Critical Heritage, Activism and Social Change

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Ulster University

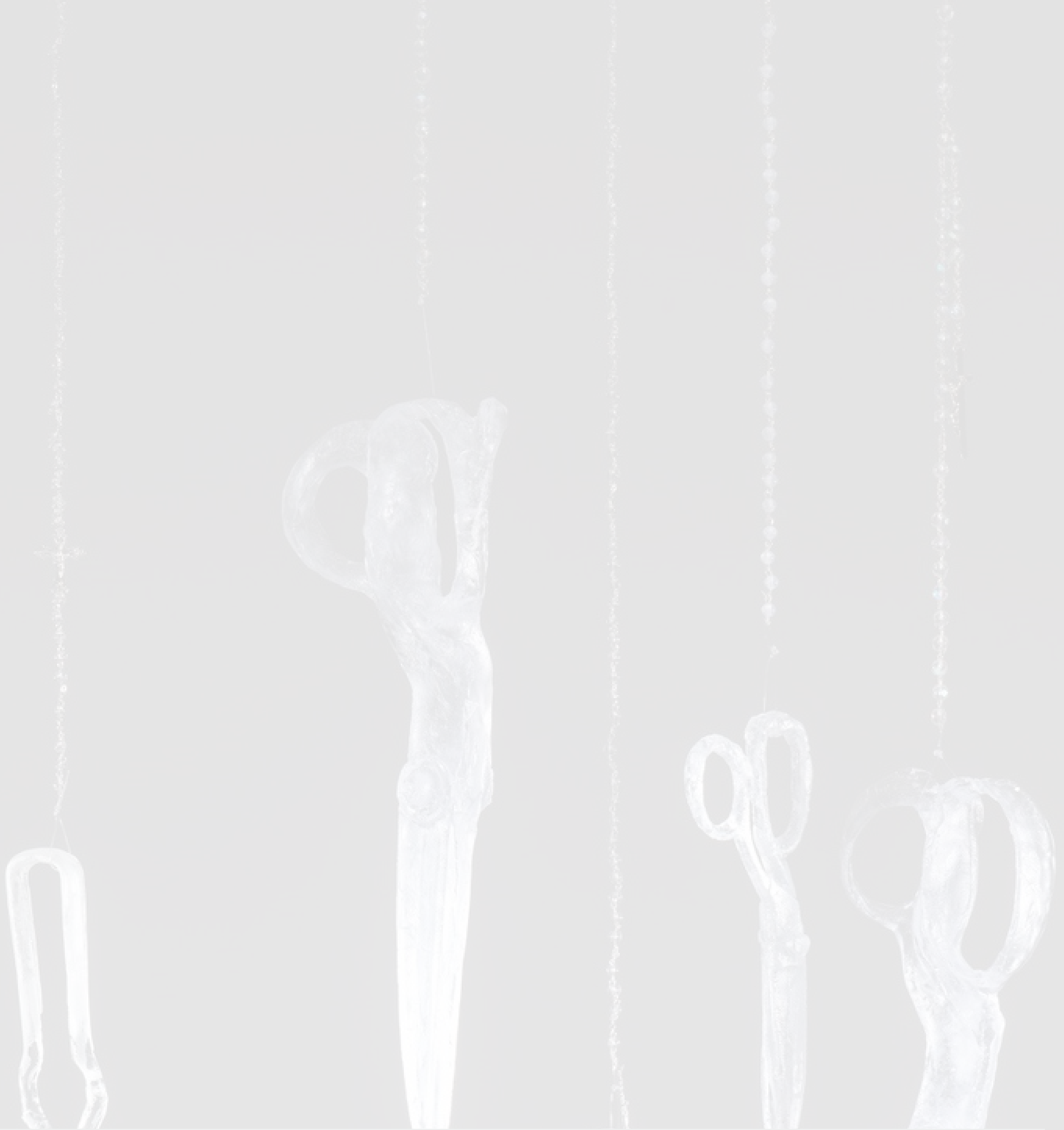
Critical Heritage, Activism and Social Change Symposium

Belfast,
19–20 January 2024

Patricia Lundy,
Philip McDermott,
and Adriana Valderama Lopez

UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

International Coalition of SITES of CONSCIENCE Europe



Cover Images

Top right
Ribbons in Iron Fence Ballarat

Middle right
Dressing Our Hidden Truths by Alison Lowry - Photo by Glenn Norwood

Base right
Diamond War Memorial

Central circle
Women Rights Initiative (WORI), Uganda, a member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience

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Professor Patricia Lundy and Dr Philip McDermott

Symposium Organising Committee

- Professor Patricia Lundy (Sociology)
- Dr Philip McDermott (Sociology)
- Professor Elizabeth Crooke (Museum and Heritage Studies)
- Dr Niall Gilmartin (Sociology)

Executive Summary

A symposium on Critical Heritage, Activism and Social Change was held on the Belfast campus of Ulster University on Friday 19th January 2024. The event was organised by Professor Patricia Lundy and Dr Philip McDermott from Sociology and assisted by members of the organising committee Professor Elizabeth Crooke and Dr Niall Gilmartin.

The symposium explored the multifaceted nature of heritage and its evolving interpretations, alongside the role of activism and participatory approaches to dealing with difficult pasts. Participants included activists, heritage professionals, NGO representatives and academics from Ireland, the UK, Denmark, Australia and Canada. A closed workshop on the following day brought diverse perspectives to the debate and explored the purpose and role of heritage in engaging with and memorialising difficult pasts. The symposium started from the standpoint that heritage transcends the mere preservation of physical artefacts and is a dynamic cultural process, intertwined with contemporary narratives and social contexts.

Three thematic strands were central to the debate on the day:

- Memorialising institutional abuse
- Intercultural and multicultural heritage
- Memorialising conflict

National and international case studies addressing each of these strands were presented and discussed in depth. Central to the discussion was the role of grassroots activism in shaping heritage discourse around difficult and contested pasts. Participants explored how their work involves challenging conventional top-down definitions and amplifies the voices of marginalised communities. Collaboration, participation, and co-design were highlighted as crucial aspects, emphasising heritage as an ongoing dialogue rather than a static concept. The examples came from those with applied evidence of the role of activism and considered what participation, collaboration, and co-design might look like.

A central aspect of the symposium was a recognition that contemporary heritage is a social tool. Heritage resources are essential for understanding the complexities of our diverse world and catalysing social change. This perspective resonates with social activism as challenging inequality and questioning power dynamics.

On the second day, a workshop involving the speakers, policymakers, heritage professionals and those with lived experience was held in collaboration with the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC). This event took place in the Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC), Belfast. Justine Di Mayo of ICSC gave a comprehensive presentation on the work of her organisation, and she explored the challenges and lessons learned from its work. Workshop participants then discussed and outlined their own hopes and aspirations for co-designed, participatory, and collaborative projects. Emanating from the symposium and workshop discussions we have identified key principles underpinning participatory, collaborative, and co-designed heritage. These principles are particularly relevant in cases where grassroots activists engage with those in powerful positions within state institutions and/or official heritage organisations (including museums)[1]. We call this activist heritage (AH). However, we hope that the Belfast principles set out in this report will be helpful to official and non-official heritage groups/organisations and those seeking to engage in bridging work and further dialogue on co-designed heritage projects

1 The process of developing these principles from the context of the conference and subsequent discussion is outlined throughout the report.

Introduction

Heritage encompasses a dynamic production and construction of knowledge about the past in the present and thus serves as a vital social process (Smith, 2006). The rise of the term 'critical heritage' has come to challenge heritage as simply being under the custodianship of professional heritage experts, or the state. Rather, a more critical perspective helps us to better understand 'the various ways in which heritage now has a stake in, and can act as a positive enabler for, the complex, multi-vector challenges that face us today' (Winter, 2013: 533).

Despite the emergence of this debate, the idea of a dominant 'authorised heritage discourse' (AHD) is still prevalent in many areas of the professional heritage sector and in decision-making processes at the level of powerful institutions or government. What heritage is and who decides this is still often 'top-down'. Such an approach can sideline marginalised or disempowered groups and restrict the co-creation of heritage initiatives (Smith, 2006). Disempowered groups are typically under-represented in collaborative design, decision-making, implementation, and monitoring processes.

Thus, the AHD embodies certain assumptions about heritage and its interpretation as a static and top-down process. This is at odds with the potential of heritage to adequately address or challenge 'dark' aspects of history in ways which more effectively work and co-design with those who have lived experience. The symposium therefore sought to act as a forum between heritage professionals, activists, policymakers, and communities to discuss and potentially challenge these perspectives.

Unequal power dynamics restrict collaboration and co-creation, and this was a core theme of the symposium. Unequal power dynamics were discussed by NGOs, victims and survivors, people with lived experience of conflict and racism, filmmakers, museum professionals, government officials and NGO representatives.
There were three interrelated strands during the event:

- Memorialising historical institutional abuse (HIA)
- Exploring multicultural and intercultural heritage
- Navigating the heritage of post-conflict environments such as Northern Ireland (NI)

Participants exchanged first-hand experiences and expertise from locations including Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, England, Denmark, Australia, and Canada. This exchange enabled participants to draw tangible lessons from best practice and fostered deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of heritage and its transformative potential. Examples of bottom-up participatory co-created heritage projects were showcased from grassroots local, national, and international case studies.

