Putting Intangible Heritage in its Place(s): Proposals for Policy and Practice

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ABSTRACT

The regrettable split between tangible and intangible heritage specialisations should be brought to an end. Just as many (tangible) places owe their importance to intangible values, so too many aspects of intangible heritage are grounded in specific places and cannot survive without them. Yet UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* shows little interest in places, and national and local conservation policies are generally ineffective at safeguarding the intangible values of places. There is a compelling need for policies that do so. To develop them, heritage experts will need to look beyond the kinds of cultural manifestations favoured by tourism and focus instead on ordinary, everyday places. Paying attention to the narratives expressed through people's customs, stories, and memories can give heritage professionals invaluable insights into the psychological bonds that people form with these places and that, with time, come to define their heritage values. Practitioners can adapt research methods from anthropology, sociology, geography, and environment-behaviour studies to analyse people's place-relationships and organise their apparently limitless subjectivity into coherent patterns on which effective public policies can be based. Implementing such policies will depend on certain organisational factors. Responsibility for tangible and intangible heritage must be brought together within the same agencies. And these agencies must be open not only to intangible heritage values but also to democratic participation in defining them.

UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* complements but also challenges the concepts laid out in its earlier *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, known as the *World Heritage Convention*. Whereas the older accord defines cultural heritage as *monuments, groups of buildings*, and *sites,* the newer one emphasises *oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe*, and *traditional craftsmanship.* The chasm that opens up between these two definitions of heritage invites practitioners to stay safely on one side or the other. Yet logic and experience tell us that important heritage values disappear into the voids left by such a fragmented approach. While practitioners under each convention have made tentative efforts to include some small portion of this in-between realm, there remains a need to cover the gap in some more comprehensive way. Can intangible heritage be safeguarded while the places essential to its survival are ignored? Can monuments and sites be protected while their intangible values are disregarded?

In this article I look into the space between the approaches represented by the two conventions. As I myself come from the building/site/monument side, I shall survey it from that perspective, starting with the work of ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites. Unlike the *World Heritage Convention, the Intangible Heritage Convention* assigns no specific responsibilities to ICOMOS, yet it has increased the pressure many ICOMOS members (along with others) feel to engage with intangible heritage and intangible heritage values. The formation in 2005 of an International Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage was one response to this pressure, yet intangible heritage was already a bigger part of ICOMOS's work than its stated focus on *monuments and sites* might suggest.[1] Cultural landscapes and historic urban landscapes had long been within ICOMOS's scope: both draw heavily on intangible values. Moreover, Criterion vi of the *World Heritage list* refers to sites *associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works….*—in short, with intangible values—and the *World Heritage Convention* makes ICOMOS responsible for evaluating nominations. Interest in intangible heritage became sharper in 1998, when the organisation decided to devote a symposium to intangible heritage: the result, in 2003, was *Place–Memory–Meaning: Preserving Intangible Values in Monuments and Sites.* A second conference, in 2008, focused on *Finding the Spirit of Place.* Many questions remain as to how ICOMOS (and ICOMOS practitioners) should treat intangible heritage, but at least the organisation's trajectory reflects a growing awareness that intangible values are an essential part of buildings, sites, and places, and therefore of its mission. It is in this context, of understanding and protecting places, that I want to situate the explorations into the intangible-tangible that follow.

Some guidelines and definitions

As a starting point, I should like to propose a couple of catchphrases or signposts for the journey. I draw the first —appropriately, I think—from the culinary realm, an inexhaustible source of heritage. It is:

Vodka – Not Whisky

I am a great admirer of whisky (or, in Ireland, whiskey). But vodka provides a more reliable guidepost for working with intangible heritage. Vodka is good for mixing; whisky is not. Serious whisky drinkers know that the best way to savour it is undiluted. Adding flavours to a good whisky is unthinkable. This is not true of vodka. Russians, who know their vodka well, habitually flavour it with all manner of things: coriander, lemon, blueberries, cranberries, red pepper, honey, garlic, ginger, apricots, and so forth. The result is a vodka which retains all of its own character yet is also infused with that of the other ingredient. Such an outcome is roughly what one should seek in conservation work: a mixed essence blending the physical qualities of places with their intangible values. Rather than emulating the whisky drinker by standing up for purity, then, practitioners should follow the vodka drinker by blending the flavours: tangible and intangible, monumental and quotidian, permanent and fleeting.

Let me stake out a second and more peremptory guidepost:

Lower Standards NOW!

Like motherhood, high standards are hard to oppose. But a misplaced reliance on them can become an obstacle to good work, and this is never more true than when they are applied to intangible heritage. Though one can certainly rate an opera performance (whether Italian or Chinese), how should one rate a community's

attachment to a particular place, its traditions, or its shared memories? The fact is, intangible values rarely fit into categories like 'excellent' or 'most important', and the attempt to squeeze them into such rigid boxes merely encourages one to become narrow-minded and censorious. Of course there is a place for high standards: in the honesty and diligence of our own work, for example. But as a yardstick for measuring intangible heritage values they are misplaced. High standards in this sense encourage us to exclude where we should include, to separate where we should blend. Instead of high standards, then, let us seek high relevance. Or high utility.

