



FORWARD TOGETHER

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Forward Together: A Culture-Nature Journey Towards More Effective Conservation in a Changing World

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Protection of Living Heritage: Implementing New Tools for Heritage Resilience

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Abstract

This paper concerns new ideas, strategies and tools for protection of living (intangible) heritage in the United States. Existing approaches to protection of living heritage are reviewed by qualitative analysis. The commonly employed past techniques of heritage conservation, per the current state of practice, are generally inadequate. New initiatives, policies and programs which can be pursued by local municipalities show promise for greater sustainability of culture and overall enhanced resilience of intangible heritage. This paper outlines roles for municipal government in developing collaborative and integrated policies with advocacy groups, institutions and community. Various forms of participatory engagement are described, including cultural mapping and oral history collection to document intangible heritage. Strategies to enhance local businesses and create local jobs are suggested. The end goal of this analysis is to strengthen the value of intangible heritage through best principles of conservation, planning, government programs and urban design. Ultimately, high potential for success is observed, but quantitative data is lacking for analysis of pros and cons regarding each of the strategies and tools. Protection of living heritage in the US is nascent area of both scholarship and practice.

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Protection of Living Heritage: Implementing New Tools for Heritage Resilience

Introduction

Intangible heritage is difficult to protect. Professional planners and architects engaged in historic preservation understand this. The laws and policies which evolved from the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act were based on property (who owns it) and funding sources (who is paying for it) because these are the essential elements of our legal and financial systems. The ‘tools of the trade’ were designed to identify and preserve the built environment, not intangible heritage. Preservation as practiced at the local level is a type of zoning, and historic preservation in a legal/jurisdictional context concerns real estate. At federal and state levels it is based on laws designed to consider impact on built things that may have heritage value to society. The leading practitioners today were trained decades ago in preservation of historic districts, buildings, structures and materials. Back then, the profession reveled in knowledge of architectural styles and held ‘original’ materials in highest esteem. Intangible heritage was explicitly excluded from consideration because it is not a thing that a person can own. Thus, the National Register Bulletin 15 from the National Park Service (NPS Bulletin 15, 1995, p.4) explains that intangible heritage cannot be designated except by its association to a physical place.

Discussion about protection must begin with a definition. Intangible heritage is the collective identity and knowledge of a cultural group embodied in their traditions, arts, practices, and beliefs. In the world of architectural conservation today, valuation of intangible heritage influences decisions regarding regional planning, neighborhood design guidelines, building rehabilitation, and even treatment of historic materials. Intangible heritage is dynamic and adds contemporary value in social, educational and political terms. It holds wisdom and principles passed forward from prior generations.

Several international doctrines and charters exist to guide the practice of intangible heritage conservation. Domestically in the United States, though, we are deficient in guiding documents. The conservation methods for intangible heritage promoted by international doctrines are not

uniformly practiced in the US. In fact, intangible heritage is explicitly excluded from designation on the National Register of Historic Places, except through association to a physical place.

How do we proceed to protect the intangible from being marginalized or dispersed? Professional planners and architects are rarely ever hired to consider such things. The situation needs to change because intangible heritage is very valuable, and it is threatened. The field of historic preservation (a.k.a heritage conservation) must address fundamental questions about cultural sustainability, not just buildings. The living heritage of people deserves due consideration and protection just as much as the tangible products of human activity. Policies are evolving to handle the need, though the difficulty is high because our mechanisms of governance, regulation and incentives remain tied to older methods based on established practices that did not foresee the present problem.

Examples of planning, design, and policies explained below give hope that appropriate protection of intangible heritage is possible. Much is unproven, though, because the new efforts lack a track record of data to assess results. Dissemination and sharing of knowledge in symposia and academic papers is a necessary part of the process to guide the field towards the establishment of new methods, policies and best practices.

The San Antonio Context

In San Antonio there is increasing attention to intangible heritage due to the inscription of the San Antonio Missions as a UNESCO World Heritage cultural site in 2015. Its famed river is a natural and cultural resource straddling both tangible and intangible heritage as a destination for tourism and a spiritual source for local indigenous groups. San Antonio is also abundant in multiple forms of living heritage and traditions which take place in specific locations and structures. The intangible heritage of people is among the “outstanding universal values” of this cultural site, comprised of multiple properties along a river, in large part through economically marginalized communities. The inscription established a large “buffer zone” which envelops the historic properties and is also home to people whose surviving, intangible heritage is included in

the inscription as “outstanding.” The neighborhoods surrounding the San Antonio Missions have been home to families descended from original mission inhabitants and have remained largely underdeveloped. That has changed.

