The value of memory: Suakin's cultural heritage - significant for whom?

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ABSTRACT

The distinguished medieval port of Suakin (Sudan) is frequently referred to in formal reports and literature as the 'abandoned port of Suakin'. It is cited and commended for its tangible heritage. Suakin has been on Sudan's *World Heritage Tentative List* since September 1994. Its proposed nomination to the *UNESCO World Heritage List* was based on its archaeological, historical and architectural values, whereas the rich intangible heritage, the uses of heritage and its significance to the contemporary community, and their strong attachment was not taken into account in the nomination for world heritage status. Using ethnographic research, this article explores the heritage which has been overlooked and omitted from official archaeology, history and heritage. The research illustrates how Suakin continues to form a central part of the Suakinese culture and remains a place of history, pride, ancestors, memory, myth, traditions, home, belonging and identity. Heritage management in Sudan needs to consider the inter-connected nature of the tangible and intangible values of Suakin's cultural landscape.

Keywords

Suakin, Sudan, Red Sea Port, non-material heritage, legislation, community practices, narratives, stories, memories, traditions, sea rituals, significance, boat-building, Khalwa, Burra Charter, ICOMOS Xi'an Declaration

Introduction

Formerly, archaeologists, architects, art historians and other heritage professionals had a tendency to pay most attention to archaeological and architectural values. In addition, they concentrated mainly on sites and buildings rather than on the setting, historical and social dimensions, and the landscapes in which the buildings were placed, or the ways of life connected with them.

What is more, the long-established classification of heritage disregarded many forms of heritage, and it became clear that new methods needed to be applied to highlight its complexity (Byrne; 2001: Cleere; 2001: Byrne; 2009). The cultural diversity of human history and experience suggests a multiplicity of values, interpretation and conceptualisation of heritage (Cleere; 2001). This was a restricting factor, especially when assessing those aspects related to attachment to place, living traditions and the study of the landscape as a whole. Gibson suggests that *in a democratic society, definitions of value cannot be singular but must allow for plural interpretations and meaning* (Gibson; 2009:1). The former long-established heritage structure has, in the past, put more emphasis on a single-site approach and practice which resulted in removing people and their historical and social context from the tangible objects being studied, or in other words, separating those who care from what they value and give meaning to (Byrne; 2001). This procedure, which was marked by focusing on things, obstructed the study of people, their past memories and experiences. The ancient port of Suakin (on the Red Sea coast of Sudan) is still valued and managed in such a manner.

The aim of this article is to emphasise the paramount importance of managing heritage holistically to take account of multiple values and involving communities. This paper explores how heritage is valued by the heritage professionals in Sudan and the way it is used by the community. Firstly, I will give an overview of how heritage is managed in Sudan. Secondly, I will investigate Suakin's significance to the Suakinese (by the Suakinese community I refer to those who still reside in Suakin and the Suakinese in Diaspora). Finally, I will show that Suakin is a living heritage and is still seen by the Suakinese not as an ancient past, but as their own past, present and future.

Towards a multiple valuation of heritage

In recent years, the range of heritage places considered to be significant by professionals and heritage practitioners has broadened to include diverse areas and types and has expanded well beyond the traditional categories. Although heritage has long been associated with the built environment and material culture (sites, buildings and objects), in recent times there has been an increasing worldwide appreciation of intangible heritage - such as practices, representations, expressions, beliefs, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledge and skills, songs, music, oral traditions and dance. In 2003 UNESCO adopted, and then ratified in 2006, the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* intended explicitly to safeguard and endorse intangible heritage (UNESCO; 2003). Similarly, the *Xi'an Declaration,* which was adopted by the ICOMOS General Assembly in 2005, highlights the importance of the intangible context and content in the identification and preservation of World Heritage sites (ICOMOS, Xi'an; 2005).

An influential document in this respect is the *Burra Charter* (Australia, ICOMOS; 1979, last revised 1999). This charter included other stakeholders and non-professionals. Gibson noted that the *Charter* opened up ideas *of how we value heritage and whose values should inform this process* (Gibson; 2009:8). Similarly, Stovel (2003) considered the *Burra Charter* to be more successful than the *Venice Charter* in terms of taking social and cultural factors into consideration. The *Charter* has addressed some of the shortcomings of the previous international conventions; the guidelines enlighten understanding of what makes a place valuable and significant. This entails working with the community, taking into account their memory, association, experience and use of a place and a broader definition of significance. As a result, heritage has become multifarious (Sullivan; 1996: Byrne; 2001: Truscott; 2003: Kurin; 2004: Smith; 2006: Gibson; 2009: Smith and Waterton; 2009).