Presentations were made by the following:

- **Lorraine Daniels** is an indigenous member of the Long Plain First Nation, Manitoba, Canada, and a residential school survivor. She is currently the executive director of the National Indigenous Residential School Museum of Canada. The museum is located along the boundary of the City of Portage la Prairie in the province of Manitoba. She spoke on the journey of the museum's establishment *'From a place of hurting to a place of healing'.*

- **Sarah Smed** is a museum leader of the Danish Welfare Museum and a trained historian and activist. She presented various initiatives of the museum in her talk *'We are marked by it: Voicing the history of Danish special care'.*

- **Dr David McGinniss** is an activist and partnerships co-ordinator at the University of Melbourne. He works closely with survivor groups and has conducted research on memorialising the legacies of institutional abuse in Australia. He presented on the 'More than our childhoods' project. He is also co-director of Ashtree Projects in Victoria, Australia and presented *'Whose pain? Whose shame? Integrating heritage and histories in Ballarat, Australia'.*

- **Alison Lowry** is an artist and a graduate of Ulster University. She holds an MA from the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. Her presentation was on her art exhibition *(A)Dressing Our Hidden Truths* at the National Museum of Ireland. The exhibition is an artistic response to Ireland's legacy of institutional abuse.

- **Michelle Charters** is, since January 2024, head of the International Slavery Museum, Liverpool. She is the first woman of colour to lead a UK national museum. Prior to this, she worked for several decades as a community leader and activist. She spoke on *'Activism and the role of the International Slavery Museum'.*

- **Lilian Seenoi-Barr** is director of programmes at North West Migrants Forum (NWMF) and Dr Naomi Green was programmes manager at the NWMF (until March 2024). They spoke on the emergence of heritage as activism in light of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder in 2020. Seenoi-Barr and Green considered how issues of black history and heritage are relevant to a more diverse Northern Ireland, which inspired the establishment of NWMF's Black History and Heritage in Northern Ireland project.

- **Donna Namukasa** is a musician and community activist who uses music, particularly drums, as a form of intangible cultural heritage that challenges racism. She spoke on how music can be a form of community development. Her presentation was entitled *'Music as community activism: Challenging racism through intangible heritage'.*

- **Dr Seán Murray** is an award-winning film/documentary maker and director of Relapse Pictures, a Belfast-based production company specialising in a range of work including documentary and drama videos. In his presentation *'Reclaiming cultural memory: Storytelling in the post-conflict era',* he spoke about filmmaking as a form of advocacy and the challenges of undertaking such work in a divided society.

- **Dr Paul Mullan** is the director of the National Lottery Heritage Fund in Northern Ireland and recently completed a PhD on the notion of ethical remembering during Northern Ireland's 'Decade of Centenaries'. His presentation focused on *'Ethical remembering of the 'Troubles''.*

Following the presentations on the first day, a workshop was held on Saturday 20 January in collaboration with the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC). Justine Di Mayo (ICSC) gave a comprehensive presentation on the Coalition's international work, highlighting challenges and lessons learned. Participants discussed their own hopes and aspirations for co-designed, participatory, and collaborative projects.

Insights from the Literature: Bottom-up, Participatory and Co-designed Approaches to Heritage

Harrison (2012), in attempting to answer the question of what heritage is, focuses on two key understandings: firstly, the top-down approach, where the state classifies and promotes certain sites as 'official' heritage; secondly, the 'bottom-up' relationship between individuals, objects, places and memories that leads to the creation of 'unofficial' forms of heritage, typically at the local level. Critical heritage studies is concerned with these processes and their interconnectedness. Harrison argues that in addition to tangible objects and places, heritage also includes various intangible practices that are passed down from generation to generation. These intangible aspects of heritage, such as language, culture, music, literature, or clothing, are just as important as physical heritage sites in defining our sense of identity (Harrison, 2012). The two, however, are intricately connected.

In addition, heritage has specific and well-defined technical and legal definitions. As Carman (2002: 22) observes, heritage is formulated through a process of categorisation. For example, sites inscribed on the World Heritage List must be actively conserved, have formal documentation and policies for their management. However, even where places are not formally recognised as heritage sites, they may have deep meaning to people and communities.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, debates sparked by Patrick Wright's On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain (1986) and Hewison's The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline (1987) criticised the manipulation of history for political gain, especially in the UK context. Wright noted how heritage legislation revived wartime patriotism, while Hewison condemned the commercialisation and whitewashing of the past. Both authors linked these issues to societal changes such as deindustrialisation and migration, arguing that idealising the past in such a way detracts from using the past to address our contemporary challenges. Despite their criticisms, Raphael Samuel (1994) argued that heritage can be democratic, offering diverse perspectives and fostering senses of 'belonging' for all. Harrison (2013) suggests that Samuel's insights foreshadowed modern discussions of heritage as a dynamic process, closely linked to debates about representation within the museum sector and other aspects of heritage work.

Laurajane Smith's analysis sheds light on the inherent biases embedded in what she calls the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD), which refers to a dominant set of ideas and practices that shape the understanding and management of contemporary heritage. The AHD is characterised by an emphasis on what seem to be 'official' narratives, typically sanctioned by institutions such as governments, museums, and heritage organisations (Crooke, 2008; Urry, 1990). Moreover, the AHD tends to prioritise certain types of heritage that are deemed valuable according to established criteria, often focusing on monumental architecture, material artefacts and elite historical narratives. Such an approach serves to exclude alternative or marginalised perspectives on heritage. The AHD tends to prioritise and arguably serve the perspectives of experts and authorities. A consequence of this is that the voices of local communities, minority groups and subaltern narratives are marginalised or silenced. This exclusionary aspect of the AHD perpetuates power imbalances by limiting the representation of minority groups, working-class communities, and subaltern narratives within the heritage landscape. Importantly, in the context of the symposium, the AHD can also 'silence' dark histories which it was directly involved in.

If the AHD is a top-down approach, an alternative practice could be a participatory co-designed approach to heritage. Co-design involves collaborative and participatory processes that actively involve local communities, stakeholders and diverse voices in shaping heritage practices and narratives. In participatory co-designed projects, decision-making is shared rather than controlled by a select group of experts or authorities, thereby promoting inclusivity. Inclusive processes empower marginalised groups, allowing for a more democratic and equitable representation of heritage (McDermott, 2018; McDermott and McDowell, 2021). In essence, co-design represents a shift away from authoritative control towards collaborative and decentralised forms of authority, where multiple voices and perspectives contribute to shaping heritage narratives and practices (Crooke, 2010). Understanding the nature of participation, therefore, requires a focus on the redistribution of power among various groups. Recognising the varying degrees of influence participants can wield in decision-making processes underscores the intrinsic link between participation and power. An overarching objective is to empower all stakeholders involved in the process.

In her exploration of critical heritage studies (CHS) and the AHD, Patricia Lundy introduces the notion of Activist Heritage (AH) as a new concept (Lundy, 2024). This challenges conventional notions of heritage making by advocating a bottom-up, survivor-led approach, as opposed to the typical top-down methods employed by governments, museums and tourist boards. Lundy argues that AH can broaden the concept of heritage, making it more inclusive and enabling marginalised experiences to be acknowledged, narrated, and commemorated. AH involves especially involves co-design because it emphasises collaborative and participatory processes to empower marginalised voices, local communities and diverse stakeholders in shaping heritage narratives.

In dealing with the delicate balance between forgetting and remembering contested pasts, most communities are affected by the way in which memory is constructed and the narrative is landscaped. In the desire to construct a state or a new political balance, the role of victims and minorities is often ignored or relegated to the periphery as the dominant narratives seek to impose their understanding of the past on the larger collective (McDermott, 2023; Rosato and Lundy, 2023). We have seen this in many parts of the world, and it is a lesson in how states and politically powerful groups often use people's experiences for their own political agenda. The process of shaping memory needs to bring people together, not divide them, so dialogue on contemporary issues needs to be as participatory and inclusive as possible (See McDermott et al., 2016). However, the establishment of heritage projects are usually framed in a political struggle between the forces that call for remembering and those that call for forgetting and oblivion.

Perspectives such as those discussed above served as a key underlying concern of the symposium. The event was driven by the need to address the complexity of heritage and its evolving interpretations, particularly in relation to participatory approaches to dealing with difficult pasts. The following section of the report provides diverse insights from the symposium's speakers that illustrates the complex dynamics of power when co-creating and co-designing projects from the bottom up (See Lundy 2022).

Belfast Statement of Principles on Activist Heritage

It is not possible to present a fully developed conceptualisation of activist heritage in this short report. Nevertheless, what follows are key principles emerging from the examples discussed at the symposium. We propose that these principles should underpin activist heritage, participation, and co-design.

What is activist heritage (AH)?

Activist heritage (AH) was viewed as a corrective to the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) by many of the participants. AH can function as a counter-narrative in the struggle over 'forgetting,' ignoring and minimising historical injustices. However, there were nuances as to how activism was viewed and how it related to heritage work. Some participants did not see themselves as activists and expressed reservations about applying the label to them and their work. It was noted that in some cultural contexts the term activist has different connotations. Several participants commented on the perceived risks of advocating AH and challenges putting it into practice in formal heritage settings. Therefore, it is recognised that some individuals or groups may feel uncomfortable about identifying as activists due to cultural, political, or institutional perceived pressures, risks, or constraints.

However, what we would draw attention to are the processes and principles that underpin AH, rather than the label activist.

1. AH is distinctive in its goals. AH can be conducted by individuals, a group, or collaborating groups. It can involve non-state actors whose goals, strategy and public stance are to work towards generating change and/or transformation in dominant memory narratives, and to inform practice. But AH can also be conducted within the remit of official state-sponsored heritage or bodies funded via state support (see Danish Welfare Museum). AH seeks to challenge knowledge production – whose voices are heard? Who are the experts? Whose knowledge is valued? This would be a counterweight to the elitism and hierarchy that pervades conventional forms of knowledge production, typified in the AHD.

