AN INVITATION

Cultural Heritage: Theory in Policy and Practice

THE SMITHSONIAN CENTER FOR FOLKLIFE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE INVITES YOU TO JOIN WITH US in a timely and important effort to broaden and to raise the level of dialogue and reflection on cultural heritage—both its conceptual underpinnings and practical applications. We welcome your participation in our seminar series, “Cultural Heritage: Theory in Policy and Practice.”

Cultural heritage has become a pivotal concept for an expanding range of people and institutions—international agencies, governments, museums, civil society organizations, businesses, scholars, grassroots advocacy groups, creative artists, and professional cultural workers, among others. These people and institutions, however, do not necessarily share the same assumptions, knowledge base, and motivations regarding cultural heritage. An ethnic minority or indigenous group may see its cultural heritage as grounds for claiming a distinctive, legally recognized identity. Local communities and multilateral institutions alike may view cultural heritage either as fragile enough to disappear unless it is safeguarded, or as robust enough to be developed and managed as an economic resource. Commercial interests, individual artists, and states may pursue competing rights to intellectual property. How cultural heritage is conceived affects the way it is used, and its use matters deeply to the future of people and institutions around the world.

The goals of this seminar series are:

--to create a forum at which interested individuals from varied arenas can discuss and debate cultural heritage programs and policies, and step back to analyze their underpinnings
--to seek greater clarity across disciplinary, institutional, and geographic boundaries regarding the diverse and complex issues central to cultural heritage work
--to identify shared or linked commitments that characterize our approaches to cultural heritage, and strengthen the networks that can influence and implement more inclusive, more effective policy and practices

With U.S. reentry into UNESCO, the transformation of the European Union, and the emerging cultural diversity agenda in the Organization of American States, along with ongoing debates within the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), widespread immigration, struggles toward self-determination, the globalization of cultural flows, and conflicts over cultural values, it is increasingly important to examine theories of cultural heritage in policy and practice.

The seminar series builds on the Smithsonian Center’s three-year fellowship program dedicated to “Theorizing Cultural Heritage,” funded by the Rockefeller Foundation’s Program on Culture and Creativity, and more than three decades of professional practice working with a wide variety of agencies—public and private, at local, national, and international levels—to support and shape cultural policy agendas.

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