

Guidance Note

National Conservation Policy

FORUM 2016: CHINA

The objective of the 2016 Forum was to explore the different national heritage systems within the Asia-Pacific Region, with a view to identifying gaps that may be addressed in the future. The Forum involved participants from the heritage authorities of various countries, as well as a number of regional institutions and non-governmental organizations.

Context

This document outlines the findings of the Forum in the form of a number of principles that can apply to all national heritage systems in the region. In this context, 'national' is understood to encompass all levels of government involved in heritage conservation and protection. 'Heritage system' incorporates a wide array of structures and processes, including legal frameworks, policies, procedures and guidance delivered through a number of institutional arrangements.

In many parts of the Asia-Pacific Region, there are long historical traditions of heritage preservation and conservation. Today these traditional practices continue, yet the region is exceptionally diverse in its formal systems for heritage. The region includes countries in post-colonial contexts, some of which continue to use colonial frameworks. Very few countries have a 'National Conservation Policy' and some are currently developing new conservation mechanisms. Regional comparisons are therefore valuable in supporting these processes and identifying improvements.

The specificities of the Asia-Pacific context are dynamic. Heritage practices and outcomes are affected by pressures such as rapid transformations, population growth, rural decline, infrastructure needs, mass tourism, environmental pressures and armed conflict. There are complexities arising from migrations and movements of peoples and the creation of new local communities. There are new areas of content that national heritage systems need to incorporate – such as disaster risk management – and new linkages that must be established.

The accompanying guidance outlined below has therefore been identified from experiences across the Asia-Pacific Region. The processes of developing and using national heritage systems can be understood according to eight key questions, which can be generally applied to all national heritage systems in the region.

	QUESTIONS	KEY ISSUES	GUIDANCE
1	What is heritage? How is heritage defined? What are the gaps?	All countries have definitions in their heritage legislation and/or national policy documents. All of these provide for the protection of monumental and archaeological aspects of heritage, but there are common gaps, such as	National heritage systems should: - be widely inclusive of all heritages; - include policies that are tailored to the specific

		<p>cultural landscapes, industrial heritage, modern heritage and 'living' heritage.</p> <p>Intangible heritage in most countries is treated according to policies, laws and institutions that are separated from 'heritage conservation', creating problematic divides. The same is commonly true for natural and moveable heritage.</p> <p>Some countries have continuing legacies of colonial conceptual framing, creating disconnects with local cultural contexts.</p> <p>There are a number of systems in the region that overlook locally significant heritage, leaving essential aspects of the 'nation's' heritage unprotected and unrecognized.</p>	<p>needs and issues affecting different categories of heritage;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support and incorporate policy development at all levels of government.
2	<p>Whose heritage is recognized?</p> <p>Who is included in policy-making and conservation processes?</p>	<p>Power and authority is established in all formal national heritage systems (at all levels). Most are 'top-down' in policy development and implementation, although there are some good counter-examples.</p> <p>Many national systems do not effectively include participation by all relevant cultural groups and communities.</p> <p>Bureaucratic and professional cultures can be limited in their openness to community perspectives.</p> <p>Formulaic 'check-list' approaches to engagement can result in policy development without effective involvement.</p>	<p>National heritage systems should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - be capable of localized implementation; - incorporate extensive public processes, consultation and listening; - ensure inclusiveness in all policy development processes and participatory conservation approaches; - incorporate public transparency into decision-making processes; - provide effective communications, including information about how the systems can be used; - clearly define terms like 'community', 'stakeholder', 'rights-holder', 'consultation'; - develop skills and use multi-disciplinary teams of specialists; - incorporate regular review.
3	<p>How is heritage structured at different levels of government?</p>	<p>Many countries have two or three levels of government, with diverse arrangements between them.</p>	<p>National heritage systems should:</p>

	<p>What is the role of non-governmental organizations and professional bodies?</p>	<p>The level that is most likely to be under-recognized in national heritage systems is the local one, yet it is critically important for good outcomes.</p> <p>Capacity at all levels, is essential for well-functioning national systems.</p> <p>There is value in enhanced collaboration within Asia and the Pacific region and globally for sharing knowledge and innovations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide clarity for heritage processes at all levels of government; - acknowledge the gaps and the interlinkages with other spheres of government and non-government action; - establish appropriate levels of protection; - create spaces for innovation and ‘bottom up’ understanding and implementation, with the help of non-government actors and organizations; - empower local governments to initiate and implement heritage conservation programmes.
4	<p>How are conservation, principles, philosophies and practices defined in the national heritage system?</p>	<p>Arrangements across the region include provision for conservation principles in a variety of ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional knowledge and historical texts are utilized as sources of creativity and continuity; - Principles, practices and policies are embedded in legislation; - National conservation policies are in place – either as a single overarching policy or a suite of policies on particular topics; - Full or part reliance on NGO Charters to frame conservation concepts and approaches; - Indigenous knowledge systems are the foundations of the formal heritage practices. <p>In some cases, conservation principles and terms have been imported – for example from the World Heritage system, or from colonial models. This can cause a potential conflict with the local cultural contexts in which they are applied.</p> <p>International conservation terms are commonly used, but hold different meanings across the region. This creates additional confusion in the regional and local dialogues.</p>	<p>National heritage systems should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reflect the social and cultural contexts within each country; - be rooted in the cultural traditions and local histories; - re-engage with traditional knowledge systems and texts (where they exist); - ensure that cultural and customary rights of indigenous peoples and minorities are respected; - allow for an integrated awareness of the intangible and tangible dimensions of heritage, as well as culture and nature; - explain and clarify the terminologies used in conservation processes (such as restoration, reconstruction, adaptation, preservation and conservation); - ensure that international commitments are met and