2. AH is also distinctive in how it is carried out or its methodology. It is participatory, collaborative, egalitarian, emancipatory, activist in orientation and in solidarity with struggles pursuing justice and social transformation. These principles could be adhered to, but the label activism not applied. Importantly, AH processes and practices should facilitate agency and empowerment of marginalised groups.

3. AH has the potential to create spaces and unlock transformative dynamics that empower marginalised groups, generate a sense of ownership, and create pathways to justice and social change. However, we caution against over-eulogising AH – and to guard against perpetuating unequal power relations, hierarchies, and exclusions. In any form of AH we advocate a continuous process of reflection on the process at all stages of co-designed and collaborative working.

What is participation and co-design?

Participation is fundamental to AH. The importance of participation is increasingly recognised internationally and underscored in policy. However, research shows that survivor participation and the inclusion of those with lived experiences of dark pasts is often 'superficial' or 'tokenism';

they are at best consultees and rarely in decision- making roles (Hamber and Lundy 2020; Lundy 2020; Lundy, 2022, McDermott, 2023). Adhering to AH principles means that heritage activities which deal with dark and difficult pasts should be led from the bottom-up by those marginalised groups whose lives have been directly impacted by these pasts. They should participate in each stage of a heritage process – the initiation, co-design, development of strategy and putting of strategy into action – with full participation in decision-making, management, and evaluation. They should not be the passive recipients of decisions taken elsewhere, by others.

What exactly is participation? There are several different schools of thought on this question. Participation can be considered as both an end in itself and as a means to an end. What participation is, therefore, varies and may involve different levels of involvement, input, and control over the process. It may be described as 'being listened to,' having a say, and/or being consulted. However, if adhering to AH principles, participation extends beyond this understanding and minimalist approach. It should involve fully empowering the 'voiceless,' to have more direct power as real decision-makers, at each stage to shape the design and implementation of heritage work in a partnership of equals. This means the co-design of heritage projects. The essence is change and the reversal of role, behaviour, relationship, and learning. As Chambers notes, 'outsiders do not dominate and lecture; they facilitate, sit down, listen, and learn' (1997:103). Indeed, in much of the literature we can trace the rise of participation to the understanding that the marginalised and alienated must be included in the design and implementation of processes intended to assist them.

What are the benefits and/or harms?

There are many benefits to participation for marginalised groups, including empowerment, agency, and decreased isolation. Participation can make such groups feel valued and dignified, generating meaning, personal transformation, and recognition (Hamber and Lundy 2020). Participation is as much about the process as the outcome, and if carried out rigorously, is potentially emancipatory and transformative (Lundy 2022; Lundy, 2024). At its heart AH offers an alternative pathway to framing heritage – one that puts addressing marginalised groups' needs centre-stage and drives approaches and processes.

With regards to harm, crucial here is inclusivity and recognition of the potential harmful effects upon 'unrecognised,' conflated, or 'overlooked' voices of individuals/groups leaving them feeling silenced' or frustrated. At the same time, the over-representation of more articulate and/or those 'who shout the loudest'/ 'who claim to speak for' - are just some of the challenges. It is also worth pointing out that some groups/individuals may not wish to be 'burdened' with such obligations or powers they do not wish to exercise.

For institutions there are also benefits including legitimizing, responding to local needs, generating 'buy in' and embedding local ownership in heritage projects. Regarding harm for institutions, there may be perceived tensions, risks, and challenges. These perceived concerns are worthy of further exploration, reflection, and research.

What we have drawn from the workshop in Belfast is that marginalised groups are often not active participants in co-designing and implementing heritage; they are not in decision-making roles and their needs are not driving the process. In this regard, if heritage lacks meaningful participation in the co-design of projects, it could itself function as a form of disempowerment and might generate resentment and opposition from the very people it claims to honour. Moreover, in the struggle over memory, heritage could function to gloss over past wrongs, deter further scrutiny, placate, and disempower marginalised groups. This raises crucial questions about the purpose and value of heritage to society and marginalised groups on the one hand, and the state and other powerful institutions on the other.

We contend that a transformation and re-conceptualisation of heritage from the bottom up is needed. AH provides an alternative pathway to framing heritage that puts the marginalised and their justice needs centre-stage. It challenges notions of who the experts are and whose knowledge matters. If implemented rigorously, AH could create spaces and unlock transformative dynamics that empower, generate a sense of ownership, and create pathways to justice and social change. AH raises important questions about the processes and practices of memory work.

We argue that the principles that underpin AH should inform official heritage policy and practice.

Symposium Discussion on Participatory and Co-created Heritage Projects

Panel 1: Historical institutional abuse

National Indigenous Residential School Museum of Canada

Lorraine Daniels is an indigenous member of the Long Plain First Nation in Canada and a residential school survivor. She is a prominent advocate for truth and reconciliation on the experiences of indigenous peoples in Canada and gave a presentation on the establishment of the National Indigenous Residential School Museum of Canada in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.

What is significant and sensitive is that the museum is housed on the site of a former residential school. Residential schools were endorsed by the Canadian state with the support of Christian churches and ran from the 1860s to the 1990s to detach first nations from their land and culture and 'assimilate' them into a perceived notion of a dominant Canadian culture. During this period, many suffered physical and sexual abuse as well as the trauma of separation from their traditional way of life, culture and language.

The museum was established after many years of community lobbying involving survivors' voices at all levels – even when those survivors' opinions may have differed. Daniels' presentation highlighted the building's unique transformation from a place of hurt to a place of healing through this complex process. She described it as a space where history and culture have intersected on a journey of reconciliation and healing.

The museum is governed by an indigenous board of directors. Survivors are thus part of the board of management, which means that engagement with government authorities or official heritage bodies will always include survivors' voices. Stories are, therefore, conveyed within the museum and in discussions about the museum via indigenous voices and leadership. Throughout her presentation, Daniels noted that this initiative received widespread support through resolutions and statements of support from survivors, community members and regional and national leadership and, eventually, from the museum's important endorsement by the Assembly of First Nations in 2001. Such a mandate was made possible through clear grassroots voice to the authorities that indigenous peoples must have their stories about the residential school system in Canada told. The building was designated a Provincial Heritage Site in 2005 and a National Historic Site in 2020.

Significantly, the museum's grassroots approach ensures that its direction also acknowledges indigenous cultural systems and worldviews that draw on traditional practices and knowledge. The museum began as a two-room display and has expanded to several exhibition spaces. Each space looks at a theme relating to the residential school period, the impact of residential schools, or celebrating survivor activism and the survival of indigenous cultures more generally. The museum now also contains a support space for visitors and survivors, a memorial garden, and a large communal space to host meetings, share meals and view films. The museum serves as a sacred space for community connection and healing, where a rich tapestry of workshops, healing ceremonies and traditional pow-wows weave together to foster unity and resilience in the face of historical adversity. At the symposium, Daniels stated: 'within these walls, efforts to revive and preserve indigenous languages breathe new life into ancient tongues, ensuring that cultural heritage endures for future generations. Cultural teachings become a cornerstone, passing on traditions that have stood the test of time' (Daniels, 19 January 2024).

This example indicates that one of the most important elements in co-creation is cultural sensitivity and understanding the ways in which other groups or communities may 'see' the world, engage with their pasts and try to overcome past and ongoing traumas.

Inside the museum, the walls echo with the stories of survivors, their voices mingling with the whispers of the past. Visitors come face to face with the devastating impacts of the residential school system on the health and well-being of indigenous peoples, families and communities. They learn of the intergenerational trauma passed down through generations, a legacy of abuse and neglect that continues to reverberate to this day.

Daniels reflected that the role of the museum is to educate wider society about the history and impact of residential schools and ensure survivors' voices and experiences are 'heard' and documented. Moreover, the museum is a place to celebrate indigenous cultures and foster healing by providing a safe place for survivors to share stories; and inspire action by generating dialogue that will motivate people to rectify past wrongs.

Learning points from the National Indigenous Residential School Museum

- The central role that survivors have in all stages of the creation and development of the museum and memorialisation process, their key decision-making, governance and management role, while not without challenges, has led to a more 'authentic', acceptable interpretation of the story of residential schools based on lived experiences.

- This bottom-up approach demonstrates how a survivor-led participatory approach is important to ensure that survivor voice(s) are centre-stage, that they have ownership and control of the project.

- The leadership provided by the survivors themselves intersected with other issues of trauma such as the loss of language, culture and identity and provided a potential transformative role in inspiring action to rectify past wrongs.

- The museum's 'activist approach' links the experiences of the past with challenges in contemporary society and importantly gained recognition from official heritage processes. For example, the designation of the museum as a National Historic Site.

Indian Residential School | Source:
Canada. Department of Mines and Technical Surveys. Library and Archives Canada, PA-047850

/https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indian_Residential_School,_Portage_la_Prairie,_Manitoba,_circa_1914%E2%88%921915_Pensionnat_indien,_Portage_la_Prairie_(Manitoba),_vers_1914-1915_(13998648628).jpg#:~:text=BiblioArchives%20/%20LibraryArchives,%20CC%20BY%202.0%20%3Chttps://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0%3E,%20via%20Wikimedia%20Commons

Danish Welfare Museum (Forsorgsmuseum)

The Danish Welfare Museum (Forsorgsmuseum) is part of Svendborg Museum and is housed in the only listed and best-preserved poorhouse in the Nordic countries. It was built in 1872 and closed in 1974, when the buildings were handed over to the museum. Today, the museum sheds light on a lesser-known aspect of Denmark's past, as it serves as a custodian of Denmark's social history, with a particular focus on the lives of those who lived on the margins of society. It strives to preserve, research and tell the stories of people who lived in various welfare institutions, including children's 'homes', poorhouses, workhouses and old people's homes.

