



Cultural Base

Social Platform
on Cultural Heritage
and European Identities

**Report on the
Workshop *Voices of
Dissent: how to
listen to heritage,*
University of Sussex,
17th November 2016**

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Summary Report

This first workshop of the CulturalBase Cultural Memory working group tackled the issue of dissent in heritage. It built on earlier work from the Major Stakeholder Conference, *Co-Creating Agendas for Culture in Europe. Memory, Inclusion, Creativity*, which brought together 85 academics, practitioners and policy-makers in May 2016.

During that conference, and more generally within our work for the CulturalBase social platform, we noted a recurrent aspect of heritage that emerged during research on the project. Dissent over what is heritage, over how it is represented and by whom encapsulates a range of concerns of people working in the Cultural Memory axis about how heritage is being made in the present, and the impact it can have – negative and positive – on communities and society at large. By bringing together academics and practitioners to explore how voices of dissent are given voice or silenced in heritage the workshop was envisaged as a step towards helping develop a more ethical and empathetic heritage sector.

The day was informally structured with the primary purpose of testing whether there was further potential in the concept of *Voices of Dissent*; in other words, whether exploring dissent in heritage was both useful and practicable.

With regard to the former it was soon clear that this was a live topic: all of the participants presented their work, which covered diverse aspects of dissent in heritage. From nationalist symbols, gentrification and exclusion, artistic interventions on colonial monuments, attempting to recover and reinterpret socialist architecture, working with minority communities on the commemorations of the bicentenary of the abolition of slavery, peacebuilding through art and heritage, using archives to engage South Asian minorities with contentious First World War history, establishing a human rights museum, the range of expertise was very broad.



In order to explore the practicalities of working with dissent in heritage, things were more complicated. The workshop built on the answers participants had submitted to pre-workshop questions about their concerns, priorities and best practices (see Appendices pp.7-9). A fruitful afternoon was spent identifying and then exploring three key areas of dissent in heritage: discourse, governance, and collaboration. Therefore three break-out groups explored: (1) how heritage is being discussed (heritage discourses); (2) governance and decision-making (how and why heritage is being governed); and (3) collaboration among stakeholders. All agreed that practical steps could be taken, but that intensive work was needed, and that the three areas were also interlinked.

It is hoped that this exploration of the shared interests of academics and practitioners may help to form an expert network that can speak usefully to both practitioners, policy-makers and others in the international heritage community. Kalliopi suggested we might join/ally with the UK-based *Diversity Heritage Group* that she is an active part of.

A number of those attending the workshop straddle the academic/practitioner boundary in their own work, and some time was spent discussing what meaningful action, activism and engagement looks like. One idea that may form an initial stepping-stone to future work together is that of creating 'safe spaces' for dissent. This is not the same as the contentious 'safe spaces' policies in US and UK universities, rather it is finding ways to help dissent be expressed and represented creatively.

A first step is being taken in December when Jasper and Iqbal will meet with Liz Ellis (Policy Advisor Communities and Diversity, Participation and Learning Team), and Lucy Footer (First World War and Anniversaries Advisor) of the UK's major heritage funding body, the Heritage Lottery Fund. The group hope to have similar meetings with equivalent figures in other European countries and to find ways to work collectively.



List of Participants

Ngaire Blankenberg, Lord Cultural Resources, Canada / Spain

Bahar Aykan, Marmara University, Turkey

Jasper Chalcraft, University of Sussex, UK

Ajay Chhabra, Nutkhut, UK [substituted by Matt Weyland]

Gerard Delanty, University of Sussex, UK

Lars Ebert, European League of Institutes of Arts, Netherlands

Kalliopi Fouseki, Institute of Sustainable Heritage, University College London, UK

Iqbal Hussein, The National Archives, UK

Péter Inkei, Budapest Cultural Observatory, Hungary

Robbert Jacobs, University of Antwerp, Belgium

Charlotte Onslow, International Alert, UK

Dominique Poulot, Université de Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, France

Isidora Stanković, Université de Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, France