Conservation and selection policies and practices have been based on social significance, including aesthetic, historic, scientific and social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations (Article 1.2). The revised charter is meant to incorporate new conservation advances made in the field, and to extend the understanding of what is meant by cultural significance (Australia, ICOMOS; 1999: Logan; 2004). This concept includes both the tangible fabric of place and the intangible values of meaning, memory, lived experience and attachment.

The broadening of what counts as heritage, or what is included in heritage, to embrace the ordinary and every-day, and a move from the control by experts and professionals to include personal and unofficial heritages

is an improvement in heritage assessment practices. Yet regardless of the expansion of the notion of what constitutes heritage, there are still some limitations as to how professionals assign significance to heritage, particularly those involving feelings and emotions, or what values they protect. Should they protect the economic value of the place, the historical and aesthetic value or what people feel through their personal attachment to a place? Furthermore, despite the fact that the interconnection and entwining nature between the tangible and the intangible has been acknowledged by the *Convention* of 2003, the protection of the two still remains separate. The ineffectiveness of this division has been questioned by many professionals who find it unfeasible and very challenging (Deacon 2003; Munjeri 2003; Clarke and Johnston 2003; Carman 2009; Smith and Akagawa 2009; Taha 2012; Kaufman 2013). In addition, this new understanding of what constitutes heritage is not embraced everywhere - and Sudan is one of those countries where it is not.

The aim of the research

Suakin's architectural heritage has attained especial significance and has been the subject of numerous studies. It has also captured the imagination of countless poets and artists, whereas the voices and stories of the people and their attachment to those buildings have been absent. In addition, the social landscape, the cultural context, the people who lived and still live in Suakin and the various values they attributed to Suakin have not previously been taken into account. The main focus of the research was to gain insight into the relationships between people and heritage places, how and why people feel attachment to heritage places, and what affects people's sense of attachment to heritage, with a particular focus on attachment to abandoned heritage.

Sudan: a single value strategy

The significance and value of archaeological heritage and the meanings surrounding it have lately become a focus of academic research embodied in concepts such as 'social value'. This seems to be an under-explored field in Sudan, where professional values, and not the values held by the community, have continued to dominate heritage practices.

In Sudan, the legislation continues to favour the historicity and monumentality of cultural heritage. Despite the fact that the heritage law was updated as recently as 1999, the law did not incorporate social values (Australia, ICOMOS; 1999), nor did it include any of the recent ICOMOS or UNESCO guidelines. Additionally, it did not take the opportunity to adopt the latest advances and developments in heritage identification and practices. Attitudes to, and fascination with tangibility and grandeur persist as the guiding principle. Furthermore, heritage definitions and guidelines carry on referring to 'sites' and 'buildings' which keeps this as the dominant approach, rather than referring to cultural landscapes, place or community. Traditional concerns with historic, aesthetic and scientific values are predominant and heritage management continues to emphasise professional authority and a top-down approach. Consequently, this has led to local traditions and associations being side-lined.

As the Sudanese National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums' (NCAM) legal protection for cultural heritage is limited to tangible heritage, this approach has been the cause of conflict between communities and heritage professionals. There is a general consensus that intangible values are imperative aspects of conservation and the necessity for professionals to integrate tangible and intangible heritage and to focus on the cultural landscapes and the relationship between people, culture and place (Deacon 2003; Munjeri 2003; Clarke and Johnston 2003; Carman 2009; Smith and Akagawa 2009; Taha 2012; Kaufman 2013). In the case of Suakin, it has been valued for its historicity and architectural splendour, overlooking the living traditions and people's association with the place. This has been grounds for unease and disagreement between heritage professionals and the Suakinese.

