



Shared Cultural Heritage Programme 2021-2024: Report on the Brainstorming Session 2-5 June 2020

In the first week of June, an online brainstorming session took place to provide input for the Shared Cultural Heritage Programme of the Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE) for the policy period 2021-2024. The session was organized by the RCE and facilitated by the ErfgoedAcademie. Colleagues from current and future partner countries were invited to log on to an online forum to share their insights and remarks in four specific discussion threads: Societal Challenges, Opportunities, Risks and Covid-19.



An overview of all topics put forward during the brainstorming session can be found in the appendix. Below you will find brief summaries of the input for each discussion thread.

Societal Challenges

The Shared Cultural Heritage Programme follows from the International Cultural Policy Framework set out by two government departments in the Netherlands: the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to this policy framework, the starting point for international heritage collaboration should be its contribution to solutions for the contemporary challenges that face society. In light of this, participants were asked to identify the societal challenges they found most relevant and urgent, and for which international collaboration would have added value.

There was a lively discussion within this thread. Most contributors agreed that heritage conservation and societal problems are interconnected. Thoughts were shared about the positioning of heritage organizations, including those representing government, in relation to the political-historical dimension. This led to a further exploration of multilateral forms of international collaboration. Projects such as [Sharing Stories on Contested Histories](#) have proven that multilateral exchange transcends national and bilateral issues, broadens the dialogue and can facilitate multiperspectivity. It was brought forward that an important condition for international heritage cooperation is that it should also focus on sustainability and relevance for the local communities in the partner countries. This prompted the question of how to involve local communities and how to extend initiatives to the rural and provincial areas of partner countries, as many current partners are located in capital cities and urban centres.

Opportunities

The second topic focused on the opportunities for international heritage collaboration in relation to the societal issues identified in the first discussion thread and how to maximize such opportunities.

One clear opportunity identified during the discussion was the connection between heritage and the Sustainable Development Goals. Heritage contributes to the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development, while these dimensions, in turn, contribute to a sustainable future for cultural heritage. Also, it was suggested that establishing an international heritage agenda at national level could help improve the effectiveness of international heritage collaboration. The added value of working together on shared heritage was mentioned, with a view to developing a deeper understanding and appreciation of connections between countries and cultures and to learning from each other in order to meet the challenges that lie ahead. It was also posited that all parties involved in international collaboration should provide resource persons, as opposed to a set-up in which professionals from one country share their own expertise with professionals from the other country. Other important aspects included tapping into existing international frameworks for heritage collaboration and working towards interdisciplinary networks. A further suggestion was to create low-key structures for international exchange, such as an expert forum to field questions from professionals in partner countries.

Potential Risks

While the Shared Cultural Heritage Programme is founded on the principle that collaborating on shared heritage offers opportunities to learn from each other, there may also be risks and challenges associated with this approach. In this thread, the contributors' views on such risks and challenges were expressed and explored.

In the course of this discussion, concerns were raised about the principle of reciprocity. Even though reciprocity and mutual knowledge exchange are at the core of the Shared Cultural Heritage Programme, work still needs to be done in order to create more equal partnerships and these cannot be guaranteed by a demand-driven approach alone. One risk mentioned was the danger of taking on a political role as a heritage organization. The importance of involving the right stakeholders from the start and getting them in sync was emphasized. Another risk identified in the discussion concerned the difficulties encountered in measuring or quantifying the success of international heritage projects. This could lead to a lack of support at local government level for contribution to Shared Cultural Heritage projects, as officials are not always convinced of the added value of this type of heritage collaboration for their local communities.

COVID-19

The sudden global outbreak of the coronavirus and the unprecedented measures taken to mitigate its impact have implications for the heritage sector worldwide, as well as for the opportunities available for international cooperation. This discussion thread focused on ways in which heritage organizations across the world can continue to work together in the new reality.

One consequence of the current situation is that institutes have transitioned their work and network activities to online platforms and social media. Many participants agreed that this represents an opportunity for international heritage cooperation to further develop online resources to maintain connections within the Shared Cultural Heritage network and to facilitate easy access to best practices and multilateral exchange of expertise. This would make collaboration not only easier but also more ecologically responsible. The need to invest in training and facilities to boost the quality of online exchange was also highlighted. Another important issue raised in this discussion group was that heritage sites and collections should not be as reliant on mass tourism as they are at present: as the current lockdowns clearly demonstrate, overreliance on the tourist sector can prove to be catastrophic.