Low standards and vodka may seem like poor guides for a profession in need of direction, but I think they will serve us well. I should like to consider one more useful phrase. In English, one refers to intangible heritage. Spanish has the equivalent, *patrimonio intangible,* but it also gives us another option, *patrimonio inmaterial,* or non-material heritage. The difference is subtle. *Intangible* points to something we can't do with the heritage in question (touch it). *Inmaterial* seems instead to describe a property of the heritage itself. To me, it also conjures up the possibility that parallel universes, material and non-material, may exist within the same space and time. Although I see no need to change the accepted English usage, I do think it is helpful to add the Spanish alternative, *patrimonio inmaterial,* to our guideposts. In fact, it leads us directly to the first of the two questions I should like to consider, namely how these parallel universes of heritage values, the tangible and the intangible, make contact with each other.

The Council of Europe has proposed a definition of heritage that touches on this point. Cultural heritage, says the Council, is *a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time.*[2] One might call this the everything-but-the-kitchen-sink definition, in that it includes pretty much anything that anyone might find relevant. Its advantage is that it makes the tangible-intangible problem disappear. If we could sustain such a posture in practice it would save us a great deal of trouble. But we cannot always do so. In fact, the weakness of the Council's definition is that it is not very operational: it does not help heritage practitioners to get from day to day,

from one decision to the next and then to the one after that. For this, we need definitions somewhat closer to the real world of policies and programmes.

One useful approach, as I've already suggested, begins with the observation that tangible and intangible values meet in places. Though admittedly trite, this formulation establishes a useful connection between ICOMOS's strength—its depth of expertise with places—and the *Intangible Heritage Convention's* weakness—its failure to link the safeguarding of intangible heritage to the protection of places. Thus it begins to suggest a possible course of action. It says that ICOMOS can play an essential role in safeguarding intangible heritage, not by departing from its commitment to protecting places, but by devoting more attention to understanding and protecting the kinds of places that form its essential cradle, hearth, and habitat.

Another virtue of this simple formulation lies in its bureaucratic aptness. I use this term in a respectful sense to indicate the work that goes on (mainly in offices or bureaux) to frame heritage policies, make decisions, and implement directives. The people who do this work are not free agents but are both empowered and constrained by their agencies' laws, guidelines, and missions. If outside advocates or the public want heritage officials to do more to safeguard intangible heritage values, they must first consider whether the bureaucracy permits and requires such action: if not, their first task must be to call for a redesigned bureaucracy. Thus the conceptual problem of how tangible and intangible values meet in places leads to the practical problem of the bureaucracy: of the laws, norms, directives, and organisational charts that make safeguarding intangible place-values more than a mere wish or intention. The remainder of this article follows the same progression.

Linking intangible heritage to places: examples in practice

Despite its striking lack of interest in places, UNESCO's *Intangible Heritage Convention* has elicited some empirical answers to the problem of intangible-heritage-in-place. Indeed one of the first listings under the Masterpieces programme that preceded the *Convention* was of a world-famous place, the Place Jemaâ El Fna in Marrakesh, Morocco.[3] We may then

begin, very practically, by considering how intangible values are related to place in some nominations to the *Representative List. The Tango* was jointly nominated by Argentina and Uruguay. This combination of music, dance, poetry, and singing arose among the lower classes of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, the capital cities which face each other across the Rio de la Plata, and over time has become *one of the fundamental signs of the Rio de la Plata's identity.* At the regional scale, then, the tango demonstrates a historical and cultural connection between intangible heritage and place. At the scale of the site, it demonstrates a functional connection, for tango is practiced at particular places, especially the bars or cafes and dance halls where *milongas* (dance evenings) are organised. This is a strong connection, for without tango sites, tango cannot survive as a living practice. Quite appropriately, then, one of the measures proposed to safeguard it is a bi-city programme to promote these sites.

Another 2009 entry on the *Representative List* is *The Candombe and its socio-cultural space: a community practice. Candombe* is particularly associated with Montevideo's Afro-descendent community. Its central feature is the drum calls (*llamadas de tambores de candombe*) that are performed on Sundays and holidays by processions of drummers in the old part of the city, especially the neighbourhoods of Sur, Palermo, and

Cordón Norte. *Candombe,* then, is culturally connected both to a city and to specific neighbourhoods. And like the tango, it is functionally connected to specific sites, including traditional starting points and processional routes. An architect in Montevideo explained to me how the streets themselves contribute to and even become part of the *Candombe,* not through their visual qualities but through their acoustic resonance.[4] Sadly, Uruguay's efforts to safeguard the Candombe do not appear to include protecting its historic habitat.

A third inscription, from Mexico, is called *Places of memory and living traditions of the Otomí-Chichimecas people of Tolimán: the Peña de Bernal, guardian of a sacred territory.* The Otomí and Chichimeca are indigenous groups that dug in when the Spanish arrived and hung on, maintaining distinctive cultural traits (as well as severe poverty). Their culture finds intangible expression in foods, social customs, and patterns of community organisation, but it also takes tangible form in 260 small chapels, each maintained by a specific family group (Plate 1). The chapels express a distinctive blend of Catholic and indigenous religious practices, but it was their exquisite wall paintings that initially interested the architects in the state heritage ministry of Querétaro. They wanted to document and preserve the chapels but quickly realised that this could only be done in the context of the living culture which used and maintained them. So

Plate 1
One of the family chapels of Tolimán: 18th century wall paintings and contemporary stewards. Photo: author.

the architects worked with the Otomí and Chichimeca peoples to seek listing under the *Intangible Heritage Convention.*