In contrast to the official definition of heritage, what people think heritage is seems to be broader, more comprehensive and part of a whole. It is not pigeonholed as the professionals do. Generally expressed responses from interviewees were:

Heritage is the culture, the values, everything related to our ancestors, clothing, food, religion, traditions, history, homes. (Female, Port Sudan. Age 30s)[1]

Heritage is old things, customs and traditions, food, clothes, songs, dance, the sea and the shrines. (Male, Suakin. Age 30s)

Heritage is the old things, habits, ethics, conduct and the land. (Female, Khartoum. Age 60s)

Heritage is everything left to us by our ancestors, homes, stories, values, way of life, music, songs ... (Male, overseas. Age 40s)

Heritage is like a tree, the land is the base, the tree trunk and its branches are the morals, conduct, values, food, clothes, art... (Male, Khartoum. Age 70s)

Heritage in this sense is being used and expressed in a broader manner, involving the cultural, social and the natural, including ideas, beliefs and ways of life. I asked the employees at the Antiquities Service what heritage means. Their responses reflected the institution's established view of heritage, generally held views being:

It is known as defined by the antiquities law, anything which is 100 years old or older. (Official, Khartoum, 2009)

Heritage is difficult to define. Archaeology is old things and tangible; whereas heritage is culture, folklore and the intangible. (Interview with the Director, Khartoum, 2009)

Interviews with the staff and employees at the Antiquities Service reflect a clear division between heritage and archaeology, while heritage or folklore is seen to include all non-material culture; archaeology on the other hand consists of tangible objects and antiquity.

By contrast, in interviews with the Suakinese, when asked what the word 'heritage' meant to them, all those interviewed revealed that heritage meant anything and everything they inherited from their ancestors, and this included both tangible and intangible elements. There seems to be a gap between what the users of heritage consider as heritage and valuable to them, and what the heritage professionals' criteria define as constituting heritage and therefore needing safeguarding (Interviews; Sudan, 2009). Similarly, through a series of examples, Kaufman (2013), illustrates that peoples' view of heritage could differ from that of professionals.

The 2003 *Convention for the safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* was designed specifically to overcome the limitation of the 1972 *Convention* and to protect and promote intangible cultural heritage. Additionally, the *Convention* gave voice to communities and promoted cultural diversity. Rudolff and Raymond (2013), demonstrate the complexity of defining what signifies a community. However, they suggested the search for suitable methods to serve the needs of the communities and at the same time conform to the objectives of the *Convention*.

Suakin's setting

Suakin was one of the most distinguished international maritime trade centres on the Red Sea (Figure 1). The Red Sea has been one of the main trading routes between the



Figure 1
a. Suakin in relation to Sudan.
b. Suakin's location in the Red Sea State. Source: Google Maps.

Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Aden. What makes Suakin special is that it remained intact and continuously inhabited by multi-generational families, and a fully functioning port, until the beginning of the twentieth-century when the British colonial power decided to relocate the port to present day Port Sudan. After the spread of Islam in Central and West Africa, Suakin became a major port for pilgrims travelling to Mecca, and from the beginning of the sixteenth-century it became the most important port on the Red Sea coast. However, this was not the first time that Suakin was used as a port. Although the documented history of Suakin goes back to 750 AD, several scholars suggest that its location is one of the oldest to serve as a port on the Red Sea (Al Shamiy; 1961: Dirar; 1981). Folklore takes Suakin back to the time of King Solomon and stories about the Queen of Sheba who, (as the legends would have it) travelled from Suakin to Jerusalem. Furthermore, Suakin also served as a port for the Christian kingdoms in the Nile valley and for Ethiopian pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land. Suakin was one of the longest-serving ports and historically it has been a bridge between Africa, Arabia, Asia, the Mediterranean and Europe, encouraging trade as well as social and cultural contact, and playing a major role in the world of international trade and commercial exchange between the surrounding countries (Dirar; 1981: Abu Aisha; 2002: Taha; 2012).

Suakin's cultural heritage

Suakin has a rich material and non-material heritage and a distinctive architecture and character. It is characterised by its compactness, narrow, meandering streets and minarets looming high in the sky (Matthews; 1953: Hansen; 1972: Hinkel; 1992: Greenlaw; 1995: Calia; 1997). The city's architecture and planning was characteristic of the Islamic style, comprising a main street and narrow side streets and a *souq* (market), *caravanserai* (travel lodge), a main mosque and several neighbourhoods. Houses in the *Gezira* (island) were three or four storeys high, whitewashed, with outwardly-projecting windows (*roshan*) and built of local coral (Plate 1). Most importantly, Suakin is rich in intangible heritage, expressed not only through religious festivals, rituals and ceremonies, beliefs and practices, but also through the way of life, using traditional knowledge, skills and crafts. All of these are inseparable from the tangible heritage. Suakin has been on *Sudan's World Heritage Tentative List* since 1994, however, and after 10 years should be re-examined and resubmitted as recommended by the World Heritage Centre, most particularly to include its continuing traditions and meaning to the present day communities there (UNESCO World Heritage Centre – Tentative Lists).