Dea Vidović, Kulturanova, Croatia

Rabia Nusrat, International Alert, UK

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Appendices

Original Workshop Call

Background

Heritage foregrounds some voices and forecloses others. Past lives obscure present realities, contemporary reimaginings of the past silence uncomfortable aspects of those pasts. Dissent and contestation over heritage is also a feature of contemporary heritage-making processes. These voices can be heard most loudly in debates around gentrification and repatriation of cultural objects and human remains. But dissent takes many forms, and those who interpret the past for public consumption and/or edification develop strategies to either mainstream such dissent, deal with it in productive ways, or silence it. If there is one constant in heritage, it is that people will continue to question and contest aspects of it, from 'ownership' to the right to represent it. These aspects are of increasing significance given the application of 'human rights' to heritage, as evidenced in the Council of Europe's 2005 Faro Convention, and the 2015 Namur Declaration. Finding innovative ways to work with dissenting voices is a crucial strategy to support cultural pluralism in an era of increasingly factionalised identity politics.

Objectives

How can dissent be discovered, listened to and understood? This Workshop brings together heritage practitioners and academics to explore how voices of dissent are given voice or silenced in heritage. How do practitioners handle multiple voices and narratives in their heritage work? How can academics support and understand these, and how can policy makers handle the messiness of social realities and multiple claims over the past?

It is hoped that this exploration of the shared interests of academics and practitioners may help to form an expert network that can speak usefully to policy-makers and others in the international heritage community. The workshop will also explore what meaningful action, activism and advice to other practitioners might look like. No prior assumptions about what might work are being made, the workshop wants to find out what works, where and why.

Participants

This one day workshop is being organised by Jasper Chalcraft and Gerard Delanty from the Department of Sociology, University of Sussex, both members of the CulturalBase project on European Identities and Cultural Heritage. Participants will include members of the CulturalBase project's 'Cultural Memory Working Group', as well as other practitioners and policy makers. By bringing them together the workshop hopes to contribute to helping develop a more ethical and empathetic heritage sector.

Format

This is an informal workshop, structured around a laboratory model aiming to draw on collective experience and to test various ideas. Participants will be expected to commit to some pre-workshop readings, and to very briefly present their own work and/or ideas about Voices of Dissent. The majority of the day will involve active participation in collective work.



Conference Programme

In a nutshell: Contemporary reimaginings of the past often silence aspects of those pasts. In an era of increasingly factionalised identity politics, can we find innovative ways to work with dissenting voices to support cultural pluralism?

How:

- can dissent be discovered, listened to, understood and represented?
- are voices of dissent used or silenced in heritage-making?
- do practitioners handle multiple voices in their heritage work?
- can academics support and understand these multiple narratives?
- should policies handle multiple claims over the past?
- could 'heritage rights' change heritage-making?
- should we take this forward?

SCHEDULE

Welcome & Introduction
Presentations of individual work

- *Coffee 11:00 to 11:15* -

Describing and delineating the problem
Tools analysis: what do people use?
What is 'listening'? Consultation; sustained collaboration; etc.?
Three groups to work on identified key issues

- *Lunch 13:00 to 13:40* -

Prototyping: Tools; Methods; Policy; Outreach; etc.