The inscription covers a lot of ground, but the unifying theme is given by the word 'places' in the title. Thus the *nominated element* is defined as encompassing the *symbolic territory* of the Otomí-Chichimecas, including the chapels, the defining natural features of the region (Plate 2), annual processions, *chimales* (imposing temporary structures erected at various churches and shrines), and a ritual calendar focused on water, a precious element in this arid landscape. Here, intangible heritage is understood not as a cultural performance but as a set of practices and understandings that organise many aspects of the community's life and are rooted in relationships to place ranging from functional to symbolic, site-specific to regional. The inscription makes this clear, defining the symbolic territory as *a geographic space, a built-up cultural environment that has preserved its topographic and ecological features while being marked by human activity, not only with respect to material and tangible elements but also in the realm of the symbolic.* The physical places of Otomí-Chichimeca culture are not merely containers for intangible heritage but integral parts of a system of meaning that weaves the material and immaterial together. In a profound yet simple way, the tangible and intangible have come together in places.

On one level, the Tolimán inscription achieves something like the Council of Europe's formulation, erasing the line between tangible and intangible. It also recalls the definition of intangible heritage offered by Argentine scholar Ramón Gutiérrez.[5] Starting with fiestas, processions, and other popular manifestations, he moves to a broader conception of intangible heritage *as that which we receive from our elders through our family education and through the process of social integration which extends throughout our lives, including everything that we incorporate from day to day in the exercise of developing as human beings.* The practical significance of Gutiérrez's definition lies in its reminder that we cannot simply select the aspects of intangible heritage that strike us as most colourful or interesting: instead, each manifestation must be related to a larger cultural picture. That picture includes ideas about how spaces are used and understood. Here again, Gutiérrrez's vision is ample. He reminds us that the space of a fiesta or procession extends beyond the site itself, perhaps encompassing an entire city or region.

Gutiérrez's definition prompts us to ask whether conservation programmes that focus on and even isolate the most attractive and memorable productions of intangible heritage may be missing the point. If he is right, then instead of framing and exhibiting them like masterworks, intangible heritage programmes should

Plate 2
The Peña Bernal, one of the defining natural features of the Otomi-Chichimeca region. Photo: author.
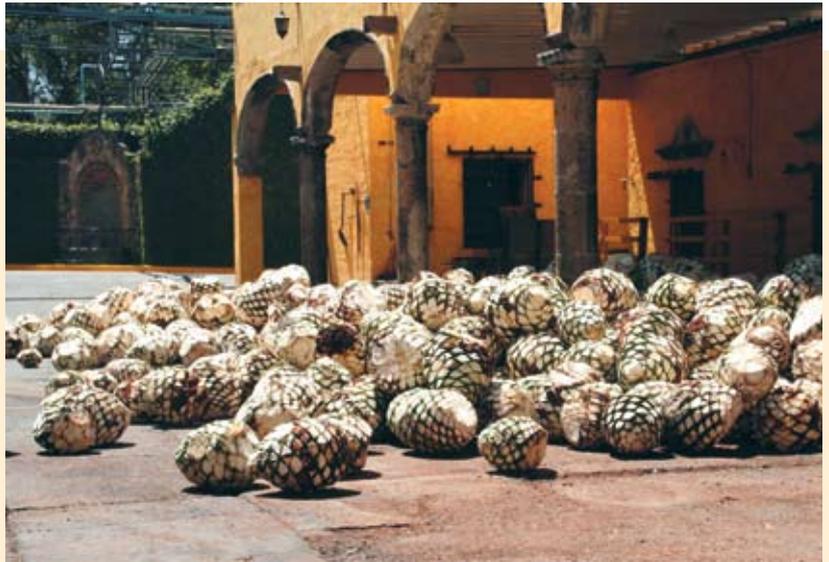
Plate 3
The piña is the fibrous, sugar-filled heart of the agave plant. A pile of them awaits the processing that will turn them into tequila at the historic headquarters of a leading producer. Most of the firm's production, however, takes place in a modern distillery. Photo: author.

pay more attention to the social, cultural, and (not least) spatial contexts of these phenomena. Instead of framing and exhibiting the masterworks of intangible heritage, Gutiérrez seems to advise, we should safeguard the ordinary, quotidian, nameless, unremarked, and unremarkable. Perhaps this is the real stuff of intangible heritage.

What happens when fascination with the exceptional clashes with the day-to-day realities of a place can be observed in Mexico's *paisaje agavero,* the region where tequila is produced. This portion of the state of Jalisco was inscribed on the *World Heritage List* in 2006, based partly on Criterion vi, association with *events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs…*—in other words, intangible values. The designation has had a strong impact on the region, on the one hand valorising the production of tequila and the cultivation of agave, on the other arguably helping to move the industry from local to foreign (and often multi-national corporate) ownership. Some critics also accuse new owners of replacing traditional artisanal methods with industrial production and international marketing. Certainly the latter is much in evidence. So are traditional methods, but sometimes more as a tourist spectacle than anything else (Plate 3): the bigger operations produce the bulk of their product in large factories which are not shown to visitors. As for the government, it has supported tourism while paying little

attention to the concerns of residents. And so the heritage conservation ledger shows both gains and losses. On the plus side, encouragement for a traditional product and a traditional aspect of the landscape. On the minus side, loss of local ownership and artisanal techniques.