Conclusion

The RCE's Shared Cultural Heritage team looks back on a highly productive and rewarding brainstorming session and would like to thank all the participants for their valuable contributions and the ErfgoedAcademie for facilitating the intensive online communication that took place. During the brainstorming session, 80 invitees from 11 different countries joined the online platform, with 40 of them participating actively in the discussions. The results of this round of brainstorming and of the discussions due to be held later this month, in the form of live video exchanges with small groups, will be taken into consideration as the Cultural Heritage Agency draws up its Shared Cultural Heritage Programme Policy Plan 2021-2024. [Follow our newsletter](#) to keep abreast of the latest developments.

APPENDIX

Overview of input

Brainstorming Session Shared Cultural Heritage Programme 2021-2024, 2-5 June 2020 Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands

1. Societal challenges

- Social justice
- Social inclusion
- Civil rights: equal opportunities and treatment of people regardless of ethnicity, gender, sexuality etc.
- Multiperspectivity
- Contemporary migration (including what the media refer to as the 'refugee crisis')
- Decolonization
- Contested heritage
- Deeper understanding of shared history
- Tendency towards nationalism
- Adaptive re-use of built heritage (including colonial & industrial heritage)
- Revitalization of depopulated areas
- Gentrification of historical inner cities
- Climate change
- Participation
- Strengthening civil society

2. Opportunities

- Connecting heritage collaboration with SDGs
- Shared heritage as a means to connect the past with the present and future
- Shared heritage as a means to build societies and develop an appreciation of connections between countries and cultures
- Better understanding of the current meanings of colonial heritage in postcolonial countries
- Multilateral collaboration
- Learning from other countries
- Working with foreign experts as resource persons (for training & reflection)
- Dialogue beyond sharing best practices and lessons learned
- Tapping into and strengthening existing international frameworks for heritage collaboration
- Establishing networks that focus on specific types of heritage or societal challenges for which international heritage collaboration could have added value
- Strong global thematic agenda
- International heritage agenda at national level
- Increasing regional collaborations instead of focusing on central government
- Exploring and learning from each other's paradigms of cultural heritage
- Moving away from (mass) tourism as a heritage conservation strategy
- Collaboration through co-creation
- Finding ways to express the stories and memories embodied in tangible heritage
- Connecting with maritime landscapes
- Studying canal systems in relation to climate change and water management
- Exchanging perspectives on redevelopment of heritage and possible conservation constraints
- Perception of war history
- Multidisciplinary networks of heritage specialists
- Partnering with maritime museums

- Connecting maritime paradigms with those of decolonization and contested histories
- Expert networks or expert forums to field questions about specific topics from professionals in partner countries
- Expanding collaboration strategies to include private (and corporate) museums
- Narratives connected to industrial heritage
- Creating and promoting heritage studies, especially in partner countries with a lack of qualified professionals (from BA to PhD level) in the heritage/archaeological sector

3. Risks

- Expectation management: which needs can be met and which cannot
- Taking on a political role as a heritage organisation
- Not involving the right stakeholders from the very start
- Involving many different stakeholders who are not in sync
- Starting a project without enough commitment from local stakeholders
- Narrow perception of what heritage is and is supposed to achieve
- Not collaborating as equal partners
- Too much teaching/training instead of mutual learning and development
- Projects that are driven too much by Dutch stakeholders
- Focusing on the object/site without addressing its historical context
- Encountering problems due to cultural differences
- Defining 'shared' in terms of property
- Fixating on co-financing instead of looking at other forms of contribution
- Inability to explain the contribution of culture within the wider context of national foreign policies and overarching international objectives
- Lack of collaboration with regional organizations
- Lack of support for culture by ministries of foreign affairs
- Becoming bogged down in Dutch/Western terminologies/ways of working

4. COVID-19

- Making working practices in international heritage collaboration more environmentally sustainable
- Keeping people informed and involved by ensuring digital visibility
- Providing online and blended learning
- Online platforms for exchanging knowledge and best practices, and to bring people together
- Not forgetting those who are less digitally connected
- Creating digital experiences in addition to (not instead of) existing experiences
- Connecting digitally to increase diversity and inclusiveness among the participants
- Exploring new working methods
- Visitor programmes in digital format
- Crossovers with creative industries and digital design
- Focusing on the professionalization of online events and understanding the extra time and effort involved in organizing them
- Need for sustainable training in digital technology
- Need to incorporate technological developments in (day-to-day) future operations