The World Heritage inscription in 2015 engendered a sudden, public awareness that intangible heritage is a major component of social identity, plus economic prosperity through heritage tourism. At the same time, opportunities for growth and real estate development were immediately identified by investors. Public concern was expressed in community meetings about displacement of businesses and residents—gentrification.

Following the 2015 inscription of the San Antonio Missions, the opportunities for growth and real estate development were immediately identified by investors, and just as quickly perceived and then discussed in public forums as a threat. The threat was displacement of businesses and residents, so the response was to find ways to mitigate the displacement and the loss of traditional property uses. Naturally and appropriately, the agencies of government and most property owners advocated for a balanced approach that would not block new development projects. Included in the mix of considerations was the need to maintain and improve heritage tourism as an economic engine, while not supplanting the local economy serving needs of existing residents and businesses.

Part 1. Urban Design Responses to Protect Intangible Heritage

Consideration of the San Antonio Missions relative to other World Heritage sites in the U.S. is instructive to understanding the scope of the problem. No other city in the United States is faced with the same issue. The San Antonio Missions, when compared to the other 22 inscribed World Heritage Sites in the U.S., are unique with regard to the intangible aspects of OUV to be protected and managed per the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. First of all, only 10 of 23 World Heritage sites in the U.S. have cultural heritage; the other 13 are entirely natural heritage. Digging deeper, of the 10 cultural heritage sites, only half (5) are in urban areas, among them San Antonio. The San Antonio Missions differ from the other four cultural sites in an urban

context because the OUV statement includes intangible attributes of authenticity and integrity surviving across the urban area. Plus, the other four do not have a buffer zone, while San Antonio's buffer zone includes large, residential areas. The result for San Antonio is a management plan for protection of the inscribed sites that must include not only care of the physical, historic features, but also continuity of local culture. Long-term preservation means that a stable demographic of residents and businesses needs to be sustained, and not be displaced by real estate development or rapid economic growth.

Design objectives for living heritage protection

The Buffer Zone of the San Antonio Missions World Heritage cultural site needed fresh thinking on protection and management to make the most of existing tools as well as implement new ideas. Prior to the inscription, researchers at The University of Texas at San Antonio had already observed the existing tools would not be enough to stem a tide of gentrification poised to sweep southward across the heritage zones of the San Antonio Missions (Doganer, 2015). Aligning forces for the common good, the city sought fresh ideas from the university, resulting in a Market Assessment report (Tunstall, 2017). Urban planning and design objectives were established by the report, though not codified into official policy. These objectives with regard to living heritage can be summarized as follows:

- Extend (incentivize, even) opportunities for economic prosperity to existing residents and businesses so they may keep pace with changes happening around them;
- Expand understanding of the "OUV" of the inscribed World Heritage site, because it does not exist without the people who live in the communities around the Missions;
- Mitigate potential for population displacement;
- Creatively and respectfully increase contact opportunities for visitors (local or distant) to have authentic experiences of San Antonio's living heritage;
- Protect and sustain existing cultural heritage, including the civic institutions and economy supporting day-to-day needs of local residents;

- Do not block the natural process of cultural change, and conversely do not facilitate rapid change of any type;
- Allow new businesses based on the heritage tourism economy (plus new residents), without displacing or dominating the existing demographics.

The city has had good programs in place for working on the above list of objectives for many years, even before the World Heritage inscription raised awareness of living heritage. These have been fine-tuned over the past two years and more added. The latest updates are described below. Additionally, urban design responses to intangible heritage protection were proposed and are under consideration. What follows next is a description of each design response.

Responses

San Antonio is trying to achieve a good balance between conservation of intangible heritage and economic growth. The objectives should not be mutually exclusive, and perhaps could even reinforce each other. Here are some proposed methods:

Enhance local business opportunities and create jobs

Existing programs and agencies fostering small, local businesses should be retained and enhanced, of course. New training programs can specifically support existing businesses (plus the local residents they employ) by offering guided access to greater prosperity within heritage zones. Small business development programs can be targeted to offer one-on-one professional advice in design, rehabilitation, historic preservation tax credits, ordinances, permits, marketing and overall business needs for existing and new start-ups to grow.

