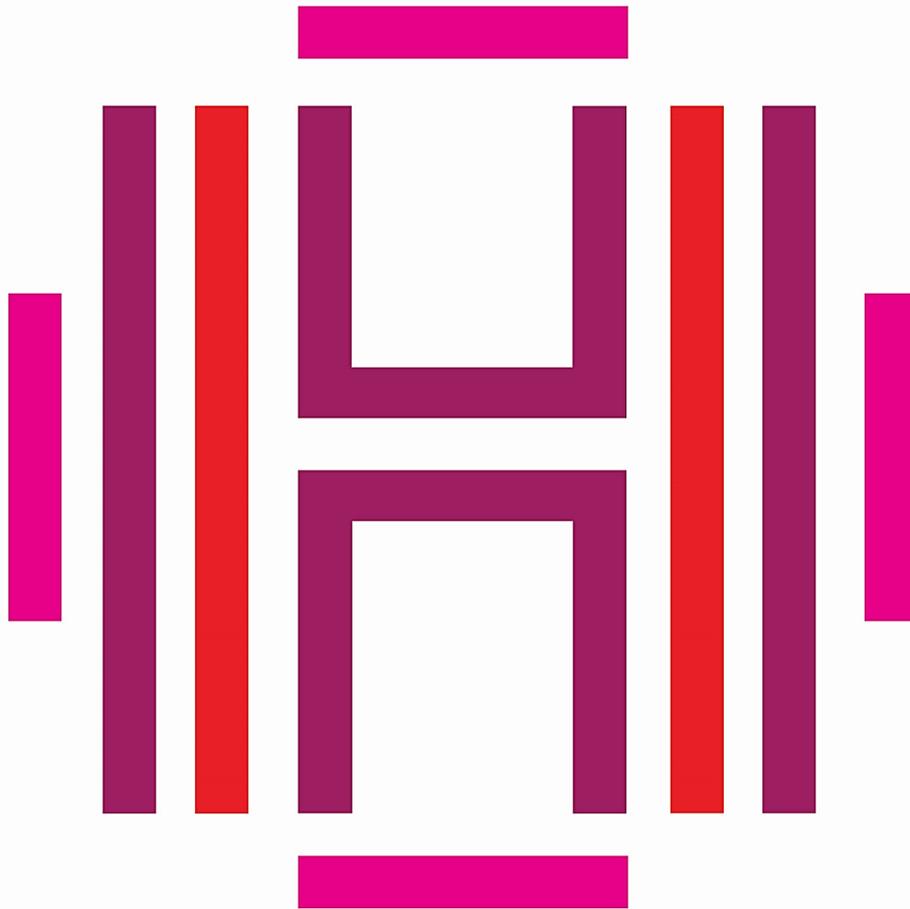


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DEMOCRATIZING HERITAGE

a symposium on

a people based approach

to sustainable development

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The problem

THE Delhi Declaration on Heritage and Democracy as adopted by the 19th General Assembly of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in Delhi, India in 2017, recognizes that democracy is a much needed consideration in the conservation of heritage. As democracy ‘gives both rights and duties to individuals, communities and nations’, it can aid in realizing the shared nature of heritage and, in doing so, guide the conservation of heritage assets in communities, neighbouring countries and larger regions:

‘This Declaration reflects the commitment by ICOMOS to Heritage and Democracy as key ingredients in a people-based approach to sustainable development. Heritage is a fundamental right and responsibility of all. It is a starting point for a meaningful and equitable future that secures and celebrates diversity, social engagement, equality and justice for all cultures.’¹

This issue of *Seminar*, seeks to explore the central theme of heritage and democracy from the varied perspectives of international heritage and non-heritage practitioners and academics in an effort to provide a platform for much needed dialogue about the idea of heritage, and the ways in which the objectives of the declaration can be realized.

