

Guidance Note

Applicability and Adaptability of Traditional Knowledge Systems in the Conservation and Management of Heritage in Asia

FORUM 2015: THAILAND

The objective of the 2015 Forum was to explore the potential applicability and adaptability of Traditional Knowledge Systems (TKS) in the conservation and management of heritage in Asia through the analysis of examples from across the region.

Context

TKS are time-tested and dynamic processes that can contribute greatly to the conservation and management of heritage in Asia and elsewhere. TKS in Asia are the product of diverse contexts, and in many cases, though not all, they were created by communities. The region is particularly rich in written and other documentary sources for TKS. These can potentially bring benefits to that community and to others, such as promoting social resilience, fostering local identity and social cohesion, building intergenerational relationships and encouraging conflict resolution. TKS can help conservation professionals better understand and safeguard the community's connection with heritage and, through this, safeguard heritage itself. TKS can also help conservation professionals overcome the divide between tangible and intangible heritage, as well as connecting cultural heritage to the natural environment in which it is located.

However, the reality on the ground today is that TKS are all too often threatened by a range of socio-economic pressures from the modern globalized world, as well as changes that occur within the knowledge-holding community. With regards to the heritage sector, this has included an increasing professionalization of conservation practice that largely fails to recognize the importance of TKS.

The challenge, therefore, lies in reconciling TKS with conventional heritage management systems, showing that the two are potentially compatible and could be mutually beneficial. Various examples illustrate the many TKS in use at a variety of heritage typologies (such as cultural landscapes, urban landscapes, buildings, and protected areas) and related to materials, techniques and other aspects.

	KEY ISSUES	GUIDANCE	TARGET GROUPS
1	Communities can be the source of TKS and community members are knowledge-holders; TKS can contribute to community well-being and empowerment.	Decision-making should include knowledge-holders, as well as professionals from the conservation and other relevant sectors, throughout conservation processes. Conservation processes should seek to ensure that economic and other benefits	Institutions Professionals Communities

		are gained by communities, conservation professionals and the heritage itself.	
2	TKS are already embedded in various types of management systems and may offer financial, intellectual and human resources for conservation where the conventional management system is lacking.	<p>Analysis of existing management systems¹ can help highlight gaps which TKS may well help to fill.</p> <p>TKS should be taken into consideration in people-centred approaches for the more effective conservation and management of heritage.</p> <p>TKS need to be integrated into capacity building, giving both community members and professionals confidence in TKS as valid approaches to conservation.</p> <p>In some cases, it is appropriate to integrate TKS into formal legal frameworks.</p>	Institutions Professionals Communities
3	TKS continue to evolve over time in response to changing needs and the survival and adaptation of TKS is a sign of their robustness and relevance today. However, the social, economic, environmental and political context has changed dramatically from that in which TKS were formulated and this may have caused their disruption.	<p>In response to changing contexts, solutions might be sought that encourage innovation in TKS to make them more relevant to contemporary situations. At the same time, specific support mechanisms could also be considered to safeguard them from pressures that come from outside the knowledge-holding community.</p> <p>Knowledge transfer of TKS from one generation to the next needs to be ensured, through the cooperation of young people with those who are more experienced. This knowledge transfer could be supported by the formal education system.</p> <p>Those TKS that have been disrupted should be studied, with an assessment made about whether it is possible and appropriate to restore them.</p>	Professionals Communities
4	Sources for understanding TKS include oral, written, audio-visual sources, along with processes and physical evidence. The results of gathering data on TKS can create a rich repository of information.	<p>TKS should be recognized as the intellectual property of the knowledge-holders and their rights must be respected in the gathering and holding of associated data.</p> <p>Depending on the context and sensitivity of the information, data should be made</p>	Institutions Professionals Communities

¹ For example, using the tool developed by ICCROM for the World Heritage Manual on the *Management of Cultural World Heritage*: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/managing-cultural-world-heritage/>

		<p>accessible through sharing platforms; this should be considered a valuable resource for capacity building.</p> <p>There is a need to map and research the evolution of TKS (in terms of continuity and change) over time.</p>	
5	TKS should be considered a valuable resource for the heritage sector as it seeks to overcome the divide that has been created between tangible and intangible heritage, and between natural and cultural heritage.	Conservation and management decisions should involve various sectors, including knowledge-holders, to overcome these divides.	Professionals Communities
6	TKS can contribute to building resilience to disasters and developing effective coping mechanisms for post-disaster response and recovery.	Disaster risk management should involve TKS for disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.	Institutions Professionals Communities
7	TKS are under pressure from development, tourism, globalization, changing lifestyles, commodification of heritage, etc.	The impact on TKS should be given due consideration in decision-making about change and the potential contribution of TKS should be harnessed for sustainable development.	Institutions
8	TKS suggest context-specific solutions for conservation that potentially use natural resources in an environmentally sustainable way, particularly in response to climate change.	The adaptations of TKS need to be understood and further evolutions encouraged in response to changing conditions.	Institutions Professionals Communities

For further discussion of these issues and illustrated examples, please see the publication of this Forum.

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