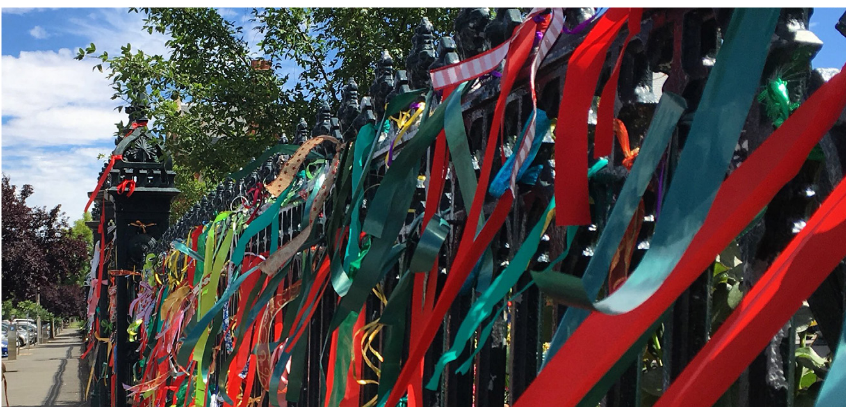
The museum played a key role in the compilation of the Godhavn report, an important document in Danish social history which investigated abuse in children's homes between 1945 and 1976. As Sarah Smed, the museum's director, explained, 'the museum works to preserve, research and communicate society's care as it has taken place in institutions as diverse as orphanages, poorhouses, workhouses and old people's homes – with a special focus on the period from the mid-1800s to the present day' (Smed, 19 January 2024). The museum has sought to give a voice to people whose stories have not been, or are not being, told.

The museum's mission and vision are to increase society's knowledge of Danish social history, based on strong museum expertise, and to document the conditions for vulnerable and housed citizens in the past, present and future. Smed emphasised the museum's activist approach in linking the experiences of the past with the challenges of today: 'We challenge and break down prejudices about vulnerable and housed citizens, and together with them we work for social justice' (Smed, 19 January 2024). The aim is to amplify the voices of those who have been historically marginalised through strategic partnerships, interdisciplinary research, and targeted outreach, working with people whose stories have been overlooked or ignored.

According to Smed, the museum believes that by engaging in debates about social history, welfare and social policy in a historical context, it can offer valuable insights, engage visitors and strengthen their commitment to democracy. As such, the museum is committed to socially responsible research, teaching and communication, using interdisciplinary approaches and embracing personal diversity as a source of strength. Smed believes that the museum's activist approach has the potential to serve as a catalyst for dialogue and an agent for social change. In addition, she explained that it is imperative for the museum to remain vigilant and adaptable in the face of political and social change. Smed also stressed the need to ensure the museum's financial stability as an essential part of its continued success and sustainability.

Learning points from Danish Welfare Museum (Forsorgsmuseum)

- The museum's activist approach has the potential to serve as a catalyst for dialogue and an agent for social change, as it allows for the linking of past experiences with the challenges of today.
- By bringing to light the often-overlooked parts of society's history, obscured by barriers and taboos, the museum plays a central role in democracy. It amplifies the stories of the poor, the mentally or physically disabled, the homeless, the isolated, the marginalised and the orphaned. Together with these people, it strives for social justice, thereby strengthening democratic principles.



Ribbons in Iron Fence of St Patrick's Cathedral Ballarat

Source:
Belinda Coates

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ec/Ribbons_in_iron_fence_of_St_Patrick%27s_Cathedral_Ballarat.jpg

Whose pain? Whose shame? Integrating heritage and histories in Ballarat, Australia

David McGinniss began his presentation with an intricate exploration of the multifaceted character of Ballarat, Australia. Acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land, the Wadda Wurrung people, McGinniss acknowledged their enduring connection to the land and that their sovereignty was never ceded. He explained the significance of the name 'Ballarat' in the Wadda Wurrung language, which translates roughly to a 'resting place'. This notion of a resting place stands in stark ironic contrast to Ballarat's histories of Colonisation, the violent destruction of its landscapes through the transformations of the goldrush, and histories of institutionalisation, separation from families and cultures, and the perpetration and cover-up and abuse for which Ballarat has now become known.

Drawing on his background as a historian and social services professional, McGinniss highlighted his involvement in researching the history of institutions such as the Ballarat Children's Home and Orphanage and his advocacy for policy reform and accountability, delving into why Ballarat has come to prominence, particularly in the aftermath of the 2017 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This inquiry exposed systemic failures within institutions across Australia, but especially in Ballarat, sparking grassroots movements such as 'LOUD fence'- the tying of ribbons to the fence of institutional buildings as a symbol of support and acknowledgment of and by survivors of sexual abuse. In many ways the ribbons act as a ritual of memorial for survivors and as a challenge to church and institutional authority. Efforts to acknowledge survivors publicly, such as the Continuous Voices project initiated by community activists and subsequently managed by the City of Ballarat, and the transformation of institutions such as Child and Family Services Ballarat (Cafs), which is the modern organisation that used to manage the Ballarat Children's Home and Orphanage, underlined the commitment some institutions are now taking in Ballarat to acknowledge historical injustices.

The LOUD fence movement has emerged as a visible manifestation of community solidarity and awareness, challenging the prevailing culture of shame and secrecy surrounding institutional abuse.

Through public expressions of support and recognition, many people have embarked on a journey of acknowledgment, offering valuable lessons for communities facing similar challenges around the world. Reclaiming the notion of 'common knowledge' and challenging power structures, initiatives like LOUD fence represent a shift towards accountability and empowerment. McGinniss stated that by confronting its painful past with courage and compassion, people in Ballarat can set an example for communities around the world, demonstrating the transformative potential of collective activism, that can open dialogue to drive institutional change and justice (McGinniss, 19 January 2024).

McGinniss went on to discuss the need to critically examine historical narratives, highlighting the dichotomy between perceived narratives of prosperity and the harsh realities experienced by marginalised communities historically. He emphasised the need to dismantle complacent notions embedded in collective identities and urged a re-evaluation of historical events through a lens of social justice and equity.

Learning points from Whose pain? Whose shame?

- The need to critically examine historical narratives, particularly those shaped by colonial legacies and dominant perspectives. Challenging complacent notions embedded in collective identities, individuals and communities can gain a deeper understanding of historical events and acknowledge the often-overlooked experiences of marginalised groups. This process of re-evaluation allows for a more nuanced understanding of history and promotes social justice and equity.

- The transformative power of grassroots movements, such as the LOUD fence initiative in Ballarat, to challenge dominant narratives of shame and silence around institutional abuse. These movements serve as platforms for public expressions of solidarity and support, fostering community resilience and promoting healing and reconciliation. By amplifying survivors' voices and challenging power structures, grassroots movements play a crucial role in driving institutional change and advocating for justice and accountability.

(A)Dressing Our Hidden Truths

The exhibition (A)Dressing Our Hidden Truths opened at the National Museum of Ireland in March 2019. It is the creation of curator Dr Audrey Whitty and artist Alison Lowry. The exhibition is an artistic response to the legacy of Magdalene Laundries in Ireland. The Magdalene Laundries operated in Ireland throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. It is estimated that 30,000 Irish women went through the laundry system in that time. The exhibition is a powerful testament to the grim discoveries made in Ireland, notably the mass grave of 796 children found in Tuam, on the former site of St Mary's Mother and Baby Home, and the harrowing realities of the Magdalene Laundries.

In the symposium, Alison Lowry explained that her artistic exploration is inspired by deeply disturbing issues such as child abuse and domestic violence, expressed through the medium of glass. (A)Dressing Our Hidden Truths was a collaborative effort to explore over 200 years of atrocities perpetrated by the Catholic Church and the Irish State against women and children. Lowry's choice of medium, 'pâte de verre' or 'paste of glass', known for its ethereal beauty, offers a stark contrast to the darkness of the subject matter. This juxtaposition intensifies the emotional impact of her artwork, drawing viewers into a visceral experience. Through a combination of glass sculptures, text, audio recordings and video installations, Lowry immerses her audience in the harrowing narratives of survivors from these institutions.

Located in the National Museum of Ireland – Decorative Arts and History in Dublin, Lowry described how the exhibition's setting adds another layer of depth to the viewer's experience. The dimly lit space with black-painted rooms creates an atmosphere of solemnity and introspection. The exhibition takes visitors on an emotional journey through the shadows of history. On entering the exhibition, visitors are greeted by a life-size apron made from unfired pâte de verre over fabric, symbolising the work and loss of identity experienced by women in these institutions. Another piece features glass scissors dangling from rosaries amid piles of human hair – a chilling representation of the dehumanisation and cruelty endured by internees.

(A)Dressing Our Hidden Truths 3 by Alison Lowry
Photo by Glenn Norwood

(A)Dressing Our Hidden Truths 4 by Alison Lowry - Photo by Glenn Norwood

Lowry also shared that throughout the exhibition, audio testimonies from survivors accompany each artwork, providing insight into their lived experiences. Lowry noted that the recordings are intended to evoke deep sadness and empathy, juxtaposed with the exquisite beauty of the glass sculptures, highlighting the stark contrast between the brutality of reality and the fragility of memory (Lowry, 19 January 2024).