It is no accident that heritage and democracy was chosen as the theme for ICOMOS 19th General Assembly. The board of ICOMOS India collectively agreed that India, as the world’s largest democracy, is an apt site to address the issues facing practitioners in different parts of the world as they seek to negotiate the spaces of governance in dealing with heritage matters. In large part this decision was informed by their

own experience of working in the Indian context in which organizations such as the Archaeological Society of India (ASI), the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), and heritage practitioners like themselves often struggle to protect heritage in a holistic manner in a country which while rich in history, culture and heritage continues to face basic problems, such as the absence of a comprehensive legal regime responsive to the growing and evolving needs that protects heritage and also recognizes rights of communities on matters of culture and heritage. Equally debilitating is a severe paucity of funds (from the side of national, state local governments) to undertake conservation works, and most importantly, the minimal engagement of a larger public/civil society in the processes of conservation management largely due to the absence of a collective understanding of what encompasses heritage and enabling systems for dialogue and engagement, and organizational structures of government bodies and their capacity to respond to the multiple concerns related to heritage. Therefore, the choice of the theme of heritage and democracy was driven by the aim of examining heritage practice through the lens of democracy so as to kick-start a dialogue among the different stakeholders of the practice and academia in India and other parts of the world and bring together some of the nuanced conversations so as to increase the visibility of heritage concerns.

Democracy in India is perhaps as intensely debated as it is elsewhere, but despite the often negative connotations associated with it, it is also widely recognized as a unique feature of a culturally, socially and economically diverse nation. The demand for decentralization of power within the federal model of

1. International Council on Monuments and Sites, *Delhi Declaration on Heritage and Democracy*, 2017.

power has helped strengthen democracy in India. In fact, it is noteworthy that, '[O]ver the years, as democracy has spread, numerous mobilized groups in India have demanded further redistribution of power... so that the Indian political system by now possesses significant decentralized traits... in the practice of federalism, in the changing character of local governments, and in the evolving constitutional design.'² In other words, it has been both 'the design of political institutions, and the role of diverse social groups', namely ethnic, class, caste, and regional groups, that have and continually helped to renegotiate the boundaries of centralized power in India.³

This does not imply that democracy in India is successful or that it benefits all sections of Indian society, but perhaps it is important to realize that the, 'differentiated experiences of people and their relationship with state and democratic process can be captured only when we include variables that can incorporate this diversity of democratic experiences and expectations.'⁴ Recognizing the multifaceted dimensions of democracy in India including its institutions, its apparatuses and, most importantly, its people and their diverse and non-homogenous experiences of a social and political system, is critical to furthering the initial ideas delineated by the Delhi Declaration as applicable to different countries in the world.

Central to the larger discussion is the idea of 'dialogical heritage':

2. A. Kohli (ed.), 'Introduction', in *The Success of India's Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 2.

3. Ibid.

4. N. Chander and B. Hussain, 'Challenges and Possibilities of Substantive Democracy in India: A Critical Engagement Through the ADI Framework', *Asian Democracy Review* 3, 2014, p. 105.

'A dialogical concept of heritage suggests that heritage making is interactive – meaningfulness arises out of encounter and dialogue among multiple subjects, some of whom are human. Place (constructed interactively) may also be a subject in its own right... Communication runs through living systems, including land and people. The processes and practices of keeping the past alive in the present, like the practice and processes of keeping the future alive in the present, is collaborative.'⁵

The idea of a dialogical heritage resonates with the multifaceted dimensions of democracy in which multiple subjects have varied experiences and expectations of their interactions with the state and its democratic processes. The collaborative nature of heritage underscores the issue of the production of the past – in other words 'who and what is involved in the process of "making" heritage, and "where" the production of heritage might be located within contemporary societies', and this in turn 'invokes the question of agency'.⁶ The idea of agency is now considered 'not as an individual act of will, but as something that is distributed across collectives', such that the idea of social collectives are transformed and accompanied by the 'dissolution of familiar, modernist dualisms such as "nature" and "culture", "human" and "non-human", "social" and "natural".'⁷ In terms of heritage this would question the

5. R. Harrison and D.B. Rose, 'Intangible Heritage', in T. Benton (ed.), *Understanding Heritage in Practice*. Manchester University Press/Open University, Manchester/Milton Keynes, 2010, pp. 264-5.

