

# HERITAGE AND OUR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

research, practice, policy and impact



Heritage and Our Sustainable Future  
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*This session addressed a number of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).*

## INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE CITIES

**Brief Report from the UK National Commission for UNESCO and PRAXIS at the University of Leeds. Session held on Friday 26th February, 2021.**

The session focused on current challenges in historic urban environments, including rapid processes of urban development, gentrification, migration and exclusionary practices. These have caused significant physical, economic, environmental and social impacts. The session explored how to rethink and transform current approaches to urban heritage interpretation, conservation and management in more creative, integrated and participatory ways. Particular attention was paid to issues of equality, inclusion and social justice in relation to the plurality of interests in urban environments and to the construction and communication of heritage meanings and values.

### KEY INSIGHTS

**ONE. Heritage comprises a plurality of narratives and values, all of which need to be recognised in interpretation, conservation and management.**

There is often a conflicting tension between dominant and official heritage narratives, including (but not limited to) the definition of Outstanding Universal Value for World Heritage sites, and those of minority voices and communities, which are sometimes under-represented, ignored or even silenced.

**TWO. The SDGs framework does not recognise the dynamic elements and diversity of meanings of heritage, which are both critical for inclusion and sustainability.**

SDG 11.4, the only one explicitly focusing on heritage, does not fully embrace the complexity involved in heritage recognition and representation by different communities, groups and individuals. The lack of an appropriate policy framework for urban heritage conservation and management may lead to exclusionary practices and marginalisation.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

**ONE. Heritage comprises a plurality of narratives and values, all of which need to be recognised in interpretation, conservation and management.**

- **Conduct research and learn from practical experience to increase our understanding of plural heritage narratives and values in urban environments** and to inform policymaking on heritage conservation, management and communication.
- **Engage constructively with diverse communities, groups and individuals** through art-based and creative methodologies to share stories and memories associated with their urban heritage and foster place attachment and community connection.
- **Co-produce heritage narratives, including UNESCO nominations, with both local communities and authorities** to provide more inclusive heritage interpretations and support the transmission of under-represented and non-official stories.
- **Communicate multiple heritage narratives and values through accessible design-led methods and creative products** preferably co-produced with local residents and located in different urban settings.
- **Take advantage of the potential of social media and digital technologies** to stimulate dialogue and the dissemination of under-represented and marginalised heritage narratives.
- **Foster partnerships between universities, local authorities, schools and cultural institutions** to stimulate intergenerational and multicultural dialogue, to exchange different views on urban heritage matters and to increase local heritage awareness.

**TWO. The SDGs framework does not recognise the dynamic elements and diversity of meanings of heritage, which are both critical for inclusion and sustainability.**

- **Align international frameworks with local needs** by balancing the implementation of top-down policies and bottom-up approaches to heritage.
- **Conduct research to increase knowledge on urban heritage dynamics** and inform the development of more inclusive and sustainable heritage and urban planning policies.
- **Promote the development of inclusive and dynamic platforms to foster citizens' and stakeholders' active engagement as well as intergenerational exchange on heritage matters**, for example urban observatories, laboratories and museums.
- **Implement participatory heritage projects to reduce the distance between policymakers and local citizens**, and support the development of a shared heritage and urban agenda.
- **Develop cultural strategies, policies and networks embracing the challenge of equality, inclusion and diversity in urban environments through heritage and creativity**, for example the UNESCO Creative Cities and European Capitals of Culture Networks or the World Heritage Cities Programme.
- **Support place-making, urban liveliness and vibrancy in all urban neighbourhoods** and not only in the most popular and conventional heritage sites.



## KEY ISSUES

1. Cities are unique dynamic environments, constantly evolving over time. The recognition and representation of their urban heritage is the result of a process of constant reconstruction of meanings and values by a plurality of communities, groups and individuals.
2. Local communities are often excluded from the of official heritage narratives, which are commonly defined by international, national and local authorities. This exclusionary process reinforces a separation between citizens and decision-makers in heritage conservation and management.
3. Comprehensive, inclusive and meaningful engagement of communities in urban heritage management is challenging. Participants in heritage projects are not always representatives of all the diverse spectrum of local residents.
4. Some urban neighbourhoods and heritage sites are not well interpreted to national and international tourists, nor to local residents. As a consequence tourists tend to visit the most conventionally popular heritage sites, marginalising other urban areas and their associated communities.
5. Much heritage-related work is project-based, which promotes localised interventions with a short-term focus and hinders continuity of approach.