Nominate “Traditional Cultural Property,” per National Register Bulletin #38

Within the realm of historic designation, the federal government issued “Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties” (NPS Bulletin 38, 1998), for the purpose of adding traditional cultural properties to the National Register of Historic Places. Such a property is “eligible for inclusion in the National Register because of its association with

cultural practices or beliefs of a living community that (a) are rooted in that community’s history, and (b) are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community.” Recent efforts in San Francisco, CA, for example, documented traditional cultural property for protection of intangible heritage in the Japantown neighborhood. There are limits to this approach because the intangible heritage is not what is designated and thus afforded protection, but the property, a historic place. Also, intangible heritage may be associated with a non-historic building as readily as an older, historic one, thereby presenting some possible confusion and further limits on effectiveness of this approach. Nonetheless, the survey process will identify important resources, and may become an essential tool for intangible heritage protection in San Antonio.

Execute Social Impact Assessments to include communities in large decisions

In 1966 the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) generated a new agency to inform federal undertakings, because the impacts of federal activities can be environmental, economic and social. A tool for assessment of impact prior to action is the “Social Impact Assessment” (SIA), designed to consider effects of an action on the lives of people and their local society, including cultural values and beliefs. NEPA recognizes the need to include communities in decisions, thus local knowledge and values are included in the SIA in order to make socially responsible choices balancing the local interests with the regional or national agenda. The SIA could be a valuable step in the design process for any proposed changes around the San Antonio Missions, but it is unlikely to be pursued because there is no entity required or interested to fund it. That’s unfortunate because it is designed to consider the lives of people and their local society, including cultural values and beliefs.

Conduct ICOMOS Heritage Impact Assessments for approval of large projects

Per the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, which is essentially an international treaty, the impacts on the “outstanding universal values” (OUVs) of inscribed sites are to be identified in advance of proposed changes and mitigated. ICOMOS is a technical advisor to the World Heritage Committee, and so they put forth guidance advising site managers to conduct a

“Heritage Impact Assessment” in the process of consideration of any changes that could alter the OUVs. The HIA works like the SIA in that it is a case-by-case report done in response to individual proposals. The HIA is specific to World Heritage as it focuses directly on how the OUVs would be impacted by a proposal for new development, typically something such as a large new building, large-scale demolition, or major infrastructure improvement.

Promote “Legacy Businesses” and offer financial incentives

This urban design tool to protect intangible heritage has been implemented in San Antonio and is further described below. The new program takes lessons from similar programs established in San Francisco, CA, to identify, promote and give financial support to “legacy” businesses. San Francisco Heritage, a local non-profit advocacy group, set up the “Legacy Bars & Restaurants” initiative in 2013 modeled after ones in Barcelona, Buenos Aires, and Paris. The program is primarily a guide for patrons, and has qualification criteria – 40 years or more longevity plus distinctive architecture and a history that relates to the community. The City of San Francisco has a comparable “Legacy Business Registry” of businesses located in San Francisco over 30 years which have “contributed to the history and identity of a neighborhood or community.” Also, San Francisco has a “Legacy Business Historic Preservation Fund,” approved by voters in November 2015. The program subsidizes rents as well as costs of ownership, and up to 300 businesses may participate. Legacy business designations, marketing and financial support programs can help protect the intangible heritage of a place.

Stimulate private commercial uses on public property

Public owners of land that is within boundaries of the inscribed sites or the buffer zone have the capacity to issue permits and leases for commercial vendors. Respectful concessions under joint agreements with public owners are very possible, and many good business opportunities exist. Visitors need services at key locations along their travel routes.

Concession types which enhance the OUVs of the Missions would be most desired. Benefits to small, local entrepreneurs are obvious: lower overhead expenses compared to ‘brick-and-mortar’

shops. The positive effect will include an increase in the “dwell time” of visitors by providing more retail opportunities.

