive sentiment ratio (9 positive vs. 1 negative). As illustrated in Figure 3, the posts associated with this hashtag prominently feature visual storytelling, enthusiasm for reopened heritage sites, and personal accounts of site visits, confirming the strong alignment between user-generated content and the event's public messaging.

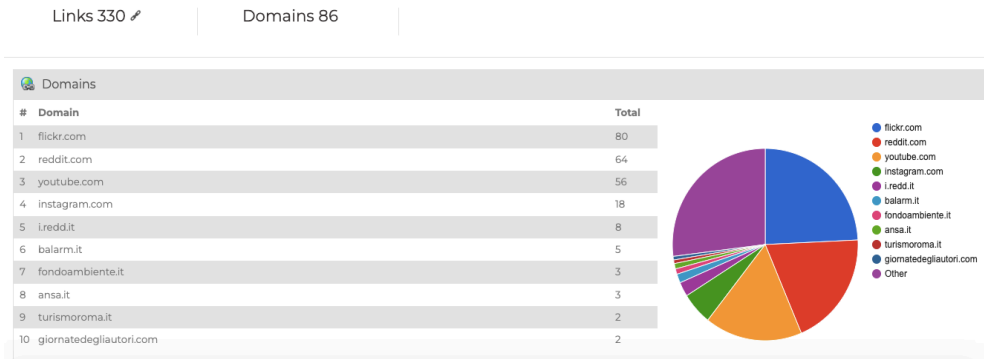


Figure 3. Representative User Posts with the Hashtag #GiornateFAI

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the platform Social Searcher

Figure 4 further shows that #FAIprimavera—recording 71 mentions—was closely associated with images and videos highlighting the seasonal identity of the event, including architectural details, landscapes and volunteer portraits, thereby reinforcing the aesthetic framing of the Spring Days.

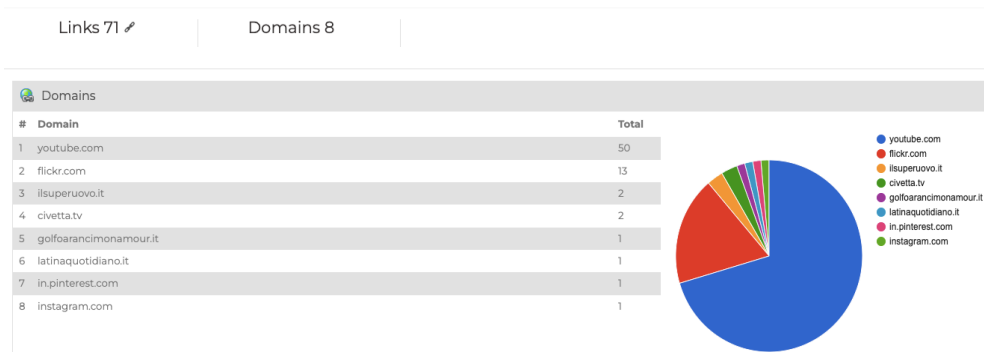


Figure 4. Representative User Posts with the Hashtag #FAIprimavera

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the platform Social Searcher

As depicted in Figure 5, the hashtag #ApprendistiCiceroni (97 mentions) foregrounded the active participation of student volunteers, whose self-representations emphasize their educational role and symbolic visibility within FAI's civic mission. These posts consolidate the perception of the Apprendisti Ciceroni as central mediators of heritage during the event.

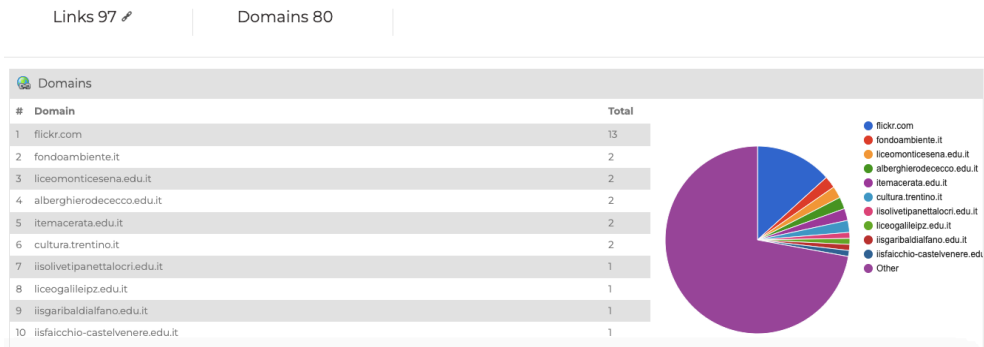


Figure 5. Representative User Posts with the Hashtag #ApprendistiCiceroni

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the platform Social Searcher

The overall content leaned heavily toward visual storytelling, with over 50 videos and 127 photos shared across platforms, underscoring the immersive and aesthetic appeal of the events. The low incidence of negative sentiment further reinforces a generally positive public perception, validating the initiative's resonance with both participants and observers.