There is something else too. Though the *World Heritage List* calls this the 'agave landscape', residents do not necessarily see it in this one-dimensional way. In 2010, the Director of Historic and Artistic Heritage for the state of Jalisco conducted workshops with over 1,400 children in towns and villages throughout the region.[6] She found that the agave, though important, did not dominate their sense of either the heritage or the landscape. Corn was important too, as were various religious festivals. These young residents, in short, saw their heritage as a blend of many elements, some marked as special (festivals), others as ordinary (tortillas). Like the residents of Tolimán (or like Gutiérrez), they saw their intangible heritage as a system encompassing food, landscape, and customs. The World Heritage listing, by contrast, emphasised just one aspect of that heritage, the one most striking to outsiders. We should, then, add over-simplification and distortion to the minus side of the ledger.

This outcome obviously can't be blamed on the *Intangible Heritage Convention,* since the region was

designated under the other convention. The two conventions in fact differ in the value they assign to the exceptional as opposed to the everyday. The older convention's standard of *Outstanding Universal Value* effectively requires promoters to show how listed elements stand out from their contexts—how they are exceptional. Advocates must therefore become connoisseurs, evaluating quality and seeking out masterpieces that rise above the rest—a habit already all too ingrained among architectural historians. With its "masterpieces" of oral and intangible heritage programmes, UNESCO initially seemed set on applying the same standard to intangible heritage. But the *Convention* which superseded the *masterpieces* programme set a different direction, replacing *masterpieces* with a 'representative list.' This shift from 'outstanding' to 'representative' is an important step forward and a good example of how lowering one's standards, if done right, can produce better outcomes.

By discouraging misplaced connoisseurship, the *Intangible Heritage Convention* removes one cause of over-simplification, but plenty of others remain, including the pressure of disciplinary specialisation and the administrative imperative to sort and catalogue things into heritage lists. Mass tourism is another. The tourism industry cannot sell 'one-of-the-regions-where-agave-is-grown-but-so-are-other-things.' It *can* sell 'The Agave Region.' It can sell 'tequila.' In the United States, it can sell a region covering no less than thirty-seven counties in

the state of Iowa as the 'Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area,' complete with the syrupy touristic slogan, *Come Touch the Heart of America*.[7] The tourism industry does not care whether residents reject such sloganeering as an over-simplified picture of their heritage, because tourism is for outsiders: that is the point. So tourism-driven heritage conservation will generally simplify intangible heritage, over-emphasising the unusual and exportable at the expense of the ordinary and domestic.

Because the goal of conservation is to safeguard intangible heritage, not the tourism industry, practitioners need to stay focused on the ordinary. Of course there are traditional art forms in which excellence is relevant and appreciated, but there are many more manifestations of intangible heritage that are not art forms in this sense but rather people's habitual interactions with each other and their environments. Before we can write good laws and organise effective bureaucracies to protect intangible heritage, then, we need to understand what makes places meaningful to their inhabitants or users. As this is basically a problem of social organisation, psychology, and geography that lies largely outside the expertise of the conservation professions, we will need help from sociologists, psychiatrists, and geographers, as well as anthropologists, demographers, journalists, and, some might add, novelists and poets.

Plate 4
De Luca's Restaurant in Pittsburgh on a Sunday morning. Photo: author.

Learning from other disciplines

As a matter of fact, anthropologists and sociologists have already given us some excellent tools. From sociologist Ray Oldenburg comes the idea of 'third places'.[8] These are places that are not home and are not work; they are 'third places' where people go to buy a book, get a haircut, drink coffee or beer, or do some other useful thing, and also congregate with others. Often places where local news gets exchanged, they become focal points for groups of people who aren't necessarily close friends but become something more than strangers. Most communities have such places. A record shop in the Bronx called Casa Amadeo is an example: several generations of musicians and listeners have gone there not just to buy recordings but to exchange information about salsa and Latin jazz. De Luca's Restaurant in Pittsburgh may be another, at least judging by the number of people who crowd into its booths on a Sunday morning (Plate 4). Researchers have documented the important role played by small Asian markets in Los Angeles within the Filipino American community, not merely as sources of culturally appropriate foods but also as places to exchange news:[9] in Oldenburg's terms, these would be 'third places'.

The concept of 'third places' meshes well with conservation practice and should be attractive to anyone concerned with the heritage values of places. Without calling into question what they are already doing, it gives them another tool to work with, another measuring stick by which to assess heritage value. It would be relatively easy to integrate 'third places' into current assessment practices: this should be much more widely done.

Environmental psychiatry and environment-behaviour studies have brought other insights into how people respond to their environment. One offshoot is the work of France's Centre for Research on Sonic Space and Urban Environment (CRESSON), based at the Graduate School of Architecture in Grenoble.[10] Through video and sound recordings, interviews, and maps, researchers connect the sensory or perceived environment with the ways in which people use and feel about spaces, capturing dimensions of day-to-day intangible heritage that evade standard heritage research techniques. BazarUrbain, a multidisciplinary collective that includes some of CRESSON's researchers, has put these practices to work in projects that explore the daily interactions between people and places in a variety of urban environments.[11] Place conservers can learn much from their work.

Anthropologists and ethnographers also have much to offer. In fact, most of the techniques normally used to find out how groups of people feel about things (and places) were invented by anthropologists: questionnaires, focus groups, unstructured and semi-structured interviews, participant and unobtrusive observation, and so forth.[12] Heritage conservers could put these techniques to good use in condition reports and resource inventories.