Suakin's religious heritage

One of Suakin's distinctive features is the large number of mosques, shrines, *Zawias* (mosques without minarets) and *Khalwas* (Quranic schools). Suakin's landscape is dotted with minarets; in the historic centre, mosques in Suakin represent all four of Islam's main religious doctrines (*Al Shafiy, Al Hanafiy, Al Maliky and Al Hanbily*). It is also known for the large number of theology

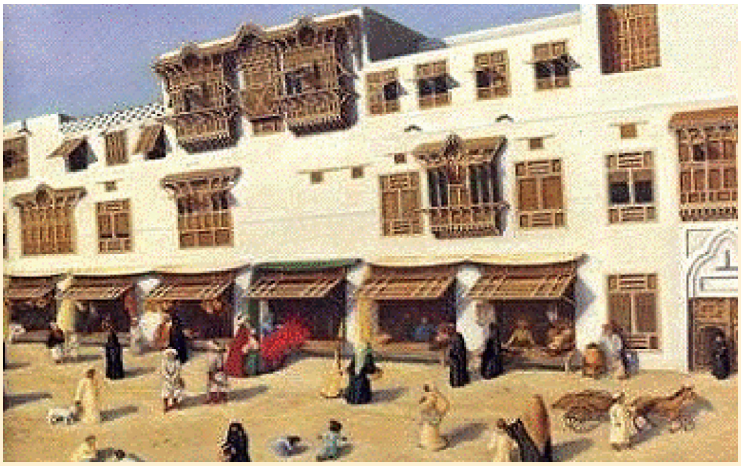

Plate 1
An example of an old house in Suakin showing the fine woodwork.
Photo: by permission of the University of Durham archives.

teachers, Sufi groups (*Tariquas*), religious sheiks and *Khalwa* teachers. Suakinese lives revolve around religion and the religious establishments provide shared religious, social and cultural identities. Suakinese women were allowed and accepted to become *Khalwa* teachers and they teach both girls and boys, although male *Khalwa* teachers teach only boys (Author interviews; 2008-9: Taha; 2011). Another feature distinctive to Suakin is the presence of a large number of shrines and mausoleums in a small area, together with holy women and men and theologians (Dirar; 1981: Abu Aisha; 2002: Badawiy; 2005: Taha; 2012).

Present-day Suakin

Even though Suakin was officially replaced by Port Sudan in 1910, it continued its international trade until 1924 and a small-scale trade with Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the Horn of Africa until the 1980s. After the relocation of the port, the trade became more limited and included items such as: sorghum, honey, butter, cattle, sheep and camels. The local mariners brought back electronic goods, cigarettes, fabrics, perfumes and incense. This period was described by both the sailors and the local community as a period of plenty (Interviews 2009). It also continued as a pilgrimage port until the 1970s. Suakin is still occupied by a local community and the descendant community in Diaspora visit during public holidays. The *Beja* nomads continue to camp around Suakin during the winter months and the religious communities still visit the shrines. Suakin is a living cultural heritage. In addition, it is a place visited by national and international tourists.

