



Special Political & Decolonization (SPECPOL)

Topic 1: The redefinition of cultural heritage conservation in the Decolonization era

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1. Definition of key terms

Decolonization: 1. The process in which a country that was previously a colony becomes politically independent, gaining sovereignty and autonomy.

2. The process of re-evaluating and transforming cultural elements, such as curricula, to challenge colonial perspectives and give due importance to non-European contributions.

The conservation of cultural heritage: The measures taken to prolong the life of cultural heritage while reinforcing the transmission of its significant messages and values. Conservation aims to preserve both the physical and cultural characteristics of objects, ensuring their lasting value.

ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property): An intergovernmental organization dedicated to promoting the conservation of cultural heritage globally. Operating in alignment with UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, ICCROM emphasizes the importance of respecting cultural diversity, fostering dialogue, and cooperation for international peace and security.

2. Introduction

Cultural heritage encompasses the legacy of physical artifacts, cultural property, and intangible attributes inherited from past generations, actively preserved in the present, and passed on for the benefit of future generations. It should possess exceptional universal value from various perspectives, including historical, architectural, commemorative, aesthetic, ethnological, or anthropological. Cultural heritage plays a crucial role in providing communities, groups, and individuals with a sense of identity and continuity, helping them visualize their world and attributing meaning to their collective way of life.

The management of heritage remains a globally significant subject, and an essential tool in this endeavour is a system for recording, monitoring, and promoting heritage assets. While numerous systems exist worldwide, many are based on 'Western' concepts of heritage, which may fall short in implementation in other parts of the world due to their inability to capture diverse definitions and approaches to heritage.

3. Background information

Following World War II, there was a significant increase in the number of independent states as the colonial empires dissolved, and individual administrative colonies were granted the status of separate sovereign states. Since 1945, a total of 96 new states have been created as a result of the decolonization process. However, during the same period, another 32 colonial dependencies, which underwent decolonization, did not achieve the status of independent states.

4. General overview

In the era of globalization, there is a growing concern that worldwide culture may become more uniform, leading to a reduction in cultural diversity. To counteract this potential homogeneity, strategies have been developed to preserve the cultures of different communities that could be at risk of extinction. Living cultures are particularly susceptible to disappearing. In the present time, the increasing interest in culture is opening up new possibilities for safeguarding cultural heritage as a crucial component in constructing a sustainable cultural vision for the world. In the context of UNESCO's activities, the value and importance of preserving cultural heritage are universally acknowledged.

Cultural heritage conservation can be defined as the set of measures and actions aimed at safeguarding cultural heritage and ensuring its accessibility to both present and future generations. Conservation encompasses preventive conservation, adaptation, reconstruction, and restoration. All measures and actions should respect the meaning and physical properties of the cultural artifact.

5. Major countries involved

Canada: Canada's identity as a settler colonial state adds complexity to the decolonization task, as the original colonizers remain, and acts of colonization persist. Settler colonialism is evident in federal government policies such as the Indian Act and the Indian Residential Schools system, provincial government decisions in child welfare, and non-Indigenous people's reluctance to acknowledge Indigenous land and treaty rights or relinquish land.