## KEY CHALLENGES

1. URBAN DEVELOPMENT
2. GENTRIFICATION AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT
3. HERITAGE MISREPRESENTATION
4. EXCLUSION AND MARGINALISATION
5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY
6. INTERGENERATIONAL PARTICIPATION

# CASE STUDIES

## PLURAL HERITAGES OF ISTANBUL

The challenge we faced was how to ‘see past’ the official heritage valorisation of a major urban World Heritage site – the ancient Land Walls of Istanbul, often connected to the Ottoman Conquest of Constantinople – to engage with place heritages that are meaningful to local communities. Senses of place attachment, belonging and community are embedded in less spectacular and momentous heritages, characterised by everyday and minor relations between the physicality of place, people, histories and practices overlooked or even suppressed by official heritage practice. Through the project [‘Plural Heritages of Istanbul’](#), we engaged local communities to produce different interpretations, using walking interviews to co-produce short films about the plural, interacting heritages of the neighbourhoods of the Land Walls. This gave communities agency to valorise their own relationships to heritage and historic place. It provided people with a sense of recognition and value missing from official practice, which focuses on educating inhabitants about the authorised heritage value of the historic fabric. Through this, we opened ways to rethink heritage itself, questioning what we take to be the valuable past, and how it can be represented. The project mobilised senses of pride of place and community connection, opening new pathways for official practice in engaging urban heritage communities.



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## POPULAR PERFORMANCE FOR NEW URBAN AUDIENCE – RECONNECTING M50 CREATIVE CLUSTER WITH SHANGHAI ALL-FEMALE YUE OPERA

Post-industrial economic development has often seen the reuse of abandoned industrial sites to create contemporary art clusters which revitalise cities and develop the local creative economy. One such example is a former Shanghai textile factory now internationally known as the M50 contemporary arts cluster. Today’s visitors to M50 enjoy the old factory buildings housing contemporary art workshops, galleries, coffee bars, restaurants and boutique shops. However, one finds little reference to China’s first female working class and no reference to their once cultural identity, Shanghai Yue Opera. The [Newton-funded research project](#) ‘Creative Economy in China: Popular Performances for New Urban Audiences, Reconnecting the M50 Creative Industry with Shanghai All-Female Yue Opera’ (2018-2021) aims to reconnect the history of the Chinese textile factory female workers, and their art form Shanghai all-female Yue opera, with today’s M50 and its visitors, whilst exploring development of the creative economy in China. One of the main outputs of this research project is a site-specific performance called Ghost in M50 Host, which is to be produced jointly by the National Digital Performing Arts Lab, the Shanghai Theatre Academy and the School of Performance and Cultural Industries of the University of Leeds.

## LEICESTER: WHERE ARE WE?

Effective planning for a city as distinctive and diverse as Leicester cannot be considered as a case study – it is rather an ongoing challenge that needs to be embedded in the day-to-day work of a local administration in a meaningful and inclusive way. Establishing ‘Where are we?’ on this journey requires open conversations. This is particularly important when national political concerns over statues, heritage and history raise divisive and sensitive questions around identity. Leicester’s factories used to ‘shoe and clothe the world’ – and the changing dynamic of global manufacturing has led to a rich tapestry of communities and culture in the city. The planning policies of Leicester’s City Council have sought to respond to changing dynamics and economic circumstances. Just as importantly, promoting and celebrating the diverse stories of our built heritage to all our communities has been addressed through many lenses: Books (e.g. *The Quality of Leicester #1* and *#2*), websites (e.g. [Home - Story of Leicester](#)), signage, events, as well as cultural programmes such as that currently underway in [Leicester’s High Street Heritage Action Zone](#). The success of our work requires: a representative workforce; activism; effective ongoing engagement. The Council will continue to strive for energetic inclusion!





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