Although a few older posts were retrieved—likely due to residual indexing from previous editions (e.g., 2021)—the majority of activity clustered around the actual event dates, confirming the reliability of the selected hashtags for capturing short-term public engagement. These results demonstrate that the *FAI Spring Days* act as digital catalysts for cultural engagement, transforming online spaces into participatory arenas of heritage expression.

Importantly, the role of social media extends beyond communication or marketing: it contributes to the construction of a collective narrative of heritage experience, shaped by visitors' perspectives, emotions, and representations. In this sense, digital platforms offer a complementary ethnographic lens through which to examine how individuals relate to heritage spaces and reframe them within their everyday digital practices. As the next section will show, these interactions are further amplified through the voices of volunteers, local communities, and young participants who embody the participatory ethos of the FAI.

Heritage as civic ritual: The Spring Days in practice

The *Giornate FAI di Primavera*—or FAI Spring Days—have evolved into one of the most influential and widely attended heritage events in Italy (La Repubblica 2025; RAI News 2025). Originally conceived in the early 1990s to raise awareness about under-recognized or inaccessible sites, by 2025 the initiative had become a fully-fledged civic ritual. It now merges mass participation, affective engagement, and strategic media visibility, embodying a performative, multi-sited event that mediates relationships among citizens, institutions, and place.

The fiftieth-anniversary edition, held on **March 23–24, 2025**, mobilized over **400,000 visitors** across all Italian regions, granting temporary access to more than **750 cultural and environmental sites**. Many of these spaces—private palaces, deconsecrated religious buildings, military infrastructures, or restricted natural areas—are ordinarily closed to the public. Their ephemeral accessibility generates a heightened emotional charge, transforming site visits into extraordinary, collectively shared experiences. This temporality contributes to the ritual character of the event: a fleeting encounter with heritage that gains meaning precisely through its impermanence.

At the heart of the Spring Days lies FAI's distinctive **volunteer-based model**. Over **15,000 FAI members and local coordinators** collaborated with more than **50,000 high school students**, known as *Apprendisti Ciceroni*, who served as guides during the event. After preparatory training, these students deliver presentations in informal, accessible language, often drawing on personal or local narratives. This intergenerational pedagogy empowers youth to position themselves as **active custodians of cultural heritage**, disrupting traditional hierarchies of expertise. It marks a shift from authoritative transmission to participatory storytelling, reinforcing civic values such as responsibility, openness, and belonging.

Echoing broader patterns of cultural participation, the educational and social dimensions embodied by the *Apprendisti Ciceroni* align with recent findings on the determinants of heritage engagement: Fiorillo & Ofria (2024) show that in Italy, human capital (educational level) and social capital (social networks) play a decisive role in predicting both the likelihood and frequency of visits to museums, sites, and monuments.

The performative dimension of the Spring Days is also inscribed in its **spatial politics**. By foregrounding “hidden” or marginal sites—such as hydroelectric plants, abandoned gardens, or working-class housing—the FAI subtly challenges the dominant heritage imaginary centered on monumentalism and high art. In 2025, several itineraries focused on **20th-century industrial archaeology, environmental regeneration sites, and migrant heritage**.

In Genoa, for example, a repurposed slaughterhouse now serving as a creative hub was among the most visited venues, with tours curated by a coalition of students, artists, and activists. In Palermo, the inclusion of a migrant-run urban garden marked a symbolic (if still tentative) expansion of what is recognized as “heritage” within FAI’s institutional scope. These curatorial choices are not devoid of politics. While the event promotes broad participation, the **selection of sites remains centrally orchestrated**, often shaped by strategic partnerships, institutional endorsements, or donor interests. This raises important questions about **whose heritage is legitimized**, and how power circulates in the public production of civic rituals.

Despite these tensions, the **affective impact** of the event is significant. Visitors frequently describe the experience using emotionally charged language—“magical,” “unexpected,” “moving.” Standing inside an otherwise inaccessible space, often guided by a local student, fosters a sense of connection to both place and history. These moments generate what Papacharissi (2015) terms “**affective publics**”: ephemeral communities formed around shared emotional experiences and mediated acts of collective meaning-making.

The annual recurrence of the Spring Days reinforces this affective dimension. The event typically takes place during the same March weekend, generating a sense of **anticipation and ritual regularity**. Families, couples, and students plan around it, sometimes crossing regional borders to attend specific sites. The symbolic alignment with the arrival of spring strengthens the emotional resonance: heritage becomes a seasonal practice of **renewal, discovery, and national re-connection**.