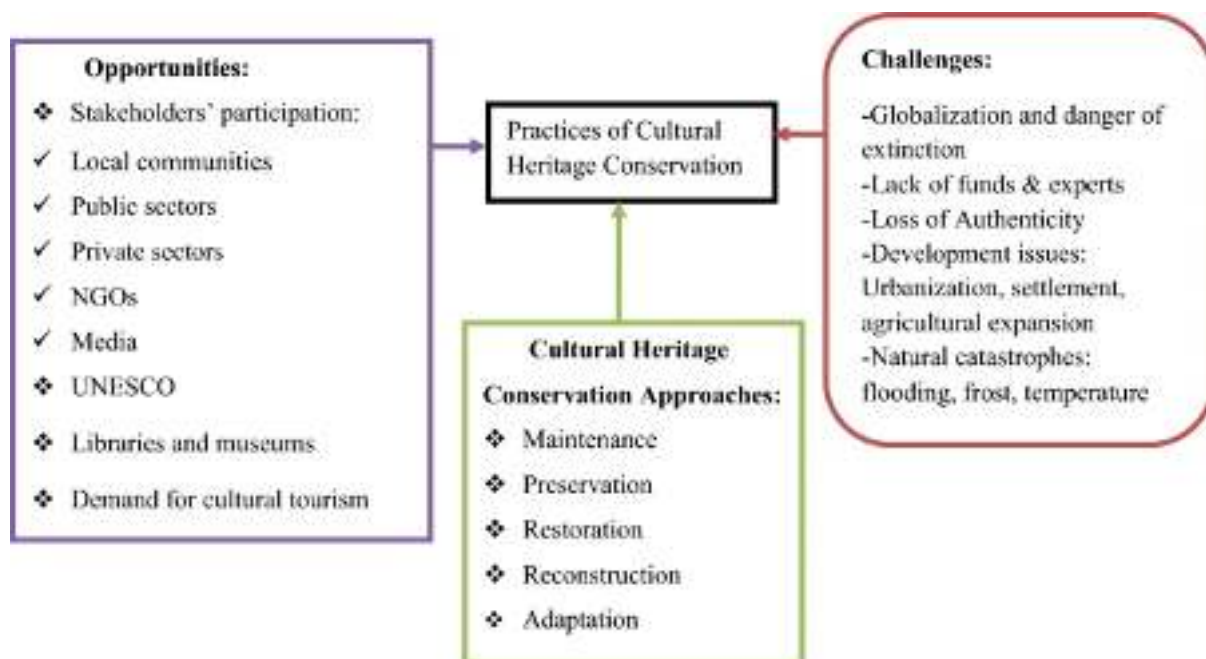
Ethiopia: In Ethiopia, collaborative efforts have been established between the Authorities for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage within the Ministry of Tourism and the UNESCO Addis Ababa Office. Their joint work plan (2006–2007) focuses on inventorying and safeguarding both tangible and intangible cultural heritage in the country. Ethiopia's constitution and cultural policy, formulated in 1995 and 1997, respectively, emphasize the equal safeguarding, recognition, and respect for all Ethiopian languages, heritage, history, handicraft, fine arts, oral literature, traditional lore, beliefs, and other cultural features.

While Ethiopia has policies, guidelines, and regulations in place for cultural heritage conservation, the practical implementation faces challenges. Many heritage attractions are in poor conservation status, facing demolition due to ignorance, intentional destruction from misinterpretation, and damage resulting from interethnic conflicts.

6. UN involvement

In today's world, despite the prevalence of mass communication and global cultural exchanges, numerous forms of cultural heritage properties are being preserved and conserved across the globe. While some cultural elements enjoy resilience, others are more delicate and even endangered, necessitating protective measures outlined by the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. These measures operate at both national and international levels, aiding communities in ensuring the availability of their heritage for future generations.

The Convention recognizes that communities, groups, and, in certain cases, individuals serve as the primary stewards and guardians of cultural heritage. However, the success of their efforts is influenced by state policies and institutions, which can either support or hinder their endeavors. The key challenges facing these communities and their advocates involve securing the opportunity for future generations to experience the heritage of their predecessors. It is crucial that measures aimed at safeguarding such heritage are carried out with the full involvement and the free, prior, and informed consent of the communities, groups, and individuals concerned.



7. Useful links

- <https://www.iccrom.org/news/thematic-discussion-decolonizing-heritage>
- <https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/about/equity/centre-for-equity-and-inclusion/race/decolonising-academia/what-does-decolonising-mean/>
- <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/asia-and-africa>

8. Bibliography

- <https://www.iccrom.org/it/chi-siamo/panoramica/che-cos%C3%A8-liccrom>
- <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/decolonization>
- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13505033.2023.2287894?src=>
- <https://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/conservation-cultural-heritage>
- <https://heritagesciencejournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40494-022-00802-6>
- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41147687>