

**The Hearth Lecture Series**  
**Trendspotting: Why Things Matter**

**Session 6**

**Living Heritage: A Balancing Act Between Preservation and Progress**

**Introduction**

Approaches to heritage conservation can be delineated into three main strands. Firstly, there is the classical approach, which centres on the physical fabric and material of our heritage. This perspective asserts that these unique windows into the past belong collectively to humanity and therefore should be preserved, protected, and left as unchanged as feasible.

The second approach recognises the beauty and depth of the values held by communities that interact with the heritage fabric. These values manifest through traditions, arts, rituals, and performances that shape how others perceive the heritage deemed globally significant. While still rooted in Western paradigms and formal conservation principles, this approach involves consulting with communities culturally linked to the spaces we aim to conserve. However, this engagement can inadvertently bind a community's identity to a romanticised past, limiting its capacity to embrace modernisation or reinterpret its heritage for contemporary contexts.

Lastly, there's a more radical approach that acknowledges the richness and beauty of heritage fabric while primarily offering advice and consultation to the community intertwined with the material deemed historically significant. It leaves the decision on how to preserve and engage with this heritage to the community itself. Yet, therein lies a conundrum: which community can assert its claim to this preservation endeavour, and whose intangible heritage should guide our preservation efforts? What happens when the desire to preserve is eclipsed by other pressing needs or conflicting interests?

The question persists: How do we uphold a tangible piece of history while simultaneously acknowledging the communities that constructed and interacted with it over time, along with their cultural values and symbols? And how do we ensure we don't strip them of autonomy, livelihoods, or worse, consign them to the past alongside the history they embody? Join us for the fifth instalment of Trendspotting, where we convene a panel of distinguished historians, cultural theorists, and anthropologists to navigate this intricate terrain.

We are listing a few readings for context to the upcoming discussion. Our team ensures that we merely present the accessible materials on the theme. None of the opinions in these sources should be attributed to the personal or professional opinion of the Hearth Advisors Group.

## 1. UNESCO, Sustainable development and living heritage.

Transmitted from generation to generation, living heritage is a source of community-based resilience, which can be a driver of sustainable development in many different ways:

- **Local knowledge, skills and practices**, maintained and adapted over time, provide a vital source of revenue and decent work for many around the world, including poor and vulnerable ones, through crafts, and tourism, among others.
- **Traditional agricultural systems** provide many societies worldwide with a varied diet for adequate nutrition while preserving ecosystems and maintaining genetic biodiversity.
- **Inherited healing systems, traditional physical activities** such as sports and games and festive events strengthen the health and wellbeing of communities for all at all ages.
- Youth learn about their values and culture through the transmission of their living heritage, constituting a key pillar of their **education**.
- Living heritage can **shape gender roles** and identities, key to achieving gender equality.
- Communities have developed innovative and adaptive strategies to optimise the **use and management of water** and **minimise the consumption of energy**.
- Celebration of cultural diversity, carnivals, fairs and festivals can contribute to **harmonious social relationships** within and between urban and rural areas.
- Living heritage contains locally rooted knowledge and practices that provide a source of **resilience against changing climate conditions** and help protect biodiversity.
- Local social practices of dialogue, conflict resolution and reconciliation help **regulate access to shared spaces and natural resources** and promote **peace** and social cohesion.

## 2. Poullos, I. (2014), "Discussing strategy in heritage conservation: Living heritage approach as an example of strategic innovation", *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 16-34.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-10-2012-0048>

In this article, the approaches to heritage conservation are outlined. As per the article, a material-based approach defines the principles of western-based conservation, a values-based approach expands these principles, while a living heritage approach clearly challenges the established principles. These approaches are, then, analysed from the perspective of strategy, and a living heritage approach is seen as an example of strategic innovation. The article finds that choosing the "appropriate" conservation approach depends on the specific conditions of each heritage place. Yet, for the cases of living heritage in particular (with communities with an original connection with

heritage) a living heritage approach would be preferable. It proposes a different concept of heritage and conservation, points at a different community group as responsible for the definition and protection of heritage, and proposes a different way of heritage protection. Accessible [here](#).