Suakin's significance: diverse interests

In today's Suakin, religious buildings such as mosques, *Khalwas, Zawias* and shrines are maintained by the local community and continue their religious, educational and social purpose very much in the present. In contrast, the residential area and the *Souq* (market) are deteriorating or have collapsed. In spite of the fact that the area is deficient in services like electricity and running water, the families of people who resisted moving at the closure of the port at the turn of the last century continue to live there. Regardless of all the changes and policies implemented (such as the removal of the railway line to Port Sudan, transferring the pilgrims' departure to Port Sudan and restrictions on the size of boats that can be built) which have impacted upon the economy and caused job losses in the area, and the fact that future economic expectations look bleak, people try to retain a sense of normality by holding onto their traditional ways of life. In spite of the continual deterioration of the physical landscape, Suakin continues to be used. There is a remarkable durability of traditional knowledge and cultural transmission which brings the place to life. What is more, the tradition of visiting shrines, ceremonies, rituals, the coffee ceremony, cuisine and hereditary jobs (such as imams and *Khalwas* teachers, sea skippers, the head of the market – the *Sheikh al Souq* - fishermen *Sheikh*, heads of butchers and goldsmiths) continue to thrive. In the Souq Street people go about their lives despite the decayed surroundings. Passers-by stop to greet each other, engage in conversation or stop for coffee and to exchange news. The market still serves many social and business functions (Taha; 2011 and 2012).

There is an enduring relationship between the people and the sea, and it has many layers. Their love of the sea is expressed by all age groups and genders as one of the things they like most. The sea is central to their lives and serves as a source of living and employment, of food, leisure, medicine and traditions, and of spiritual and psychological well-being. To the Suakinese, the sea is an indispensible part of Suakin. As one interviewee declared, to him Suakin represents *the sea, the unlimited horizon, the sky and the stars; the mosques and the shrines, the buildings and the smell of the sea.* (Male, Khartoum. Age 60s).[2] The sea is also a source of leisure activity during school holidays. Picnicking by the sea, fishing, swimming and sailing are flourishing habits (Plates 2 & 3). Fishing (including shell fishing), boat-building and sail-making, using long established techniques, are still practised. The Suakinese are excellent mariners with a great knowledge of the sea, navigating by the stars through the difficult waters of the coral reefs, often in high winds. One of my interviewees stated that *I know the sea like I know the back of my own hand; I will have no difficulty finding my way even if you blindfold me* (Male, Suakin. Age 50s). Some rituals and practices are closely connected to the sea, for example, after giving birth to a boy, women take part in a ceremony to throw the placenta into the sea (so the child may grow up to be daring and brave). The sea is visited after a wedding





Plates 2 and 3
Showing the enduring relationship the Suakinese have with the sea. Photos: Author, January 2009.



Plate 4
Locally made, vibrantly coloured boats. Photo: Author, December 2007.



Plate 5
A local boat building yard. Photo: Author, March 2009.

ceremony, after giving birth or when boys are circumcised, the sea is an omen of good luck, abundance and fertility. The sea is also called the 'silent doctor' and used for various medicinal purposes, so it forms a great part of the people's lives from birth to death, and for that reason they have deep affection for it.

In present day Suakin the sea is dotted with locally made boats (Plate 4); being a maritime port, boat building remains one of the essential activities. Boat building was a major source of employment, as was fishing and shell fishing. Boat building in Suakin is an old business; it is passed down through the generations of the same family. Fishermen and sailors use sails and have a good knowledge of the stars for their travels to Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Somalia, Eritrea or Egypt. To combat smuggling, the government placed restrictions on the size of the boats that could be built. That had a great impact on the business. Nevertheless, currently there are two shipyards where boat building (Plate 5), sail and rope-making go on, even today. The locally made boats are painted in vibrant colours and are quite charming. They have different names such as *Flouka, Sanbook, Lansh, Ramas, Houriy* and *Sadafia,* depending on the size and function of the boat. The craftsmanship of boat building plays a central role in the transmission of knowledge, traditions and cultural continuity.

My fieldwork in 2008-09 coincided with the religious festival of *Eid al Adha*, which is usually marked by a week's public holiday. That is when I became aware of the large number of visitors to Suakin; it suddenly

transformed into a place full of activity and business and acquired a different state of liveliness and energy. Visitors came by bus, car or camel, as individuals, in families or in groups of university students or friends. They included Suakinese and other locals from the region, Suakinese and national tourists from other towns in Sudan, Suakinese from abroad on holiday and international tourists.