Part 2. Participatory Engagement: Empowering Communities and Giving Them a Voice in Managing Intangible Heritage

Two essential elements for protection of intangible heritage by municipalities are identification and engagement. Since preservation and conservation are predicated on objectives to retain what we value, the contemporary values we find in heritage must be identified at the outset. Even more important, understanding the significance of heritage through the community’s perspective is crucial. What do people see as valuable about their past? In the realm of World Heritage and international practice these will always be related to the outstanding universal values defined in the inscription documents regarding the heritage of a place. Second, when agencies of government are managing heritage, best practices call for inclusivity and equity through strong public engagement. The need to identify values and a community-centered approach can be coupled to create an inclusive process that meets both goals. Participatory mapping is one such process. This process is a tool that also has the potential to meet the objectives of UNESCO’s Sustainable Development Goals 10 and 11 as well as the New Urban Agenda Habitat III.

Methodology and Implementation

To identify the intangible values associated with the San Antonio Missions World Heritage inscription, as well as places important to community, the City of San Antonio’s Office of Historic Preservation developed a participatory mapping initiative to engage citizens connected to the missions either through familial lineage or simply as visitors to the missions. Participatory mapping allows individuals and communities to document their own culture, make the intangible tangible through the act of social cartography and provide documentation where oral traditions prevail over documentation. This becomes an important form of communication in a dominant society that values documentation more readily than orality. Conversely, the documentation provides a sense of empowerment and gives voice to urban indigenous communities, non-English speaking communities and communities that value orality. Since modern United States

policies are written and not oral, these documents become a viable source of data useful to policy-making.

In 2016, the city announced dates, times and locations where residents were encouraged to visit with preservation staff to share stories, photographs and family archives. Often citizens attended in familial groups sharing memories and traditions in vibrant, communal discussion. After sharing stories, participants were encouraged to create maps that associated places with the stories and memories they told. Maps were approached in two ways, participants could be given paper and drawing tools so they could draw their own maps, or they could mark up a historic map that showed the boundaries of original Spanish land grants around the missions, including the names of original land grant owners. In all, 70 individual stories have been gathered from over 30 individuals to date. Analysis of the stories and maps continues, and more story collection and mapping needs to happen, but several themes and values immediately surfaced: culinary traditions—including nutritional and medicinal foods tied to the natural environment, spiritual traditions, building traditions and the importance of familial connections to the cultural landscape and its development over time.

Dissemination

The city has endeavored to disseminate findings from the mapping and story collection in a variety of ways: online videos, speaking engagements, an art exhibit and as a component of Mission Historic District Guidelines used for design review purposes. Videos from story telling and oral histories are in the process of being curated and posted online for viewing. The World Heritage Office has selected specific videos and is using them to augment a mobile website that allows visitors to the missions to hear specific stories. Three city offices, The Office of Historic Preservation, The Department of The World Heritage Office and the Department of Arts and Culture collaborated to create an art exhibit that incorporated collected stories, producing artwork to match the stories and displaying excerpts of oral histories. Citizens who have told their stories felt honored and celebrated through these forms of dissemination. The Office of Historic Preservation has also made numerous presentations on the work as well as workshops

on participatory mapping. Most recently, the Office of Historic Preservation developed district specific guidelines for the Missions Historic District. The guidelines include an overview of intangible qualities that create a spirit of place, in other words, how the intangible is manifested in the tangible, including how these can be seen in development and plat patterns, street and landscape characteristics, building traditions, associations to the San Antonio river, even proximity of familial residences and other specific asset resources that convey spirit of place.

Part 3. Managing Social Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development: a local governance perspective

Municipal agencies have a role to play in developing collaborative and integrated policies with advocacy groups, institutions and community. Implementation of strategies and tools by local municipalities can manage social change with urban development. As with many cities around the world, San Antonio is experiencing the pressures of supporting new economic development and growth while protecting community character and cultural heritage. Here, the past and the future co-exist between multiple layers of history, cultures, and social identities. Change is inevitable and is often difficult for the communities that experience it, the developers that effect it and the local governance that must manage it.