Some years ago, puzzling over this problem of ordinary places and the values people see in them, I developed my own rough-and-ready methodology, which I called 'Storyscape'.[13] 'Storyscape' is based on the simple idea that the stories people tell about places reveal which places matter to them and why, and that listening to such stories should be a central technique in the conservation of places. Stories are not just anecdotes or spoken narratives: traditions can be stories too. Thus some Otomí and Chichimeca people 'tell' the story of ascending the Peña de Bernal each year by ascending the Peña de Bernal each year. In New York, people retell their individual stories of meeting friends next to the great stone lions that guard the city's main library on Fifth Avenue by meeting friends next to the great stone lions (Plate 5). If re-enacting a story is one way to tell it, remembering it is another. Thus Denis Byrne explains how some Balinese remember the burning of villages of which all physical evidence has been obliterated—and about which it is forbidden to speak.[14] In Buenos Aires, mosaic tablets set into the sidewalks mark places where young people were abducted during the dictatorship (Plate 6). Created long after the fact, they remind people of stories that for many years could be told only by remembering. In short, one can tell a place-story by putting it in words, acting it out, or remembering it. The important point is that all are forms of narrative. And it is this narrative format, so different from the language of scientific analysis, that opens the window into how people form meaningful relationships with places, and conversely, how places become important to people.

People and places

One of the things a 'Storyscape' approach quickly reveals is how subjective people's relationships to places generally are. I may illustrate this with an incident that occurred many years before I developed 'Storyscape', when I was organ accompanist to a boys' choir on a

Plate 5
The main entrance to the New York Public Library at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, with one of its two famous lions. Photo: Ken Thomas via Wikimedia Commons.

Plate 6
A memorial in the sidewalk marks the spot where Cecilia Viñas and Hugo Penino lived and were kidnapped and 'disappeared' by Argentina's military dictatorship on July 13, 1997. About 250 victims of oppression have been similarly commemorated by the organisation Barrios X Memoria y Justicia. Photo: author.

concert tour. One afternoon in London I took the boys to St. Paul's Cathedral. Thinking, as I did then, that architecture was all about form and space, I helped them appreciate the play of light and shadow, the magnificent vaults, the echoing resonance of the great nave. Then we climbed the dome and looked out upon the silver-grey city spread far below us. On returning, I found one of our group leaders extremely upset. Again and again she asked me whether all the boys were all right, though she could see perfectly well that they were in fact quite pleased with our expedition. Her behaviour was mystifying, until someone explained to me that one of the boys had a history of suicide attempts—including leaps from high places. Why no one had thought to tell me this beforehand I cannot imagine, but the point is simply how different the dome of St. Paul's could look to two people: what I saw as an excellent place to climb up could have been, to Angelo, the perfect place from which to jump down.

This is an extreme example, but the principle is broadly true: what any particular place is, or seems to be, is shaped by the life story that each person brings to it. And since each person's life story is different, the meanings of places as well as people's feelings for them will also differ. What is striking is how intense those feelings can be—not only for landmarks like St. Paul's but also for places that are all but invisible to conservationists —places that appear ordinary and utterly lacking in heritage value. A participant in a workshop I ran several years ago (with Scottish poet and interpretation expert Michael Glen) wrote a beautiful essay about a playground

in the town where she grew up, to which she had recently returned on a visit: it was evening and there was no one around, but the scrapes made by small feet in the dirt under the swings filled the playground with memories from her own childhood. Another participant described a visit to the Vancouver ice skating rink where she'd spent her childhood training to achieve her dream of becoming an Olympic skater. Things had not worked out that way, and she had not thought about the place in years, but driving in from the airport on a business trip, she had felt compelled to make a detour to the rink: seeing it again brought back a surge of feelings that were painful but that helped close a chapter in her life. Asked to describe an important place, a student of mine chose her great-grandmother's kitchen, the emotional centre of her family life as a child (the house was later destroyed in Hurricane Katrina). Another student once fled the classroom in tears as she attempted to describe her family home.

These are typical expressions of people's emotional relationships with important places. They are relevant to heritage conservers because the emotional attachment they reveal is an important part of how people attribute meaning (and value) to the environment. And because quite often that attachment is rooted in what professionals would easily recognise as heritage values (tradition, association, the social value of places) if the places themselves did not look so undistinguished. In fact, many 'story sites'—neighbourhood playgrounds, inexpensive restaurants, school yards, street corners—fail to meet any normative description of heritage sites. They are

recognisable as such only through the narratives people tell about them—which is why I have called them 'story sites', and why we must always pay close attention to the stories.

Recognition is just the first of several challenges 'story sites' present to heritage professionals. A second is the apparent subjectivity of people's relationships with them. It is one thing to say that an ordinary playground or shop is a heritage site because of people's emotional attachment to it. It is quite another to realise that almost *any* playground, shop, house, park bench, or view may be important to someone, somewhere. An extreme subjectivity seems to rule over this crucial intersection between people and places, the tangible and the intangible. And this appears to be antithetical to the appearance of consistency with which officials must invest their decision-making in order to maintain legitimacy. As long as the public was willing to leave heritage assessments to experts armed with 'objective' criteria, this was not too difficult to achieve. But the apparent subjectivity of intangible heritage values upsets this arrangement.