- *Coffee 14:45 to 15:00* -

Group Presentations
Re-Universalising the problems
Discussion
Ways Forward



Participants' issues and concerns before the workshop

<p>1. Issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Top-down processes.- Access to shapers of platforms for heritage: who informs how heritage is framed in museums?- Postcolonial European societies need to address colonial histories (e.g. col. wars).- Dissent between heritage experts vs. public (e.g. latter as 'guardians' of Parthenon Marbles).- Lack of marginalised groups in community involvement programmes of museums.- Colonial monuments, and how to deal with them: removal, recontextualisation, linking to neocolonialism?- Dominant narrative of patriotism of Indian soliders fighting during First World War shuts out dissenting alternatives: linked to discomfort many migrants (& their children) feel about expressing dissenting views.- Misappropriation of heritage for ethnogenesis, and difficulty of ensuring fairness (e.g. populism in the 60th anniversary of Hungarian revolution).- Effects of international canonisation of heritage?- Identity is integral to conflicts, and minority identity issues are manipulated, with heritage lost in the process.- Ordinary citizens don't realise that their memories/experiences/practices are valuable; the 'authorised heritage discourse' (Smith) dominates.- Too few local projects and lack of collaboration between stakeholders.- Destruction and marginalisation of socialist-era buildings.- Preservation is still important: making physical connections between people and place helps create pride.
<p>2. Constraints in practice and policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- State control of minority heritage.- Heritage-identity incommensurabilities: e.g. intangible heritage listing as appropriation (Semah).- Destruction of heritage & displacement of communities.- Lack of clarity/transparency in decision making.- Lack of coordination for advocacy.- Heritage sector is not creative and is self-protective (e.g. little space for organisations favouring experiment over conservation).- Lack of time: working with communities is very time-consuming.- Underlying institutional ideology & anxiety over risks of community participation.- No attention to colonial history in schools.- Inaccessible academic knowledge.- Getting permission for urban <i>interventions</i> is complicated.



<p>[2. Contd.]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More work needed to explore records/archives and support those working on the 'radical diaspora'. - Legal constraints like the UK civil service code of conduct which enforce political impartiality. - In (post)conflict scenarios donors give little attention to protecting intangible heritage of minorities. Interventions focus on the tangible. - Lack of collaboration between stakeholders. - Projects are often poorly resourced and depend on enthusiastic individuals. - Lack of resources and capacities lead to neglect. - Pressures of privatisation; e.g. private investors often means loss of professional standards and manipulation of rules. - Finance a real issue for grassroots community groups (dependence on volunteers). - Need to convince local authorities of their own heritage: they simply will not prioritise or fund it without constant work and campaigning by grassroots volunteers. - For grassroots activists like B&H Black History only positive stories work in the constrained funding environment and opportunities for representation.
<p>3. Successful kinds of heritage-making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diverse platforms challenge state monopoly (esp. with human rights focus). - Some museums and cities through careful planning. - Van Abbe Museum, Imagine IC Amsterdam, Castrum Peregrini. - Hackney Museum. - 2007 Docklands Museum & the <i>London, Sugar & Slavery</i> exhibition. - Guided tours of urban colonial heritage by collective 'Mémoire Coloniale'. - Art festivals like 'Congolisation' (focus on contribution of diaspora to Belgium). - Pianofabriek, KVS, La Loge, Bozar have good theatre, exhibitions and film addressing colonialism. - Scholars like Santanu Das and Gajendra Singh who refuse to sanitise the story. - BeoPatrimonium (and possibly other participatory mapping projects). - MOTEL TRIGOR (civic campaign). - Inappropriate Monuments (regional platform revalorising anti-fascist heritage). - Vitić pleše (community art project restoring shared spaces of building in Zagreb) - Oral histories remain a powerful form of transmission.
<p>4. Networks?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Crucial in some cases (local voices to international audiences; but also international NGO collaborations). - Possibly better to strengthen/expand existing networks. - In favour of organised solidarity and advocacy but sceptical (because of the dependency on funding streams). - Diversity Heritage Group, works well as based in one country.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- A Facebook group on 'dissenting heritages' could be very effective.- Useful for sounding off and thinking through tactics.- Interdisciplinary partnerships should help innovation.- A network that brought together different communities would be good, but it would first need to identify their exact needs.- Yes, but the form is important (structure, tactics & strategies).- Vital for grassroots organisations.
5. Other key issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ineffectiveness of international heritage and human rights instruments- How to ensure concrete grassroots participation?- How to influence news media?- Creative uses of archive material to engage diverse audiences (e.g. collaboration between National Archives and Tamasha Theatre).- Engaging larger audience for issues of representation.- How to make academic research accessible without losing depth.- What circumstances help researchers, activists and artists collaborate?- How non-European countries could be more involved.- Grassroots organisations want to do more archive research.

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