San Antonio's Office of Historic Preservation has undertaken to create inclusive and innovative policies inspired by UNESCO and ICOMOS' philosophies for the protection of intangible and tangible heritage. The office works in the communities surrounding the World Heritage San Antonio Missions as well as underserved communities retaining rich heritage in other locations of the city. The collaborative processes and outcomes include the Legacy Business Program which highlights historic businesses, community outreach events such as Restored by Light which "restores" the San Antonio Missions through illumination, and the new annual Living Heritage Symposium which brings in heritage professionals from around the world to develop action plans for the safeguarding of intangible heritage and the treatment of culturally significant properties.

Obstacles need to be understood as much as successes in empowering community and advocacy groups to be effective partners with municipalities in safeguarding cultural heritage. One evident obstacle is felt by many localities throughout the United States, but is more keenly felt in communities where underdevelopment prevails—displacement of small businesses as corporate businesses and “big box” retailers move in.

The neighborhoods around the San Antonio Missions are considered to be largely underdeveloped. The reasons are many, ranging from the area being the historical agricultural fields that fed the city for so long to the adverse effect of disproportionate investment in disenfranchised neighborhoods. One result however, is that the lack of investment on a large scale created an economy based on small businesses and “mom and pop” establishments. Many of these establishments are family-owned businesses that have been owned over generations. Additionally, many of these businesses create an authentic sense of San Antonio culture because of the goods and services they provide. Bootmakers, culinary establishments, music purveyors, building trades artisans, and hatteries are all part of the unique culture surrounding the San Antonio Missions.

The Legacy Business Program created by the Office of Historic Preservation recognizes family-owned businesses that cultivate and sustain traditions and culture the good they provide or through instruction, education and passing on of traditional knowledge. Nominations are largely provided through social media crowd-sourcing and community outreach, making it a fun and popular initiative. The program is administered city-wide, but in the World Heritage buffer zone, businesses inducted into the program may qualify for grants that assist in perpetuation of the business. Business are given access to educational resources that assist in financial and legal planning as well as a mentorship program that pairs small businesses with larger Legacy Businesses that have maintained success in some cases, for over 100 years. The program is still in its infancy but has been welcomed by the business community for both the honor and recognition it provides as well as the assistance it offers.

Conclusion

Inclusive community engagement is a necessary component in the management of heritage. Inclusive engagement advances UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 10 which focuses on the reduction of inequality. Participatory mapping as used in San Antonio, allows the community to focus in the telling of their own culture's story and informing planning and review processes. Giving the community a voice, is an effective tool in ensuring inclusivity. Sustainable Development Goal 11 focuses on making cities, inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Community empowerment through mapping and story telling initiatives support not only this goal, but also the New Urban Agenda's Quito Declaration both of which seek equitable and inclusive practices towards sustainability. While much analysis of data and results is left to be done, initial positive comments from community indicate that participatory mapping and other collaborative processes with community, as the makers of culture and heritage, offer great opportunity for managing heritage as an inclusive and collaborative effort. Overall, design objectives for growth should aspire to strengthen and enhance cultural heritage through greater awareness, appreciation and respect. Policies and practices need to foster increased pride of place within the heritage zone. Benefits will extend to the heritage tourism economy as well as the existing population. The end goal is to strengthen the outstanding universal values of intangible heritage through best principles and practice of heritage conservation design.

Programs and initiatives described above are all good ones, but there a problem remains—we do not fully understand the effectiveness of each because the field lacks measurable results. More research and dialogue is needed to guide us towards new methods, policies and best practices of intangible heritage conservation. The emerging concepts of “cultural sustainability,” which is continuity of the cultural systems of human existence, and “heritage resilience,” the capacity of cultural resources to recover from the shocks and stresses of catastrophes, address the need to move beyond previously established methods of historic preservation. This is very important given the number of disasters, natural and manmade, which are routinely causing destruction and

displacement of intangible heritage. The professionals who work in the field of historic preservation must generate more ideas needed for greater sustainability and resilience:

- to manage change while retaining continuity and enhancing the health of heritage, and
- to consider efficacy of proactive responses to threatened intangible heritage.

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Biographical Notes

William Dupont, FAIA, San Antonio Conservation Society Endowed Professor at The University of Texas at San Antonio, directs the university’s Center for Cultural Sustainability to research and expand the relevance of heritage as a significant element in sustainable design with respect for the cultural continuity of local populations. Professor Dupont established UTSA’s Graduate Certificate in Historic Preservation and teaches design studios and seminars concerning various historic preservation topics.

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