How then can heritage professionals make consistent decisions about intangible values? The key, I think, lies in the word 'apparent'. I have highlighted people's individual place-feelings because understanding their emotional force and texture—not analytically but empathetically—is essential to formulating good policies. But place-feelings are not entirely idiosyncratic: many are widely shared, and some fall in fairly predictable patterns. For example, home is profoundly important to many people, and the loss of home (or neighbourhood) can be devastating.[15] Places associated with childhood also retain special significance for many people. Certain sites inspire strong feelings among particular ethnic, racial, cultural, or gender groups because they are emblematic of its identity. Others (like 'third places') inspire neighbourhood attachment as expressions of community identity. Observations like these—and one could make others—begin to suggest patterns of order within a seemingly chaotic picture of place attachment and therefore to point towards a range of policy options. Which of these kinds of attachment the public authorities choose to recognise and protect is ultimately a political decision, but the debate begins with the recognition that the attachments exist and belong to the community's intangible heritage.

While debates over intangible heritage policies properly belong to the public sphere, what the technical experts must do is promote and inform them. This means, first, accepting the validity of the intangible values that people attribute to places, and second, reformulating them in terms that support the discussion of policy options. This is a challenging but not impossible assignment. More than thirty years ago, geographers developed ways of measuring the agreements among people's individual place-preferences and translating this information into mental maps that showed how entire groups of people felt about places.[16] Techniques like these could help shrink the subjectivity problem to manageable size, though it would certainly require additional research by anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, and so forth. What heritage experts, and *only* heritage experts, can contribute to these cross-disciplinary investigations is a rigorous analysis of conservation options.

Organising heritage bureaucracies to protect intangible heritage in places

Speaking of criteria and decision-making brings us to our second problem, how to organise the bureaucracy, for the best research will lead nowhere if the bureaucracy cannot act on it. The solution of course depends on how the problem is defined. Many professionals profess to see a clash between experts (themselves) and non-experts (the public) and identify this as the problem to be solved. But this reduces a multi-vocal conversation to a two-sided confrontation and, worse, implies that the 'solution' must be at best an uneasy truce between opposing forces. In fact, experience shows that heritage debates usually have more than two points of view, even among the 'experts': just imagine the 'expert' opinions that an archaeologist, a conservator, a heritage interpreter, and a tourism co-ordinator might offer. What we see then, instead of people versus experts, is a diversity of perspectives, each with its own kind of expertise. Thus neighbourhood residents will be experts on living in that neighbourhood just as architectural historians are experts on the history and style of its buildings. The 'solution', then, must be a decision-making process that treats members of the public as well as professionals as experts and ensures they are heard. This may seem absurdly democratic, but the practice of values-centred conservation, based on the Burra Charter, shows that

something like this can in fact be achieved in the management of historic and archaeological sites.[17] For the kind of everyday places and customs we are considering here, a more agile and demotic process is needed. But the first step is to ensure that all the expert voices—public as well as professionals—are included.

This is process democracy, and it is a good starting point. But it is not enough. What is needed is a system in which the voices are not only heard but also heeded. It is no use if people are allowed to speak but are then told that what they have asked for is impossible because it does not conform to the agency's criteria or guidelines. Even the most spectacularly open public process cannot prevent this from happening if the agency's underlying design permits it. So the first and most crucial step towards a good public process is to ensure that heritage agencies have the competence—the appropriate legal mandate and institutional structure—to respond to public demands. For example, if citizens complain to the public accountant's office about excessive traffic noise, the public accountant will, quite correctly, tell them she can do nothing about it because it is not within her bureaucratic mandate. In a similar way, many conservation agencies today lack competence to deal effectively with intangible heritage values, because their laws do not require or even permit them to do so. The first step towards a good public process, once again, is to give them a legal mandate and bureaucratic structure that allow and require this.

In the United States, the fundamental importance of this principle was recognised many years ago, but the failure to act on it has caused no end of problems. In 1980, the U.S. Congress amended the 1966 *National Historic Preservation Act,* directing the Department of the Interior (as the national preservation agency) and the recently established American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress to report jointly on *preserving and conserving the intangible elements of our cultural heritage such as art skills, folklife, and folkways.* The report, co-ordinated by well-known folklorist Ormond H. Loomis, was published in 1983. Despite *widespread public interest* in intangible heritage, it found that the law put too much emphasis on the *tangible aspects of culture* (especially 'historic properties'), while overlooking the *living context and many traditional expressions of culture* and leaving out *intangible elements* unless they were *embodied in a structure or site.* While the American Folklife Center did care for intangible heritage, Congress had left it without

the power to do anything beyond studying and collecting. In short, Loomis faulted the federal preservation programme for failing to provide *clear coverage for the full range of cultural resources.*[18] In effect, the law had created a bureaucracy to safeguard intangible heritage, but without the competence to do it.

The report's conclusion was blunt: *The United States needs a consistent national system for cultural conservation,* extending from buildings to *traditional community cultural life.* The crucial recommendation was to expand the national preservation and environmental laws to cover *folklife* and related traditional *lifeways* along with built fabric.[19] A second recommendation was to appoint the Secretary of the Interior and the Librarian of Congress as trustees of each others' preservation boards, thereby enhancing the *linkage and coordination* between them. The authors thus sought both to extend the law's protective power over intangible heritage and to co-ordinate responsibility for tangibles and intangibles.

Nothing was done. Today, the National Historic Preservation Act continues to limit *protection and benefits* to built (or at least tangible) heritage. Federal responsibilities for intangible heritage continue to be lodged in folk life study centres at the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institution. The consequences of this failure to act continue to reverberate up and down the U.S. preservation system. At every level the tangible and the intangible are kept apart. On the tangible side stands the historic preservation system, consisting of the National Park Service, state and tribal historic preservation agencies, local commissions, and a great many not-for-profit groups. On the intangible side are the two national folk life centres, the national arts council and its state-level counterparts, and many other organisations that collect, study, and present various elements of intangible heritage. The two fields show little curiosity about one another, perpetuating their mutual isolation through separate journals, conferences, and graduate programmes.