**3. Prizeman O. Horse and Rider: Who will drive change in ethics and practices of globalised conservation on living heritage sites? *Architectural Research Quarterly*. 2022;26(1):91-104. doi:10.1017/S1359135522000033**

This article explores challenges that surround the implementation of conservation management strategies for living heritage in the context of two case study sites in India. Acknowledging that, in theory, 'bottom-up' strategies for expertise exist but are rarely constituted in practice, it presents two vivid but fragile examples where such possibilities might be observed. It first distinguishes the Indian Cultural Heritage context from many conventional conceptions of heritage, defined by its distance from the beholder. Vignettes illustrate how the complexity of simultaneous value systems and beliefs may confound precepts relating to the treatment of tangible heritage. A discussion of the role of the architect in drawing and model making in this context is promoted for the purpose of deeper documentation. It draws upon previous work, which has proposed the enhanced potential to record the ephemeral as well as the monumental using photogrammetry. Building on this, the role of 3D digital models has recently been suggested as a means to contribute to processes for mediating between contested conservation strategies. Challenges of heritage that is at risk of destruction from being overwhelmed by nature are separated from those associated with dereliction or, in this instance and most importantly, increased use. The two case studies, in north and south India – at Ajmer in Rajasthan and at Madurai in Tamil Nadu – are discussed in relation to other examples. These present the opportunity to consider in context how issues of the designation of value at a local or a global scale might relate to corresponding difficulties in terms of governance and control at local or global scales. It again emphasises the role and scope of deeper documentation for this purpose. In terms of safeguarding, it suggests that better means for deeper observation of existing practices of maintenance should specifically be incorporated in future work. This abstract is sourced from [Cambridge University Press](#) and the full article is available [here](#).

**4. Poullos, Ioannis. "Why Living Heritage Sites Cannot Be Embraced within the Current Approaches to Conservation?" *The Past in the Present: A Living Heritage Approach - Meteora, Greece*, Ubiquity Press, 2014, pp. 125–28. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv3s8tpq.18>.**

This chapter delves into the challenges surrounding the preservation of living heritage within the existing frameworks of heritage conservation. It identifies the non-contiguous nature of heritage conservation as a primary obstacle, contrasting it with the continuity required for both the creation and preservation of living heritage. Instead of establishing a community's connection to a site, or more precisely, the connection of an identified "core" community, modern conservation approaches tend to prioritise the relationship between the conservationists and the site, thereby maintaining control over all communities, including the core community.

Moreover, modern conservation practices often view the fabric of heritage sites as static and non-renewable, thus hindering the continuation of traditional practices, rituals, interactions, and beliefs held by the communities associated with these sites. Lastly, the current theoretical framework and practices of heritage conservation predominantly focus on sites where the process of spatial definition and arrangement has ceased.

The chapter draws on examples from various parts of the world to analyse four key aspects of continuity and their evolution, demonstrating how modern conservation approaches fall short in addressing these aspects.

5. Poullos, Ioannis. "Defining and Managing 'Living Heritage.'" *The Past in the Present: A Living Heritage Approach - Meteora, Greece*, Ubiquity Press, 2014, pp. 25–30. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv3s8tpq.9>.

In this exploration, the text delves into the existing paradigms surrounding the definition and management of living heritage sites, drawing upon a diverse array of examples from across the globe. The term "living heritage site" encompasses a wide spectrum of scenarios. It may denote a site where a local community remains deeply intertwined with and actively shapes its identity. However, pinpointing such a "local" community proves increasingly challenging in our interconnected, globalised world.

Alternatively, a living heritage site could house a community that resides within its confines, either maintaining a profound connection to the site or feeling entirely detached from it. In some instances, such communities might even perceive themselves as displaced, their connection stretching back to a site far removed from the conservation area. Moreover, a living heritage site could be one over which a community has laid claim, or it could be a dynamic space experiencing constant flux and evolution within the community. There are also sites that have never undergone modernisation, preserving their traditional essence.

Regardless of the specific circumstances, what remains consistent across these cases is the placement of communities' association with and utilisation of a site under the purview and control of heritage authorities. This chapter embarks on a journey through examples to delineate a pathway toward a new "living heritage" approach, while also offering critiques of the conventional "living heritage" framework.

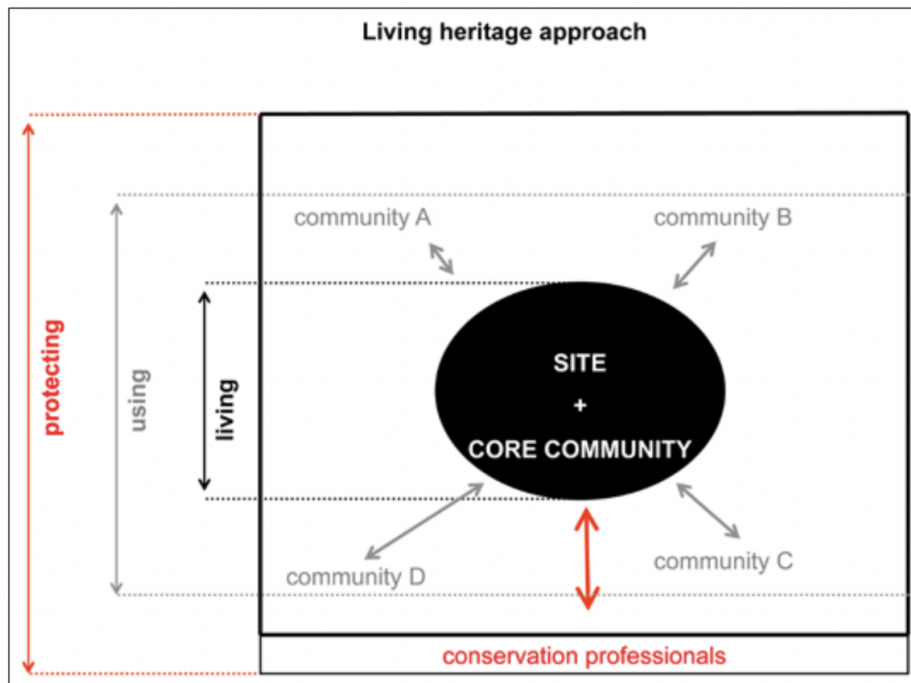
6. O'Connell, Sandra Andrea. "Living Heritage." *Irish Arts Review* (2002-), vol. 33, no. 4, 2016, pp. 574–77. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24891907>.

