

Heritage of the Air Conference - Lost or found? Intangible cultural heritage workshop

Where to from here?

Dr Rebecca Madgin was invited as our rapporteur to wrap up and reflect on the presentations and discussions at the workshop. Rebecca is Professor of Urban Studies at the University of Glasgow.

Rebecca opened up three questions drawing from the presentations and small group discussions:

- What do people do in place?
- How do those things we do in place make us respond: cognitively and with our bodies?
- How does this make us feel emotionally?

Here is a summary of her key points – in her own words.

Reflecting on where heritage theory and practice is up to today, I suggest that we have stopped thinking about things to define, to put labels on, to put boundaries around and are moving towards a focus on the relationships developed between people and place – that tricky in-between where we use words like association, connection, relationship – and I particularly use the word attachment.

And beyond that, how do we understand the purpose of heritage today? To protect something in perpetuity or is it more about evolving a sense about what we are protecting?

Reading the Burra Charter and the Practice Note, I was really struck by the idea of dependency – that we depend on place and how ICH is a product of everything we do within particular places at particular times. It's about the relationships that we are building, moment by moment.

So rather than think about a cultural practice and put a boundary around it, or a particular expression or a particular form, we could start thinking about how these practices are enabled by a place or a particular geographical location. This could decentralise the practice, tradition or expression and refocus on what people are actually doing and what it means to them.

My second point is that we don't address emotion. It's not in the Burra Charter, the Practice Note nor the Background Note. I find that really strange because if heritage is about protecting and respecting something, then shouldn't we be thinking about how that makes us feel rather than just what the thing is? And that means considering the experiential and the affective qualities of place that emerge from our relationships with place.

If place is seen as the container of both positive and negative emotions, then ICH could be seen as a repository or a way for us to think about the feelings that we have within particular places. Should that be the emphasis of our approach when we have to address change? Rather than just talking about retaining the practice or the physical attributes of the place, and instead considering how preserving that practice, tradition or culture can enable us to feel and continue to feel the emotions that draw us to those particular places?

To bring the experiential, sensory and emotional into the Practice Note could be an important next step.

Finally, where are we going next? If we think about how places make us feel, how does that impact on the protection of the place and the cultural practice. A word that keeps coming back to me is *wellbeing*. The physical and emotional disruption that happens when you are dislocated from your home – from your important places – can be intensely significant.

My final question is - thinking about ICH and its relationship to place is – Are we asking heritage to do too much? Or are we not asking it to do enough? I work in the context of urban development and a lot of the questions that we are raising here are actually conversations that we should be having in the wider built environment sector, not just within our own heritage sector.

So - are we asking heritage to do too much, or not enough?