

**NARA + 20:  
ON HERITAGE PRACTICES, CULTURAL VALUES,  
AND THE CONCEPT OF AUTHENTICITY**



**Recalling** the achievements of the 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity in setting principles of respect and tolerance for cultural and heritage diversity around the world, and in expanding the concepts of cultural value and authenticity in heritage practices;

**Affirming** the importance of community participation, social inclusion, sustainable practices and intergenerational responsibility in the conservation of heritage;

**Recognizing** present challenges to the conservation and appreciation of cultural heritage resulting from globalization, urbanization, demographic changes and new technologies;

**Acknowledging** the rights of communities to maintain and transmit their particular forms of tangible and intangible cultural expressions;

**Building** on international conventions and charters, and the work done in academic and professional fora since the drafting of the Nara Document that have helped to expand the scope of cultural heritage and underscore the importance of cultural context and cultural diversity;

The Agency for Cultural Affairs (Government of Japan), in celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nara Document initiated a series of meetings of experts in cooperation with Kyushu University to evaluate and learn from the practical experiences of applying the Nara Document to the identification and management of heritage sites over the last 20 years. This Nara+20 text, building on the Himeji Recommendation identifies five key inter-related issues highlighting prioritized actions to be developed and expanded within global, national and local contexts by wider community and stakeholder involvement. These texts will be complemented by the proceedings of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Nara Document Meeting.

### **1. Diversity of heritage processes**

Just as the Nara Document indicates that authenticity varies according to the cultural context, the concept of cultural heritage itself assumes diverse forms and processes. In the last 20 years, heritage management and conservation practices have increasingly taken into consideration the social processes by which cultural heritage is produced, used, interpreted and safeguarded. In addition, social processes and perceptions of authenticity have been affected by emerging modes and technologies for accessing and experiencing heritage.

Further work is needed on methodologies for assessing this broader spectrum of cultural forms and processes, and the dynamic interrelationship between tangible and intangible heritage.

## **2. Implications of the evolution of cultural values**

The Nara Document acknowledges that cultural heritage undergoes a continuous process of evolution. In the last 20 years, recognition of this evolution has created challenges for heritage management and has led practitioners to question the validity of universal conservation principles. In addition, during this period, fruitful engagement by communities in heritage processes has given rise to the acceptance of new values that had previously gone unrecognized. These changes require that the identification of values and the determination of authenticity be based on periodic reviews that accommodate changes over time in perceptions and attitudes, rather than on a single assessment.

A better understanding is needed of the processes by which authenticity can be periodically assessed.

## **3. Involvement of multiple stakeholders**

The Nara Document assigns responsibility for cultural heritage to specific communities that generated or cared for it. The experience of the last 20 years has demonstrated that cultural heritage may be significant in different ways to a broader range of communities and interest groups that now include virtual global communities that did not exist in 1994. This situation is further complicated by the recognition that individuals can be simultaneously members of more than one community and by the imbalance of power among stakeholders, often determined by heritage legislation, decision-making mechanisms, and economic interests. Those with authority to establish or recognize the significance, value, authenticity, treatment and use of heritage resources have the responsibility to involve all stakeholders in these processes, not forgetting those communities with little or no voice. Heritage professionals should engage in community matters that may affect heritage.

Further work is needed on methodologies to identify the rights, responsibilities, representatives, and levels of involvement of communities.

## **4. Conflicting claims and interpretations**

The Nara Document calls for respect of cultural diversity in cases where cultural values appear to be in conflict. In the last 20 years it has become evident that competing values and meanings of heritage may lead to seemingly irreconcilable conflicts. To address such situations, credible and transparent processes are required to mediate heritage disputes. These processes would require that communities in conflict agree to participate in the conservation of the heritage, even when a shared understanding of its significance is unattainable.

Further work is needed on consensus-building methods to heritage practice.

## **5. Role of cultural heritage in sustainable development**

The Nara Document does not specifically address issues of culture and development. Over the last 20 years, however, the need for considering cultural heritage in sustainable development and poverty reduction strategies has gained broad acceptance. The use of cultural heritage in development strategies must take into account cultural values, processes, community concerns, and administrative practices while ensuring equitable participation in socio-economic benefits. The trade-offs between conservation of cultural heritage and economic development must be seen as part of the notion of sustainability.

Further work is required to explore the role that cultural heritage can play in sustainable development, and to identify methods of assessing trade-offs and building synergies so that cultural values and community concerns are integrated in development processes.

For the purpose of this document, the following interpretations of key words were used:

**Authenticity:** A culturally contingent quality associated with a heritage place, practice, or object that conveys cultural value; is recognized as a meaningful expression of an evolving cultural tradition; and/or evokes among individuals the social and emotional resonance of group identity.

**Conservation:** All actions designed to understand a heritage property or element, know, reflect upon and communicate its history and meaning, facilitate its safeguard, and manage change in ways that will best sustain its heritage values for present and future generations.

**Community:** Any group sharing cultural or social characteristics, interests, and perceived continuity through time, and which distinguishes itself in some respect from other groups. Some of the characteristics, interests, needs and perceptions that define the distinctiveness of a community are directly linked to heritage.

**Cultural values:** The meanings, functions, or benefits ascribed by various communities to something they designate as heritage, and which create the cultural significance of a place or object.

**Information sources:** all physical, written, oral, and figurative sources that underlie the understanding and appreciation of the nature, specificities, meaning, and transmission of cultural heritage and the collective memory it embodies.

**Stakeholder:** A person, group or organization who has a particular interest in the heritage on the basis of special associations, meanings, and/or legal and economic interests, and who can affect, or be affected, by decisions regarding the heritage.

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