This article delves into the Irish Heritage Trust's remarkable journey of revitalising sites like the Fota House Arboretum and Gardens. This particular site had been left to obscurity, its stunning walled garden left untouched and unattended for over half a century, until the trust intervened to breathe new life into it, making it accessible and enriching for all.

At the core of their conservation philosophy lies the mantra of "people, place, and participation." The article delves into the strategies employed by the trust, particularly its emphasis on forging strategic partnerships with local stakeholders. By actively involving the community and fostering a sense of ownership, the trust not only preserves heritage but also nurtures a vibrant human ecosystem around these sites.

The piece underscores the distinctive approach of the Irish Heritage Trust, which sets it apart as a standout success in the Irish heritage landscape: placing people squarely at the centre of its endeavours.

7. Poullos, Ioannis. "A Living Heritage Approach: The Main Principles." *The Past in the Present: A Living Heritage Approach - Meteora, Greece*, Ubiquity Press, 2014, pp. 129–34. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv3s8tpq.19>



This chapter outlines the principles underlying a "living heritage" approach, which places a strong emphasis on continuity and acknowledges the somewhat challenging and "undemocratic" task of identifying the community responsible for its stewardship.

A living heritage approach involves studying and managing the evolution of continuity over time. Conservation efforts within this framework prioritise maintaining and enhancing continuity, even if it occasionally means some harm to the fabric of the heritage. Additionally, conservation endeavours aim to embrace change and evolution over time, ensuring that heritage remains relevant to contemporary society.

Central to the living heritage approach is a community-centred, interactive, and bottom-up approach to conservation. It involves assessing the significance of heritage based on the core community's connection to it and developing activities for its continuous care using traditional or established mechanisms and practices.

In essence, the living heritage approach advocates for safeguarding heritage within the context of the present community's connection to it. Emphasis is placed on the present, as it is viewed as a continuation of the past into the future. Consequently, the conservation process begins and revolves around the present, recognizing the ongoing interplay between past, present, and future.

8. Fritz, John M., and George Michell. "Living Heritage at Risk." *Archaeology*, vol. 65, no. 6, 2012, pp. 55–62. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41804610>.

This case study is looking for new ways to preserve and protect the culture, tourism, and needs of the locals in the great mediaeval city of Hampi. It analyses two approaches to heritage in the city. The first involves leaving it be, letting ruins remain as they are and allowing them to gradually dwindle while allowing the city to evolve naturally. This leads to the creation of marketplaces, bustling businesses, and a disorganised yet vibrant local life. The heritage of the city begins to lose itself to a swarm of haphazard modern development, and soon it begins its journey towards cessation.

The next approach involves the demolition of local life, a return of sprawling gardens, manicured lawns, gates, and a tourist's paradise. The chord of continuity between past and present is cut, and all that remains are the architectural marvels of the past. The case study seems to find flaws in both approaches, asking what can be done to keep bringing the past to the present without demolishing the latter.

## 9. Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

The Convention was adopted by UNESCO on 17 October 2003 and entered into force in 2006. Its purpose is laid down in **Article 1** as safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage, ensuring respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals, raising awareness of its importance and ensuring mutual appreciation, and providing international cooperation and assistance. The existing international human rights instruments are referred to and the deep seated interdependence between intangible cultural heritage and the tangible cultural and natural heritage are considered. The Convention recognises that the processes of globalisation and social transformation also give rise to threats of deterioration, disappearance and destruction of the intangible cultural heritage, in particular owing to a lack of resources for safeguarding such heritage. Article 2 defines Intangible Cultural Heritage as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this

Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.” The text of the Convention can be accessed [here](#). The list of State Parties can be referenced [here](#). A list of cultural practices and expressions of intangible cultural heritage of India can be found [here](#).

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