6. R. Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. Routledge, Oxon, 2013, p. 32.

7. Ibid., p. 32.

binaries of cultural and natural heritage and, more recently, the dualism of tangible and intangible heritages, as one is often set within the production of the other.

The dissolution of these binaries is based on the idea of assemblage theory in which social structures are perceived as ‘assemblages’ or a series of heterogeneous groupings, such that natural/cultural groupings are ‘a product of their particular histories and their relationships with other parts of the assemblage’; in other words the relations between groupings and within groupings is emphasized and not the existence of groupings as individual components.⁸ Furthermore, the idea of assemblage enables an understanding of the ‘formation and reformation of social processes across time and space’.⁹

In terms of heritage this allows for attention to be paid to:

‘...not only the individuals and corporations and the discourses they promulgate or resist, but also to the specific arrangements of materials, equipment, texts and technologies, both “ancient” and “modern”, by which heritage is produced in conversation with them. These specific arrangements of materials might include not only the “historic” fabric of a heritage site itself, along with the assortments of artefacts and “scars” that represent its patina of age and authenticity, but also various technologies of tourism and display by which it is exhibited and made visitable as a heritage site.’¹⁰

Therefore, heritage as assemblage encourages an understanding of all the players and stakeholders involved in heritage processes, as well as the mechanisms – institutions, organizations, policies, strategies – that are employed in the conservation, interpretation and presentation of heritage(s). Furthermore, the socio-technical and/or bio-political nature of assemblage allows for an examination of the power and knowledge bases that inform the management and governance of heritage(s).

In effect, the concept of dialogical heritage can be considered as one of the ways through which an affective democratization of heritage can be achieved, as it enables inclusion of the assembled, heterogeneous, social, cultural, and political dimensions of heritage and in doing so greater representation of the interests of people and their concerns in terms of their heritage(s). The idea of a dialogical heritage also strives to move beyond the approach of engaging just people and stakeholders in dialogue with each other and seeks to bring into this

conversation the interactions (of the negotiated and re-negotiated power) between the stakeholders and mechanisms/apparatuses of heritage management and planning, thereby engaging the entire heritage system in a discursive dialogue with all its components.

The various papers in this issue of Seminar can be broadly categorized as those that question the basis of heritage and democracy in terms of ethics, trusteeship and ideas of justice, and those which reflect on the practice of heritage conservation in India and other parts of the world, as set against the backdrop of democratic expectations of stakeholders involved in the conservation of heritage(s).

Some of the primary concerns and issues that have emerged include a need to move away from the bureaucratization of heritage towards ideas of trusteeship and belonging; for evolving an ethical approach towards heritage; and inculcating a greater awareness of the predominantly elitist and monumental perceptions of heritage. Equally important is the need to recognize community as both generator and consumer of heritage, and thus empower the community with greater agency. There is a need to recognize the diverse character of heritage in the urban environment, be it historic settlements or modern cities, and to move beyond the divide between tangible and intangible heritage. Above all there is a need to create opportunities and platforms for dialogue in heritage interpretation and presentation, for heritage conservation to be driven by community engagement and the recognition of different versions of democracy and the ways in which each of these distinctive versions can help enable the protection of diverse heritage(s).

In the spirit of enabling dialogue, this issue brings together the varied perspectives of both practitioners and academics in the hope that it will create greater awareness within the larger heritage community about some key concerns and debates animating the field. An examination of the practice of different stakeholders, institutions and legislative apparatuses that are operationalized in the processes of heritage conservation and management helps provide critical insights into the ideas of heritage conservation as viewed through the lenses of democracy(s). The understandings generated are important as they provide road maps that can help shape and guide the formulation of future policy and practice in heritage conservation in a more collaborative and democratic manner.

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8. R. Harrison, 2013, p. 34.

9. Ibid., p. 34.

10. Ibid., p. 35.