Despite the destruction and the grim economic conditions, the Suakinese have maintained their customs and practices. For example, *Eid al Fitr* (the festival marking the breaking of the fast) and *Eid al Adha* (marked by a sacrificial lamb and pilgrims going to Mecca) are both celebrated. During these festivals new clothes are worn and visits are paid to friends, family and to the shrines of holy men and women (Plates 6 & 7). Other religious festivals are celebrated, such as the *Mouild al Nabaoiy* (the commemoration of the prophet's birthday) *Zafat Ramadan* (marking the beginning of Ramadan). For present day Suakinese (who live in Suakin or in Diaspora), Suakin continues to symbolise their culture; their beliefs, cultural practices and traditions. Thus Suakin is central for their ongoing sense of place and belonging. These cultural and religious ceremonies are central to the continuity of customs and practices

Rituals and practices have been maintained over a long time and they give devotees a feeling of stability and spatial and historical continuity. Moreover, rituals serve to sustain and consolidate old memories as well as creating new ones (Taha; 2011). Devotees have a very strong attachment to the holy people and to the place. The visiting of the shrines and the rituals performed there are continuous cultural and social processes. Religious ceremonies are a time of joy, of family and friends, neighbours, reunion, renewing old friendships and making new ones. It is a time for celebrations. These involve the whole area, children, adults and the whole community. Additionally, all the religious festivals are still celebrated, although not on the same scale as they were in the past. The tangible and intangible of these places are indivisible as suggested by many scholars (Clarke and Johnston; 2003: Deacon; 2003: Munjeri; 2004; Taha 2012; Kaufman 2013). The ceremonies serve to maintain practices and traditions. Ceremonial practices and performances and rituals associated with the place imbue it with meaning, and renew and reaffirm cultural associations.

Narratives, stories and family histories reinforce Suakinese cultural place attachment by linking them to the land by means of storytelling. The telling of the stories actively connects them to people and places, linking family, kin, and community to the cultural landscape (Friedman; 1998: Ryden; 1993: Low; 1992). Stories and memories bring everything to life, but they do more than that. They are not only about the ancient past, they reconstruct the past in the present.

What is important is that both tangible and intangible aspects were used to relay narratives and stories. The stories and memories which are transmitted from generation to generation give a sense of identity,



Plate 6
A congregation attending Eid prayers. Photo: Author.



Plate 7
On the way to visit the shrine after Eid prayers. Photo: Author, December 2008.

continuity and validity. Memories not only recall physical space but also tell a social history (Degnen; 2005). There are many different folk stories concerning the origin of Suakin and its name that have been passed down from generation to generation. Such tales reinforce the link between a community and a place. Storytelling and other traditional knowledge and practices which are passed on from one generation to the next assist in sustaining the connection of the people to their land.

Suakin is still relevant to their lives, memories and histories. Whereas professionals value Suakin as an ancient place, for the Suakinese it symbolises a living history - 'their history' - and it is part of their identity and who they are. The narrow official view of heritage has put Suakin's cultural heritage under extreme pressure and threat due to development and other natural and human factors.

Discussion: the need for a comprehensive heritage practice

The meanings assigned to Suakin by professionals persist in representing it as an 'abandoned port', an 'ancient port' a 'dead past' an 'archaeological site' or 'archaeological remains' and a testimony to past glories and achievements. My research demonstrates that there is more to Suakin than the ancient past and the beautiful buildings. The community who still reside there, the religious communities who visit the shrines, the Suakinese in the Diaspora who come home to visit, and the *Beja* nomads who still camp around the town in the winter months, all contribute to bringing the place to life and giving it meaning and dynamism (Fieldwork; 2007 and 2008-9: PhD. thesis; 2012).

The present interpretation of Suakin stems from the single value attributed to it - that is the tangible aspects of its heritage. To appreciate Suakin's cultural heritage in its totality, it is necessary for heritage professionals to integrate the historical and physical landscapes with the other layers of meaning and values and to try to understand what makes Suakin very special to its communities.

The memories, folklore, stories and narratives, rituals and customs are what make Suakin a living heritage and serve to maintain the continuity and transmission of the know-how, memory and oral history from one generation to the next. It is all these routine and every-day activities, things which are not considered heritage at all, which are the very qualities which give the place significance and continuity and link the past with the present. Most importantly, these mundane elements are important attributes that provide a more comprehensive heritage value than the significance currently ascribed to it.