One place where the consequences can be seen is the National Register of Historic Places. This is managed by the National Park Service, a bureau of the Department of the Interior. Citizen groups can and do propose items for listing in the National Register: indeed such proposals are encouraged. But strict rules govern what kinds of heritage can be listed. As the 1983 report observed, the rules allow

historic properties (buildings, ensembles of buildings, immovable objects, districts composed of distinctive structures or landscape features) to be listed. They do not allow for the productions of intangible heritage or its cultural contexts. The prohibition is not absolute: as the report also observed, certain intangible elements may be recognised if they are 'embodied' in a structure or site, and associations with historical figures or trends are frequently cited in favour of listing. The door was opened further in 1992, when pressure from Native American groups led Register staff to accept oral tradition or continuing patterns of community use or belief, under some circumstances, as qualifications for listing: such sites were dubbed *traditional cultural properties*, and though invented in response to tribal demands, they were available to anyone.[20] This could have marked a dramatic opening in preservation's relationship with the public, but the complexity and rigour of NPS rules, combined with extensive demands for documentation, the influence of development interests, and the intellectual conservatism of technical staff, have nearly pushed the door shut.[21]

Overall, then, one may say that the National Register process is less democratic than it looks: though formally open to public participation, a series of filters sifts out nearly everything that does not match the pre-existing heritage template. As a result, the system can only learn what it already knows: it is deaf to public demands for anything other than what it already provides.

Similar shortcomings can be observed in many (probably most) of the government agencies and citizen groups that operate across the U.S. at the local or municipal level. I once observed a striking example at a public hearing of New York's Landmarks Preservation Commission. As with the National Register, the commission's process is open to public participation: indeed every significant action is preceded by at least one public hearing. At this particular hearing, a resident took the floor to argue against a proposed new residential tower. He pointed out how it would damage the qualities that made his neighborhood feel like home. He became agitated as he tried to explain the sense of loss that this inspired in him, a Russian immigrant who valued the sense of rootedness and stability he had achieved. But the chairperson scolded him: how he felt about the neighbourhood was irrelevant. The only issue was whether the proposed project met the legal standard of 'appropriateness'. That, of course, was exactly what the speaker was addressing, but instead of

framing it in architectural or historical terms, he evoked intangible values of home, place, and neighbourhood. Subjectivity came into conflict with 'objective' standards and lost.

It should be noted that the chairperson's intervention, though rude, was legally justifiable. In determining the appropriateness of an intervention, the law directs the commissioners to consider its effects on the *exterior architectural features* of a landmark building and (in the case of a historic district) on those of its neighbours. The commissioners are further directed to consider *aesthetic, historical and architectural values and significance, architectural style, design, arrangement, texture, material and colour.* It is true that the law also permits them to consider *other pertinent matters.*[22] But given the strong emphasis on architectural features, a prudent chairperson would conclude that this vague permission would be at best a shaky basis for rejecting a development project—particularly in a political context in which any flaw in the legal record could trigger a constitutional challenge to the law itself. The chairperson's reading of the law was cautious but plausible. The problem, in short, was not a failure of imagination so much as of law and bureaucracy. The moral, once again: if heritage experts or city residents want an agency to pay more attention to the intangible values of place, they must give it the legal competence and institutional structure to do so. Ormond Loomis understood this well, and thirty years of experience have proven him right.

In Washington and New York a broadly democratic process is stifled by narrow substantive criteria. But one can also have the opposite problem, in which narrow decision-making authority stifles substantively broad criteria. Canada's Register of Historic Places provides an example.[23] Register officials reassure the public that they recognise *social value, spiritual value and cultural associations* alongside the traditional standards of *historical associations or architectural importance.* Yet they also explain that a historic place is one that has been *formally recognised for its heritage value by local, provincial, territorial or federal authorities,* each applying *its own criteria.* Thus the door is opened wide to intangible heritage values but slammed shut to genuine community participation in defining them. Only 'authorities' get to say what has heritage value.

The last thirty years have not been entirely barren in the United States. The state of Florida partially integrated its historic preservation and folk life programmes. Hawai'i added a 'cultural impact statement' to its environmental review requirements.[24] Maryland initiated a cultural conservation programme (which was eliminated by budget cuts in 2009).[25] At the federal level, the U.S. Congress authorised a system of national heritage areas which, though far too beholden to tourism interests, at least holds out the promise of integrating intangible heritage and places. The National Register, as already noted, adopted the concept of traditional cultural properties. And in a few of its nearly 400 parks and historic sites, the National Park Service has experimented with ways to support traditional patterns of use and occupancy within the boundaries of protected areas.[26] No doubt there are other encouraging examples. But on the whole, the U.S. has organised its heritage system to segregate rather than integrate intangible and tangible heritage values. One can only hope that UNESCO's decision to adopt separate conventions and bureaucracies will not bring about a similar result.

Fortunately, some heritage agencies have chosen to integrate the two. The Council of Europe, the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU), and the Centre for Heritage Development in Africa are examples. But these agencies do not have line responsibility for cultural resource protection. Two agencies that do are the municipal preservation bureaux of Buenos Aires and Bogotá: each provides an attractive model for other heritage agencies with direct conservation responsibilities.