The artist said that she wants the exhibition to act as a catalyst for reflection and dialogue, encouraging viewers to confront uncomfortable truths and bear witness to the untold stories of those who have suffered in silence. She believes that art can help amplify the voices of survivors and shed light on the dark chapters of history, and so (A)Dressing Our Hidden Truths seeks to break the cycle of silence and complicity surrounding institutional abuse. For Lowry, the exhibition was also an opportunity for co-creation, she explained, as she presented the collaborative video piece with artist Jayne Cherry. The video is a performance piece in which Cherry attempts to walk 35 steps in heavy glass slippers to illustrate how difficult it is for women to leave abusive relationships. She attempts to illustrate the statistic that on average a woman will be assaulted by her partner 35 times before she calls the police (Lowry, 19 January 2024).

Lowry sees the exhibition as a call to action, urging society to reckon with its past and demand accountability for the injustices inflicted on vulnerable populations. Through her art, Lowry invites viewers to become active participants in the process of healing and reconciliation, fostering empathy and understanding in the face of unspeakable trauma.

Learning points from (A)Dressing Our Hidden Truths

- The power of art as a catalyst for social change is clear. Lowry's exhibition illustrates the transformative potential of art to raise awareness and stimulate social dialogue. The exhibition serves as a poignant reminder of the lasting impact of institutional abuse and highlights the role of artists in bearing witness to historical injustices and advocating for justice and accountability.

- The importance of confronting uncomfortable truths is also clear. (A)Dressing Our Hidden Truths asks viewers to confront uncomfortable truths about the dark chapters of history, including the Catholic Church's and the State's systemic abuse of women and children. By amplifying the voices of survivors and shedding light on hidden atrocities, the exhibition challenges societal complacency and forces individuals to reckon with the complexity of the past.

(A)Dressing Our Hidden Truths 3 by Alison Lowry - Photo by Glenn Norwood

Panel 2: Intercultural and multicultural heritage

The International Slavery Museum, Liverpool

Panel 2 opened with a presentation from community activist Michelle Charters. As head of the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, Charters is the first black woman to head a national museum in Britain. The museum is the world's only national institution dedicated to the profound history of the transatlantic slave trade and its continuing impact. The presentation reflected on Charters' extensive activist work over 30 years. For the past 17 years, she has been the CEO of the Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre in Toxteth, Liverpool. This multifaceted centre is a testament to the vision of the Liverpool Black Sisters, an organisation forged in the 1970s to combat the myriad forms of discrimination faced by the black community. In addition, Charters is the founding chair of the Merseyside Black History Month Group and holds the distinction of being the first black woman to be appointed as a trustee of Liverpool's Everyman and Playhouse Theatres.

Charters explained that upon her initial encounter with what was then referred to as the Transatlantic Slavery Gallery nearly three decades ago, she dedicated herself to join a collective effort aimed at comprehending, interpreting and disseminating knowledge about the anguish and tribulations endured by the victims of slavery. Since that moment, Charters has harnessed the emotions of indignation and sorrow that she felt when she encountered fetters and relics from Africa, many of which were forcibly taken or acquired through exploitation by slave traders. She declared that 'my mission has been to preserve the memory of my ancestors, their harrowing journey and our imperative to preserve their history for posterity' (Charters, 19 January 2024).

The International Slavery Museum is a place of remembrance and action. Through the museum's collections, public engagement and research, the museum explores its impact and legacy. Charters describes the museum as a campaigning museum that actively engages with contemporary human rights issues: 'We combat ignorance and challenge intolerance by building partnerships with museums, communities and organisations that share our vision' (Charters, 19 January 2024). In this context, the role of those with lived experiences of the contemporary impact of slavery, such as racism and discrimination, is a vital element in the sincerity of the collaboration.

Between about 1500 and 1865, Africans were enslaved and transported across the Atlantic by European and American companies, mainly as labour, especially on plantations. Liverpool ships facilitated the transport of around 1.5 million enslaved Africans on around 5,000 voyages. Charters argues that millions of people of all ages and genders are still forced into slavery-like situations around the world today. Although not always labelled as such, the exploitation they endure mirrors the conditions of traditional slavery: they are treated as commodities, forced to work for minimal or no pay, and subject to the whims of their exploiters. This form of modern slavery persists despite being outlawed in most countries. These contemporary concerns thus link the past to the present and resonate with contemporary struggles. Future plans include a significant redevelopment and investment of £58 million for the International Slavery Museum and Maritime Museum. The presentation noted the continued centrality of the local community. Michelle Charters stated:

> The Museum's commitment to community engagement is, therefore, at the heart of our initiatives. From the outset, a range of activities – including workshops, events, meetings, surveys, and interviews – have been carried out with a variety of local groups. This collaborative approach ensures that changes to our museums are co-created and respond to the needs and aspirations of the community (Charters, 19 January 2024).

In addition, Charters emphasised the importance of a community-led approach to ensure that the voices of those most directly affected by the legacies of transatlantic and modern slavery are not only heard, but actively engaged in the redevelopment of the museum. This inclusive strategy aims to be a catalyst for change both nationally and internationally. By fostering a programme characterised by academic rigour, robust debate, and fruitful exchange, the museum aims to become a central hub for organisations across the sector. This will empower them to initiate and lead their own initiatives for change, thereby amplifying the impact of the museum's journey and advancing the cause of social justice worldwide.

Learning points from the International Slavery Museum

- The importance of historical context in understanding contemporary issues is paramount. By examining the history of the transatlantic slave trade and its enduring legacy, we gain insight into the roots of contemporary challenges such as human trafficking and forced labour. Understanding the historical context allows us to identify patterns of exploitation and injustice that persist today, despite legal prohibition.

- The importance of community engagement and collaboration in addressing complex social issues is also central to the museums remit. Community engagement is critical in shaping the development and direction of initiatives to address the legacies of slavery in a collaborative way. By actively engaging with diverse communities and amplifying the voices of those directly affected by the legacy of the slave trade, organisations such as the International Slavery Museum can ensure that their efforts continue to be relevant, inclusive and impactful.

- The emphasis on collaboration and inclusivity not only enriches the work being done, but also fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among affected communities, ultimately contributing to more effective and sustainable solutions.

The North-West Migrants Forum

Lilian Seenoi-Barr and Naomi Green represented the North-West Migrants Forum (NWMF), a leading anti-racism charity in the north-west of Ireland. The organisation was established in 2012 and its vision encompasses a profound effort to uplift lives and reshape the narratives surrounding black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. This vision is realised through a concerted effort to combat prejudice and stereotypes, normalise access to services and foster an environment of respect, fairness, equality and success. Central to this mission is the provision of support and guidance through several avenues, including the facilitation of funded events and projects. These initiatives aim to educate and empower participants from both BAME and traditional communities to challenge negative perceptions and discriminatory policies that affect their lives. They also aim to equip individuals with the skills and confidence to bring about meaningful change within their communities through a participatory approach. Lilian Seenoi-Barr reflected on the origins of the organisation, its milestones and the work still to be done. She said that 12 years ago, NWMF embarked on a noble mission, driven by a vision of a society in which racial equality goes beyond aspiration to become a tangible reality for all. 'Our journey serves as a poignant reminder of the power inherent in community engagement, the resilience of collective endeavour and the unwavering essence of hope' (Seenoi-Barr, 19 January 2019).

Seenoi-Barr and Green further assert that the forum's pioneering programmes have not only impacted lives but have also sparked profound change including on questions around heritage and the past. These initiatives have cultivated a community in which individuals, regardless of their background, can find solace and a sense of inclusion.

In their presentation NWMF explored the Black History and Heritage in Northern Ireland project. The BLM movement, sparked by the senseless killing of George Floyd, reverberated globally, compelling individuals and organisations around the world to confront systemic racism and advocate for racial justice. The presentation recognised the importance of this movement in stimulating conversations about black history and heritage, particularly in Northern Ireland, a region grappling with its own complex sociopolitical landscape. This project is led by members of the NWMF, most of whom were involved in the BLM protests in 2020. Protestors came to the realisation of the need for better education on the important contributions made by black people to Northern Ireland and that this has often been a 'silenced' and lesser-known part of the region's history. The NWMF has created a programme that is developing education tools for use in schools, an exhibition for display in local museums and libraries and a book to accompany the project. The materials act as an intercultural approach where, again, those with lived experience of racism and discrimination lead the debate from their own perspectives in dialogue with the wider populations across generations.

By highlighting the rich and diverse heritage of black individuals and communities, the project aims to promote a more inclusive and just society. Through the project activities, the NWMF aims not only to raise awareness of the contributions of black people to Northern Ireland's cultural tapestry, but also to address the systemic barriers and prejudices that perpetuate racial inequalities

In essence, the NWMF's Black History and Heritage in Northern Ireland project embodies the intersection of heritage and activism, serving as a form of empowerment for marginalised communities. By reclaiming narratives, challenging stereotypes and advocating for systemic change, the NWMF is helping to shape a more just and inclusive future for Northern Ireland.

Learning points from the North-West Migrants Forum

- The power of community engagement and grassroots activism are core. NWMF's approach highlights the effectiveness of community-driven initiatives in addressing societal issues such as racism and inequality. NWMF exemplifies the transformative potential of grassroots campaigning and collective action to reshape narratives and promote inclusive environments through heritage projects.

- The launch of the NWMF's Black History and Heritage in Northern Ireland project serves as a testament to the intersectionality of heritage preservation and activism. In response to the global reverberations of the BLM movement, the organisation recognised the need to amplify the voices and experiences of black people in Northern Ireland as related to both the past and the present.