Moreover, the Spring Days are increasingly **hybrid events**, extending into digital space. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook amplify participation, with thousands of user-generated images and videos circulating in real time. In 2025, hashtags such as **#GiornateFAI** and **#FAIprimavera** reached over **2 million interactions**, offering a **crowdsourced visual archive** of the event. These digital traces not only extend the temporal and geographic boundaries of participation but also contribute to the **symbolic construction of contemporary heritage**, shaped by emotion, visibility, and grassroots documentation.

These dynamics of participation are captured quantitatively in Figure 6, which traces the trajectory of three key participation metrics—total volunteers, event visitors, and the number of Apprentice Guides—from 1993 to 2025. It shows sustained growth up to 2019, a clear dip during the pandemic in 2020, and a gradual recovery in subsequent years, demonstrating both resilience and the continued civic value of the initiative.

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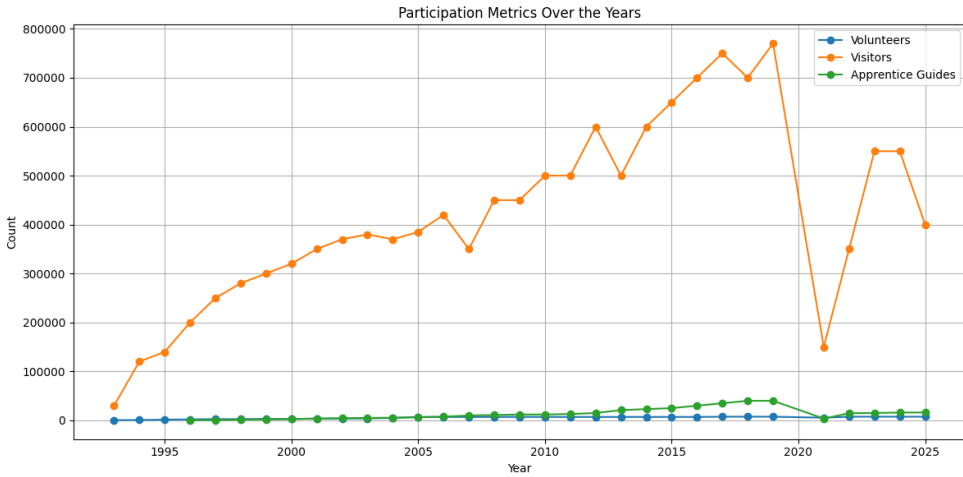


Figure 6. Long-Term Participation Trends in FAI Spring Days (1993–2025).

Source: Authors' elaboration based on FAI annual reports.

In sum, the 2025 edition of the *Giornate FAI di Primavera* exemplifies how **heritage practices can function as civic rituals**, weaving together participation, pedagogy, and place-based emotion. While the event is not immune to contradictions—particularly concerning inclusivity and institutional control—it enables a **temporary reimagining** of the relationship between the public and cultural space. Far from being mere spectacles of access, the Spring Days represent occasions of **co-creation and national imagination**, in which heritage is not only preserved but actively performed, felt, and shared.

Conclusion

The FAI Spring Days 2025 offer a compelling case study of how heritage is increasingly co-produced, performed, and circulated within a hybrid ecology of participation. This study has shown that digital platforms—especially through the use of curated hashtags—function not merely as channels of communication but as affective infrastructures that shape how the public engages with cultural heritage. The prevalence of positive sentiment, the predominance of visual content and the emergence of recurring figures such as the *Apprendisti Ciceroni* point to a digitally mediated form of civic pride and aesthetic witnessing.

By mobilizing affect, users actively participated in the construction of a shared heritage narrative, reinforcing a sense of belonging that transcended physical presence. In this context, social media posts should not be viewed as peripheral or secondary representations of the event, but rather as integral components of the heritage experience itself. The digital trace becomes part of the ritual, not its aftermath.

Furthermore, this affective engagement reveals the evolving nature of public participation in heritage practices. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) allow individuals not only to consume heritage, but to perform it—to curate, frame and emotionally invest in it. These practices signal a shift from passive observation to active co-authorship, where publics shape and reshape what counts as cultural value in real time.

Future research might deepen this analysis by comparing multiple heritage events, exploring platform-specific dynamics, or integrating more nuanced metrics of affective engagement. What remains clear is that digital participation is not an accessory to heritage, but one of its contemporary modalities. As cultural rituals migrate online, they invite new publics, new forms of presence, and new grammars of collective memory.

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