As in many U.S. cities, heritage responsibilities in Buenos Aires are split, with regulatory authority for historic districts located within the city's planning department. But most other functions are grouped within the Ministry of Culture, which includes both a sub-secretariat for cultural heritage and a Commission for the Preservation of Historical and Cultural Heritage. The latter (as its name implies) takes 'a broad view of heritage', including both tangible and intangible elements.[27] Thus while it is involved in protecting significant buildings, it has also produced an atlas of intangible heritage that documents and maps the most important manifestations throughout the city.[28] The division of cultural heritage also includes the city's Historical Institute, which has done important work with oral and neighbourhood histories.

The division's cross-disciplinary organisation has helped it to straddle the border between tangible and intangible values. One result was the 2006 World Heritage nomination of the 'cultural landscape' of Buenos Aires, which referenced both kinds of values.[29] Another is the Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Notable

Plate 7
Books, coasters, and leaflets are part of the marketing support the government of Buenos Aires provides for bars, cafés, and other establishments judged to have heritage value. Photo: author.


Plate 8
The Bar Mataderos, adjacent to the site of the well-known Feria de Mataderos in a working-class neighbourhood of Buenos Aires: recognition of its heritage value has not affected the décor. Photo: author.

Plate 9
A food stand at Bogotá's Festival de Chicha offers *fritanga,* a traditional dish that combines potatoes and plantains with blood sausage and other meats. Photo: Anoryat (CC-BY-SA-3.0) via Wikimedia Commons.
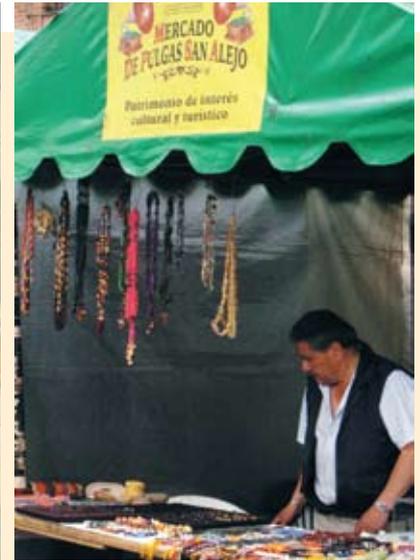
Plate 10
Bogotá's San Alejo flea market is *patrimony of cultural and touristic interest*: the sign even says so.
Photo: author.

Cafés, Bars, Billiard Halls, and Pastry Shops. The law that created it explains that an establishment can become 'notable' either through association with *significant cultural events or activities* or by virtue of its *age, architectural design, or local relevance.*[30] In addition to marketing them (Plate 7), the commission has supported conservation of the physical elements that give them character, from bar rails to hitching posts (Plate 8).[31]

Until recently, Bogotá's heritage agency, the Regional Institute for Cultural Heritage, was a fairly traditional organisation dominated by architects who carried out restoration projects. Then it was reorganised: its staff now includes anthropologists and philosophers, and in addition to offering technical assistance in restoration, it sponsors intangible heritage activities including workshops, programmes oriented towards specific social groups (working women, internal refugees, lesbians/gays/transsexuals), and an annual *Festival de Chicha,* celebrating a traditional indigenous beverage (Plate 9).[32] As in Buenos Aires, the creation of a cross-disciplinary bureaucracy has facilitated initiatives that straddle the border, including some unexpected ones.[33] In 2005, the city council used an existing statute to classify the well-known San Alejo flea market as 'Heritage of Cultural and Touristic Interest to the City of Bogotá' (Plate 10). It was the activities conducted there, rather than the space or

the temporary structures, that were declared patrimonial. The action was political and was not initially welcomed by the heritage agency. Vendors petitioned the city: now that we are patrimonial, they asked, how much money will you give us? Instead of dismissing these petitions, the Institute opened a dialogue and eventually reached an agreement: in return for help in printing sales catalogues, the vendors would inform the agency of antique furniture, manuscripts, and pre-colonial artifacts that passed through their hands. It was a solution that promoted the conservation of tangible as well as intangible heritage. It was made possible by the agency's competence to deal with both.

Of course it was also brought about by talented employees. But they could not have done it without the agency's particular bureaucratic arrangements. Should other cities emulate this system? Perhaps not in all respects. The New York system has advantages too, including tougher regulatory power over immovable heritage than that exercised in many cities. But the Buenos Aires and Bogotá systems do allow these agencies to do something impossible in New York, namely engage with the intangible *and* tangible values of places.

To close the gap between our existing heritage systems, then, we must redesign many of our existing bureaucracies, and that means designing new policy frameworks and public processes. How individuals behave does matter, but giving them the right institutional frameworks is an essential precondition, and by and large we have not done so yet. A good framework, then, will pass three tests. It will organise the subjectivity of intangible place values into patterns sufficiently coherent to support consistent decision-making; create the legal authority to safeguard those values; and put that authority where it will be exercised jointly with that for tangible heritage. Such an arrangement will ensure that people's demands for the safeguarding of intangible heritage are heeded. A democratically open public process can then ensure that they are heard. While there is much work to be done, our three guideposts can mark the way:

Patrimonio inmaterial: the material and non-material co-exist within the same space.

Vodka not whisky: pursue the blended and impure, the tangible with the intangible.

Lower standards: safeguarding the intangible heritage of places does not mean picking the best. It means sustaining the attachments that connect lives and places and give meaning to both. ▓

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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