- The emphasis on collaboration and inclusivity not only enriches the work being done, but also fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among affected communities, ultimately contributing to more effective and sustainable solutions.

Music as community activism: Challenging racism through intangible heritage

Donna Namukasa, a musician and dedicated community activist, uses the power of music, particularly drumming, as a means of promoting intangible cultural heritage and combating racism. In her thought-provoking presentation entitled 'Music as community activism: Challenging racism through intangible heritage', Namukasa eloquently explained how music serves as a powerful tool to promote community development and social change.

Throughout history, music has played a pivotal role in shaping cultural identity, fostering solidarity and breaking down social barriers. Namukasa's innovative approach to using music as a form of intangible cultural heritage not only preserves ancestral traditions, but also acts as a catalyst for challenging entrenched systems of racism and discrimination. At the heart of Namukasa's advocacy is an appreciation for the transformative power of drumming – an art form deeply rooted in African cultural heritage. The rhythmic beats of drums evoke a sense of unity, resilience and resistance, and serve as a powerful medium for conveying messages of social justice and equality. Through her mastery of drumming techniques and rhythmic expression, Namukasa empowers individuals to reclaim their cultural identity and challenge prevailing norms of racism and oppression. She has specifically used this technique in Northern Ireland to work collaboratively with young people in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. It is in these locations where narratives of the migrant 'other' by media and political discourse can enhance the conditions for racism. Such collaboration through music, therefore, can challenge these ideologies.

Namukasa's work exemplifies how music can act as a form of community development – a concept that transcends mere entertainment and embraces music's capacity to inspire collective action and social change. By harnessing the communal energy of music-making, Namukasa fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment within marginalised communities, enabling them to navigate and challenge the structural barriers that perpetuate racism. While there are criticisms that the use of music and dance can 'ethnicise' those from migrant backgrounds, Namukasa argues that when she engages with schools, other community organisations or at local council events she will always initially 'hold the mic'. In other words, her collaborations start from her worldview perspective of someone who has lived experience of racism. Namukasa uses this starting point to build collaborative working with other individuals, groups and organisations. She argues that this approach, over time, can contribute to the dismantling of oppression and promoting social justice. By encouraging dialogue, promoting education, and facilitating collective action.

Namukasa's approach highlights how preserving and promoting intangible cultural heritage can also contribute to challenging racism. In a world where cultural diversity is increasingly threatened

by globalisation and homogenisation, the preservation of ancestral traditions is all the more important. Furthermore, Namukasa's advocacy serves as a reminder of the enduring relevance of music as a universal language – one that transcends geographical boundaries and cultural differences. Through her music, Namukasa attempts to bridge division and fosters empathy.

Learning points from Reclaiming cultural memory: Storytelling in the post-conflict era

- The transformative power of music as a tool for social change: Donna Namukasa's advocacy shows how music, particularly drumming, which is deeply rooted in African cultural heritage, can serve as a powerful medium for conveying messages of social justice and equality.

- The initial point at which collaboration begins requires a sense of 'ownership' and indeed 'control' for those with lived experience. Namukasa says that she always approaches her collaborations as the person who should be initially 'holding the mic'. This metaphor can be applied to other scenarios where survivors of difficult and traumatic experiences should be heard first in any collaborative working.

- Namukasa's work highlights the importance of preserving and promoting intangible cultural heritage as a means of challenging racism and celebrating cultural diversity. Intangible cultural heritage can carry the valour of a particular cultural group. The advocacy work of Namukasa thus fosters a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity and promotes intercultural dialogue, highlighting the richness and complexity of human experience.

Image 8 - Donna Namukasa Musician Activist on challenging racism through intangible cultural heritage

Panel 3: Memorialising Conflict

Reclaiming cultural memory: Storytelling in the post-conflict era

Seán Murray, a prominent filmmaker, gave an insightful talk on storytelling and cultural memory. Murray is the director of Relapse Pictures, a Belfast-based production company specialising in documentary, drama and commercial video. However, it is his commitment to exploring the complexities of Northern Ireland's recent history and its aftermath that truly sets his work apart. Throughout his talk, Murray shared his unique approach to storytelling and filmmaking, emphasising its role in exploring the complexities of Northern Ireland's recent history and its aftermath.

Murray's work explores the role of documentary film in supporting victims of political violence. His filmmaking uses both a critical and creative methodology to demonstrate how film can engage, explore and advocate for issues and debates that are oversimplified and marginalised by mainstream film and broadcast media. An example of his work is Unquiet Graves, a film documenting the killing of more than 120 civilians by members of the British army and the local police force, the RUC, over a period spanning 1972–78, which he conceived as a way of reclaiming cultural memory: 'It's about people from my community saying we have a voice and we have a story to tell about the conflict' (Murray, 19 January 2024).

In his presentation Murray went on to explain that what he was asserting, both through his words and the film's narrative, was the critical need for the younger generation to understand the historical context. They need to see the gravity of past events, how perilously close we came to civil unrest, and to grasp the lessons of our history as we strive to move forward. For him, failure to confront these unresolved issues risks their resurgence, potentially reigniting the conflicts of the past. The recent tragic loss of young Lyra McKee is a powerful reminder of the precarious proximity of returning to such turbulent times (Murray, 19 January 2024).

The presentation also focused on how, through creative practice, Murray has been able to engage with concrete historical events in order to help victims of extraordinary traumatic experiences. He sees the role of film as providing a co-creative space for families to own their own narratives. This has been a fundamental aspect of his work, as this process of creation and co-creation has fostered a wider public recognition of the experiences of grief, loss and lack of closure and justice suffered in the region (Gilmartin, 2021).

Addressing the inadequacy of government support in addressing conflict-related trauma, Murray highlighted the growing role of filmmakers in highlighting transitional justice issues. He argued that the complexities of defining justice, often interpreted differently by unionism and nationalism, further complicate the discourse. In addition, the historical bias of the media, shaped by state censorship and control, has influenced dominant narratives for decades. Hence the need for a practice-based approach to creative research.

Learning points from Reclaiming cultural memory: Storytelling in the post-conflict era

- By engaging with concrete historical events and providing a co-creative space for families to own their narratives, Murray's approach highlights the power of storytelling in fostering wider public recognition of experiences of grief, loss and lack of closure and justice. This emphasises the role of cultural memory and storytelling in shaping collective understanding and remembrance of past events.

- In combining critical analysis and creative exploration, Murray demonstrated how documentary filmmaking can serve as a powerful tool for memory work and advocacy, exploration and engagement with issues marginalised by mainstream media.

Ethical remembering of the 'Troubles'

Dr Paul Mullan is the director of the Northern Ireland National Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and has a PhD that focused on exploring the role of heritage in a divided society. His research is specifically concerned with the development of ethical approaches to contentious commemoration. In addition to his academic work, Mullan chairs the Decade of Centenaries Roundtable, a collaborative platform of organisations including universities, museums, public bodies and community groups committed to fostering dialogue and collaboration across sectors to address historical legacies and commemorate significant events.

Mullan explained that since 1994, the HLF has allocated £260 million to various regeneration and community initiatives in Northern Ireland. Initially, there was some apprehension about projects that focused on community identity, fearing possible political motivations. However, as successes began to emerge, confidence in such endeavours grew (Mullan, 19 January 2024). Mullan highlighted one notable example of a successful project, the HLF-funded Diamond War Memorial project, led by the Holywell Trust, a community-based peace-building organisation in Derry/Londonderry. Originally conceived as a tribute to those who served in British Army regiments, the memorial was opposed by nationalist communities. However, when it was discovered that the names on the memorial included people from both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds, the memorial was re-conceptualised as a unifying place for both communities.

Reflecting on this experience, Mullan suggests that complicating narratives may initially seem counterintuitive. However, he argues that thoughtful and informed complication can actually be beneficial (Mullan, 19 January 2024). Projects such as the Diamond War Memorial, which emerged during the Centenary Decade, challenge dominant master narratives and offer more nuanced interpretations of historical events. By exposing these narratives to pluralistic perspectives, they contribute to a richer understanding of history.

The presentation explained that the period 2011–2022 marked a series of significant political events that have shaped Ireland in the 20th century. For this reason, the Community Relations Council and the HLF began working in partnership around 2010 to initiate a conversation that would raise the issue of remembrance in the public sphere and, perhaps, facilitate a process to develop models and principles. These debates led to a series of ethical principles to prioritise when developing community memory projects:

1. Start from a base of the historical facts.
2. Recognise the implications and consequences of what happened.
3. Understand that different perceptions and interpretations exist.
4. Show how events and activities can deepen understanding of the period.
5. See all the above in the context of an 'inclusive and accepting society'.

Mullan explained how the redesign of Belfast City Hall was carried out according to these principles. On the opening of the building (in 1906) the City Hall was considered as a symbol of unionism, reflected in its memorials to the British crown and Empire. Despite demographic shifts in Belfast following the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, there was little change in City Hall until unionists lost electoral control in 1997. This led to discomfort with the dominant unionist cultural presence among councillors. The question arose as to how to promote a more inclusive atmosphere. Mullan explained how the Council's community relations office worked to address this, with constructive civic engagement adopting the principles to ensure that all parties would get some form of cultural self-expression in the City Hall.

For example, objects were relocated from contentious spaces to the new exhibition space, where they could be (re)contextualised within a broader interpretation. New objects, such as stained-glass windows, were also introduced to express a wider and more diverse range of stories. Mullan also briefly touched on a similar approach at the Ulster Museum. Using examples from its exhibitions, Mullan demonstrated that the museum (and also the City Hall) is paying more attention to the plurality of Northern Irish society.