The *Intangible Heritage Convention* of 2003 states that the intangible cultural heritage is transmitted *from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity* (UNESCO; 2003, art. 2.1). Additionally, the ICOMOS *Xi'an Declaration* of 2005 emphasises the conservation of context, defined as *the physical, visual and natural aspects as well as social and spiritual practices, customs, traditional knowledge and other intangible forms* (ICOMOS, Xi'an; 2005). Consequently, recently several countries around the world have recognised the value of working with communities in an attempt to preserve intangible cultural heritage and establish appropriate conservation practices. Cultural transmission is indispensable for maintaining the spirit and meaning of places. It is through these processes that heritage is passed on and thus stays alive. Intangible heritage gives meaning to the tangible and to places. Equally, Dawson Munjeri argues that tangibility is thus secondary: *the tangible can only be interpreted through the intangible* (Munjeri; 2000). There is a tension between professionals and community, between the commodification of the place for tourists, professionals who treat Suakin as a site, a dead past and a relic and a community who regard it as home, as their past which is used in the present and which they hope to preserve for their children in the future. This variance in itself supports and reinforces the assertion of identity, sense of place and belonging and attachment to the place. For the Suakinese, heritage is not simply physical remains - though those are important too - but is the foundation for their stories and memories. Intangible heritage is an important part of their stories, folklore, memories, oral histories, narratives, traditions and community events and practices, and both cannot, and should not, be separated or ignored.

Survival of intangible cultural heritage, much more than any other aspect of cultural heritage, depends on the survival of the way of life of a community and the continuity of uses by that community. If the spirit of place is not transmitted it can be forgotten, abandoned and eventually lost.

Threats to the continuity of the non-material culture

Despite the economic difficulties and disruption of the early twentieth century, the dislocation of the port and the numerous resolutions since 2000 which have had a great impact on the Suakinese, they have maintained their links to Suakin. Even though there is currently continuity in their rituals and traditional cultural practices, there are a range of factors which endanger these ongoing traditions and impact on their consistency and stability. For example, the new port which was constructed in Suakin in 1991, the fast, unrestricted development and the large number of immigrants to the area are putting a lot of pressure on the local community. Furthermore, some of the shrines which were still actively used have been removed and others are fenced off. The port authority has put some restrictions in place and gaining access is complicated. Members of the community need to get permission to visit some of the shrines, picnicking by the sea or swimming is forbidden in some areas and entrance charges to the Island have been introduced indiscriminately (including for members of the local community and children). In addition, new developments, beautification and preparation for national and international tourism will further jeopardise access to places and threaten the enduring continuity of traditions and the link to Suakin.

Conclusions

Those who manage heritage consider Suakin as an archaeological site, a dead past rather than a holistic living heritage. My research suggests that Suakin is not an ancient past, nor a bygone past but rather a living heritage. Furthermore, Suakin's physical heritage, the natural landscape and the sea, cannot be separated from the local people and remains a primary source for their stories, experiences, memories, myths and traditions. Many of these relate to ongoing practices that transmit knowledge from generation to generation and strengthen the sense of belonging, identity and sense of place, providing continuity between the past and the present.

For the Suakinese, Suakin is a place of history, pride, ancestors, memory, home, belonging and identity. In Suakin, the past and present are intertwined through memories and stories. Culturally, this place connects present generations with their ancestors. In recent years the World Heritage Committee has given more attention to the living and local values of heritage places. The continuing cultural traditions, attachment and religious practices add to the heritage significance of Suakin. My ethnographic research demonstrates that Suakin has values other than the architectural value assigned to it. To understand Suakin's historical significance we need to look beyond the physical landscape towards an inclusive heritage that comprises not only tangible objects, but also the deeper sense of intangible heritage.

Despite Suakin's economic decline at the beginning of the twentieth century, it has remained an important destination for visitors and the community. Religious practices which have preserved their meaning for centuries continue to be performed. What official heritage organisations have not recognised is that these activities are more than just mundane practices, they are part and parcel of the social cultural life, representing continuity of use and function and a living heritage of local cultures and traditions associated with strong intangible values. The linkage between the tangible and intangible has been noted by many scholars; the classification and division by professionals that treats tangible and intangible heritage as two disconnected categories is not the way it is treated by its users. As affirmed by Sullivan: *In our heritage practice, we tend to see heritage places one-dimensionally, to put them in boxes; to split them up; and to dissect them* (2003: p.52). As demonstrated above, heritage is more than just tangible objects; it includes rituals, customs, practices, festivals, oral traditions, beliefs and values and how these are passed on to the other members of the community, and to the next generation.

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