			are harmonized in relation to national systems.
5	How effective is the national heritage system?	<p>The 'national system' is not limited to what the national government does itself. Rather it is made up of national, sub-national, provincial and local arrangements. These are often distinct and care is needed to avoid disconnections between them. Complexities occur in achieving cooperation between heritage authorities at national and local levels. Political differences can cause disruptions in the coordination between different levels of government.</p> <p>Inconsistencies can arise due to poor linkages with important policies or strategies in other sectors.</p> <p>There are potential conflicts in approaches for religious and cultural communities who safeguard their own heritage.</p> <p>Where national policies exist, there are instances where they are not effectively implemented, due to inadequate resourcing, weak institutional structures, changing government commitment and so on.</p> <p>There is value in the development of a suite of issue-specific policies that can operate in different contexts.</p>	<p>National heritage systems should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - streamline institutional arrangements; - provide resources for policy development and implementation; - find opportunities for developing 'whole of government' policy processes (with cross-agency consultation and the commitment from other key ministries); - establish robust channels of communication with other policies; - include mechanisms for public appeal and debate; - be regularly evaluated and periodically modified.
6	How is change accommodated and reflected in national heritage systems?	<p>National systems – including legislation and conservation policies – can be inflexible, with little ability to reflect needed changes.</p> <p>Understanding of heritage itself and heritage outcomes can change.</p> <p>Various tools, such as conservation and management plans can be useful.</p>	<p>National heritage systems should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - establish statements of significance that include all levels of significance for heritage places and landscapes; - enable periodic review and revision of values and statements of significance; - build in monitoring mechanisms at all levels that are oriented toward the full values of the place; - establish and guide the use of conservation and management plans.

7	<p>How is heritage resourced (in terms of human, knowledge and financial capital)?</p> <p>Who pays for conservation?</p>	<p>Resources are finite and can be unevenly distributed. Priorities need to be established. Resourcing can include support for communities to be involved effectively and to care for their own heritage; enhancing professionalization; capacity building; knowledge sharing; research; and interpretation and transmission actions.</p> <p>Lack of resources can lead to compromises with poor outcomes. Over-reliance on tourism income can result in adverse social, cultural and environmental outcomes.</p> <p>In some countries, external funding is significant for large conservation programmes but can distort the application of policies and priorities.</p> <p>Lack of policy can result in a waste of resources since priorities and processes are not established on a clear basis.</p> <p>Owners and developers need to resource the conservation of heritage in their care; and in instances of significant public benefit, can be assisted via incentives e.g. grants, financial incentives, taxation relief, transferable property and development rights.</p> <p>Public-private partnerships may be a fruitful area of innovation in resourcing of heritage conservation but require strong oversight and adherence to the national heritage system.</p> <p>Permanent endowment funds that are not influenced by financial fluctuations have been effective tools in some cases.</p> <p>Local resourcing can deliver longer-term sustainability for communities and their heritage.</p>	<p>National heritage systems should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support and provide institutional arrangements and finances; - consider the needed resources and how they can be provided across diverse settings (national, state and local); - include the mapping of existing resources, particularly at the local level; - provide appropriate incentives for private owners to undertake conservation activities; - encourage corporate social responsibility in supporting heritage conservation; - use traditional systems of decision making and resourcing as a source of innovation and improvement; - establish and support universities and training institutions; - ensure that external funding sources and donors adopt procedures that respect the policies in the countries where they work.

8	<p>Are traditional knowledge, conservation and management systems supported and recognized in the national heritage system?</p>	<p>There are some good examples in the region where traditional knowledge and management are effectively incorporated into the national heritage system.</p> <p>However, there are also some gaps and systems that do not formally recognize the value of traditional systems, including skills, decision-making and ways of working.</p> <p>There is great potential to improve this through work with communities and networks and through regional cooperation, involvement of non-governmental organizations, universities, professional organizations and the private sector.</p>	<p>National heritage systems should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - value and sustain traditional approaches; - localize practices and support traditional craftsmanship, with the support of non-governmental organizations; - support community stewardship and transmission of traditional knowledge systems; - require universities to contribute through their research, teaching programmes and dissemination of outcomes; - encourage professional organizations to incorporate traditional approaches into their codes of practice and ethics, charters and guidance materials; - document examples of best practices.
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For further discussion of these issues and illustrated examples, please see the publication of this Forum.

Forum participants

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