Learning points from Ethical remembering of the 'Troubles'

- Mullan's presentation highlights the value of multiple narratives around historical events and identities. While this approach may seem counterintuitive at first, it can lead to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of history. Through examples such as the Diamond War Memorial project, the Belfast City Hall project, and the Ulster Museum, Mullan highlights the importance of moving beyond simplistic narratives to capture diverse experiences and perspectives of communities.

- The need for discussion around ethical principles in heritage initiatives (at both community and official levels) was highlighted. The importance of starting from historical facts, recognising different perceptions and interpretations, and promoting inclusivity and acceptance within society is part of an ethical practice.

Diamond War Memorial, Derry, Northern Ireland – Photo by Philip McDermott

Day 2: Workshop

International Coalition of Sites of Conscience post-symposium presentation and workshop

The following day (20th January) we hosted a roundtable for invited stakeholders from civil society, policymakers, academics, grassroots activists, survivors and heritage professionals. The objective was to provide the space and time for participants to reflect on issues that had emerged from the previous day's symposium. Importantly, our goal was to facilitate dialogue and exchange of ideas between participants with a view to identifying what participatory co-design principles might look like, examples of best practice, and any challenges or perceived/real barriers. The organisers of the event explained that these insights would be used to help the authors formulate principles on how participatory co-design can be done, who should do it, and why.

The session opened with a presentation from Justine Di Mayo, regional programme manager for Europe and MENA at the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC). Since the ICSC was founded in 1999 it has served as a global network of sites of conscience, including historic sites, museums and memory initiatives. With over 350 members in more than 65 countries, these sites remember different histories, and come from a wide range of settings – including long-established democracies to post-conflict contexts. Members are united by a shared commitment to using the lessons of the past to address contemporary challenges around democracy and human rights. They aim to transform sites of remembrance into platforms for civic action.

The ICSC supports these efforts through training, grants, regional collaborations, global projects and grassroots transitional justice initiatives. The ICSC works with the sites to develop participatory programmes that bridge social division, advocates for the preservation of sites associated with human rights struggles, facilitates open dialogue about historical events and harnesses the power of memory, art and culture to promote more just and peaceful societies.

Di Mayo reflected on what heritage is, its purpose and how people see its role. She noted that in 1972 a meeting was held in Santiago de Chile on the importance and development of museums in the contemporary world, which resulted in a statement known as the Santiago Round Table Declaration (UNESCO, 1973). At a time when many of the countries in the region were undergoing a period of authoritarianism and various forms of national social control, this declaration became an important milestone on the role of museums and cultural heritage in contemporary contexts. Di Mayo explained that despite expectations of providing public value and enhancing visitor numbers, 'museums are beginning to look at how they serve their society and use the assets they have to inform the present and build the future' (Di Mayo, 20 January 2024).

An important development came in September 2023 when Museo Sitio de Memoria ESMA, a National Historic Monument, which evidences state terrorism and judicial evidence in the cases of crimes against humanity in Argentina, was designated as a World Heritage Site. This marked a significant milestone as it became the first ever site nominated for its exceptional universal value as a place associated with memories of recent conflicts and other divisive events. The museum, established in 2015 in response to civil society demands, transformed a notorious former clandestine detention centre into a space for learning about Argentina's dark past whilst promoting a culture of human rights. The designation sparked debates within UNESCO, but it signifies an important recognition that heritage sites linked to human suffering can play a crucial role in fostering healing, peacebuilding and contributing to a situation in which future atrocities will not occur (Di Mayo, 19 January 2024).

Di Mayo discussed the growing trend of cultural institutions using heritage to promote social change, generating a debate on their involvement in activism. She noted: 'activism can take many different forms, there is not one mode of engagement. There is obviously a difference between 'official' sites (like state museums) and 'independent' heritage sites which exist outside official narratives' (Di Mayo, 19 January 2024). While the role of cultural institutions and heritage professionals in activism varies, they can serve as platforms for productive discussions on divisive issues. The experiences of ICSC members shows that heritage sites can become agents for productive debates on difficult subjects. The National Museum of the History of Immigration in Paris evidences how museums, through aspects of their exhibitions, can challenge official policies, such as discriminatory migration policies. Similarly, the Museum of Free Derry, a community-based museum, advocates for causes such as Palestinian rights alongside an advocacy for social justice locally.

During the workshop, Di Mayo emphasised the importance of prioritising the needs and voices of communities and victims/survivors within heritage initiatives. Heritage often becomes a battleground for competing interpretations of the past, especially in official contexts. If misrepresentations influence heritage initiatives, this can exacerbate divisions and discrimination. It is crucial to focus on the needs of victims/survivors and communities and to amplify marginalised voices and construct inclusive narratives that offer diverse perspectives and alternatives to dominant interpretations. It is important to move away from a top-down approach and ensure that stakeholders are mindful of who may be excluded from discussions and whose perspectives may be overlooked in the process.

As one of the examples shared, Di Mayo highlighted the work that ICSC has been doing in Colombia since 2016 through its Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation. The initiative works with victims' groups to address a range of needs in the country, including accounting for victims of enforced disappearance and evaluating the mechanisms proposed in the peace agreement. The ICSC led efforts to facilitate communication between victims and the Truth Commission, provided training for civil society organisations in forensic techniques and organised roundtables with archival specialists. The project aimed to support civil society organisations in collecting and preserving the stories of marginalised communities, increase

their participation in transitional justice mechanisms and foster links with regional groups. As part of this, the ICSC and the Colombian site Centro Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación built the capacity of communities to produce podcasts, enabling them to share their stories and authentically honour their experiences.

Another issue highlighted by Di Mayo was the challenge of working with contested or contentious heritage when competing narratives and conflicting voices coexist. It was emphasized that Sites of Conscience around the world, whether in conflict or post-conflict settings or in long-standing democracies, work to create safe space for people to feel comfortable to engage in these difficult conversations and bridge differences. She explained that ICSC uses dialogue as a key methodology in its work, also using what it calls 'the 4 truths'. This approach originated with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and grew out of the deep listening sessions of the Commission's work. Through active listening, it became clear that individuals hold not only different narratives but also multiple perspectives on historical events.

Developed over the years through the efforts of sites of conscience around the world, these four truths comprise:

1. Forensic truth: objective facts derived from documents, data and tangible evidence.
2. Personal truth: subjective experiences and first-hand accounts by individuals.
3. Social truth: widely accepted narratives within social groups.
4. Reconciliation truth: narratives aimed at redressing perceived injustices and reconciling with the past, often an ongoing process.

Women Rights Initiative (WORI), Uganda, a member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience

This exercise in acknowledging different truths fosters crucial conversations. To navigate these different perspectives, the ICSC uses the 'arc of dialogue' method, which creates a safe space for individuals to share their experiences and truths without judgement or attempts to persuade. In this context, dialogue serves as a platform for sharing ideas, information and assumptions for personal and collective learning. It is not about changing minds, but about understanding multiple truths.

The arc of dialogue consists of four stages aimed at building trust, beginning with the sharing of personal truths and progressing to understanding and reconciling different perspectives. Throughout the process, forensic truth remains fundamental.

Di Mayo stated that inclusive, empowering and participatory practices are key to fostering more equitable public narratives and amplifying marginalised voices. To achieve this, organisations need to start with introspection and engage in deep and honest self-assessment. Sites of conscience have initiated reflective practices and engaged in challenging conversations to address critical questions such as:

- What are the underlying intentions of our exhibitions, educational programmes and archival work?
- Are we adequately meeting the evolving needs of our surrounding communities?
- Whose stories remain untold and whose experiences are missing from our narratives?
- Are community members and their diverse perspectives authentically represented in our decision-making processes?
- Are we effectively facilitating dialogue and exchange in our spaces?

In 2021, the ICSC introduced the 'Correcting the Record' methodology through a pilot initiative involving six member organisations. This methodology aims to cultivate inclusive, empowering, and participatory practices by assessing community representation, engagement, and ethical approaches within organisational frameworks. Key questions include:

- Who is our primary community?
- How do we engage with and relate to our primary community?
- Is our organisation welcoming and inclusive of the full diversity within our primary community?
- Does our content and programmes truly reflect the diverse voices and experiences within our community?
- What is the diversity of your primary community/communities?
- Does your organisation make it easy for your primary community/communities to take part in decision-making?

Through such initiatives, organisations seek to fill gaps and address omissions in policy and programming by promoting a more inclusive and equitable approach to public narratives.

Mapping marginalised communities and identifying the community you want to serve is an essential task, Di Mayo explained. For example, the Museu da Imigração in Brazil, one of the 'Correcting the Record' projects, recognised biases in its representation of migrant narratives, favouring European, Middle Eastern and Asian migrants while systematically omitting Afro-Brazilian and indigenous narratives, reflecting Brazil's history of marginalisation and colonial policies. Since its reopening in 2014, the museum has worked to address these biases and silences, aiming to present a more inclusive narrative that counters discrimination and racism in Brazilian society. Similarly, the District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa, founded in 1994,

initially served as a commemorative project for a community displaced by apartheid-era urban planning policies. Over time, the community evolved as former residents reclaimed their land and rebuilt. This evolution led the museum to question its intentions and ensure that the community's perspectives were authentically represented in its exhibitions and decision-making processes. This process involves difficult dialogue and reflection on how to adapt to the changing needs of society (Di Mayo, 20 January 2024).

Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos Chile, a member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience(2)

Di Mayo then discussed the need to engage the diversity of museums and heritage sites' primary community/communities: 'It is essential to engage the diversity of your community, especially those who have been historically marginalised or invisible' (Di Mayo, 20 January 2024). An example of this is the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos in Chile, which documents human rights violations committed by the Chilean state between 1973 and 1990. In response to the strong presence of the feminist movement in Chile's 2019 social protests, the museum reflected on the historical exclusion of women's narratives from the struggle against the dictatorship. To address this bias, through the 'Correcting the Record' project, the museum included narratives of women who participated in different forms of resistance in its permanent exhibition. Working with feminist movements, the museum sought to connect past and present struggles for gender equality and to support contemporary social justice movements.

This brings us to the need to develop sensitive, empowering and transformative practices when addressing human rights violations and contested pasts – trauma, including intergenerational trauma, is crucial to consider. Adopting trauma-informed approaches and practices is essential to empowering victims. For example, the Women's Rights Initiative (WORI) in Uganda, an NGO that runs shelters for survivors of gender-based violence, re-evaluated its documentation practices through the 'Correcting the Record' assessment. It realised that it was prioritising the collection of information for accountability over the needs and personal stories of women. The WORI shifted to alternative storytelling methods co-created with survivors to ensure that narratives reflected their personalities and experiences in an empowering way and avoided re-traumatisation (Di Mayo, 20 January 2024).

The Intercontinental Slavery Museum (ISM) in Mauritius, for example, had community engagement at the heart of its work, but recognised gaps in its engagement with the Creole community. In particular, the Rastafari community within the Creole community had historically been excluded from the museum's records. Through the 'Correcting the Record' assessment, the ISM developed a tailored approach

to engaging the Rastafari community, providing a safe space for its members to participate in decision-making around their narratives and ensuring sustainable representation and engagement.

Di Mayo concluded her presentation by reflecting on the need for co-creation processes, using the example of the Women's Institute for Alternative Development (WINAD) in Trinidad and Tobago, which has embarked on the development of a new museum and memorial on women's contribution to leadership and development. Recognising the importance of women telling their own stories, WINAD established a coordinating committee of community representatives to develop participatory processes. Through grassroots community consultation and co-creation practices, WINAD integrated community input into the museum plan, driven by an implementation committee of volunteer community members.

Workshop

Di Mayo's presentation was followed by a workshop that provided the opportunity for participants to discuss their views. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss some questions in three different tables based on the presentation and discussions from the day before. Some of the questions explored included:

1. What is the purpose of heritage and who is it for? What can heritage offer?
2. What is activism and what is the link to heritage, if there is one?
3. What should co-design, collaborative and participatory approaches look like when developing heritage projects? What are the key elements?
4. What are the challenges of 'doing' heritage and adopting these approaches?
5. What are the challenges of being an activist in this space?

Several key themes emerged around the purpose of heritage and its intended audience. Participants highlighted the transformative potential of community-based heritage work, emphasising its ability to offer new perspectives, promote mutual respect for different interpretations and provide a safe space to confront difficult histories. The discussion also explored the idea that heritage can be everything and nothing, recognising that heritage can be misappropriated and thus further antagonise a situation but that heritage can also be healing when navigated in a way which prioritises those with lived experience.

Participants also noted the important role of heritage institutions in supporting those staff involved in what might be regarded as allyship and collaborative working with communities in tackling difficult histories. These individuals are often under considerable pressure in their institutional roles. By facilitating encounters with survivors and capturing their experiences, museums can provide an important platform for their staff to engage in difficult discussions about the past. In addition, museums provide staff with a professional and ethical framework rooted in heritage that enables them to deal effectively with complex issues but such ethical conversations and policy frameworks could engage more directly with the question of activist heritage.

Participants also highlighted the benefits associated with heritage conservation, including the creation of employment opportunities and the promotion of tourism, even within the context of difficult pasts. By protecting historic sites and cultural practices, heritage initiatives contribute to empowering and enhancing local economies while fostering a sense of pride and identity around the resilience evident within communities.

The discussion moved on to the question of what activism is and what is the link to heritage, if any? Some participants noted that they were reticent about the term 'activist' as they did not feel like such a word applies to them. For example, one of the participants did not see herself as an activist but acknowledged that her actions were probably viewed as such by others. She noted that her work grew out of her practice and working with her community and as a survivor herself. For the participants, activism does not have to be 'hard' – we can do it with kindness, we can talk about the difficulties. As one participant put it, activist work can mean being as 'wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove'. Activism means different things to different people so the very word itself

is often something which should be debated.

Some participants noted that activism has to be authentic, otherwise it becomes fake, and it risks losing the respect of the community. To have a collaborative co-designed approach, projects cannot start with a predetermined agenda or preconception. Activism is a verb and is a 'doing' word. Instead, some participants commented that if powerful bodies are doing work on heritage they need to listen and work with the community before making any initial decisions. They should consider such practical things as co-writing a manifesto with the community from the outset.

Another crucial point raised in the workshop was that heritage can serve justice and accountability by preserving non-legal evidence, social and cultural experiences of injustice and can validate experiences outside the narrow legal context. Thus, heritage projects at community level can challenge state/official/conventional versions of ourselves.

In discussing the challenges of 'doing' heritage and adopting these approaches it was noted that you need trust between parties, people and organisations – and that takes time, credibility, knowledge and courage. Exchanges between all parties in a project should also be reciprocal and beneficial to all. But there can be structural barriers to this, such as lack of time and capacity and short-term funding for projects which will always create risks for longer term goals.

Another key issue that was raised was that learning needs to be shared more widely about processes that work. Best practice needs to be embedded in areas such as museum policy in a real way, with concrete guidelines to avoid lip service to principles. The process is always brittle as it can be damaged by personnel changes which pull people away from a project when they have built significant collaborative capital with other communities and organisations. Management can change, leading to uncertainty about the future of the work – there can be reputational damage to all of those involved and new and developing relationships can be stalled or broken. These challenges also could be supported more by academic research in the area of heritage and museum studies which could investigate more fully the relationship between management and curatorial practice when it comes to heritage activism.

Finally, in addressing the challenges of being an activist in this space, the discussion revolved around museum work and how activism can drive change and new approaches for inclusion and community-led practice. This is particularly the case in a fragile ecosystem that acknowledges real risks to the work and which needs mitigated. It is important that if an organisation such as a museum or an official heritage body is embarking on collaborative work that new initiatives are led by passionate individuals and can receive support from management. Another threat to collaborative work is that there may be fear in an institution like a museum. For instance, some may feel that work which is more 'activist' in nature may alienate a more traditional visitor base who may see the role of such institutions as about conservation of the past as opposed to challenging narratives of the past in the present.

Key points from the workshop discussion

- Co-designed work represents a shift away from authoritative control towards collaborative and decentralised forms of authority. Such spaces might allow multiple voices and perspectives to shaping heritage narratives and practices. This approach recognises the importance of valuing the authority of local communities and stakeholders in defining and protecting their own sense of heritage.

- By engaging in co-design, heritage practitioners and institutions can challenge the dominance of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) and promote more pluralistic understandings.

- Co-designed work encourages flexibility, adaptation and responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of local communities, leading to meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

- Activist Heritage (AH) challenges conventional notions of heritage by advocating a bottom-up, survivor-led approach, as opposed to the typical top-down methods.

- The transformative potential of community-centred heritage work is its ability to offer new perspectives, promote mutual respect for different interpretations and provide safe spaces to contribute to the healing process.

- Heritage can be a source of conflict if misused or on the contrary can have transformative social impact by promoting healing and fostering social cohesion.
- Participatory and co-creation is what we are aiming for – it goes beyond consultation and collaboration and requires power-sharing. It takes time, deep and long engagement.
- Activism does not have to be hard. We can do it with kindness, and it is important to recognise that people espouse their 'activisms' in different ways.
- There are many pseudo-consultations – to work well, more listening is required and less talking from those in powerful positions.
- Good intentions are not enough – work hard to identify any biases.
- Heritage can serve justice and accountability by preserving non-legal evidence, social and cultural experiences of injustice to validate experiences outside the narrow legal context.
- To tackle the challenges to do Activist Heritage (AH) you need trust between parties, people and organisations. However, trust takes time, it takes credibility, it takes knowledge, and it takes courage and needs to be grounded in human rights principles.
- Exchanges between parties should be reciprocal and beneficial to all.
- Activism has to be authentic, otherwise it becomes fake activism and risks losing the respect of the community. If something is perceived as tokenistic it will lose trust.
- Structural barriers are a key challenge at community level and at the level of big institutions and government departments. These needs recognised in areas such as museum policy. Especially issues such as lack of time and capacity, short-term funded projects, precariousness of workers' conditions.

Recommendations, principles, future practice

In this report we set out key principles that emerged from the Belfast symposium. These principles should underpin activist heritage, participation, and co-design.

AH provides an alternative pathway to framing heritage that puts the marginalised and their justice needs centre-stage. It challenges notions of who the experts are and whose knowledge matters. If implemented rigorously, AH can create spaces and unlock transformative dynamics that empower, generate a sense of ownership, and create pathways to justice and social change.

In the Belfast Statement we contend that AH principles should inform official heritage policy and practice and a transformation and re-conceptualisation of heritage from the bottom up.

Sarah Smed Presentation - The Danish Welfare Museum

Dr Philip McDermott Introducing Conference Themes

Audience in Belfast Campus

Professor Patricia Lundy - Panel Discussion

Symposium Audience

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