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TOOLKIT ONE

DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES OF PLACES AND PASTS

Who is this toolkit for?

- **Heritage professionals**
- **Municipalities**
- **NGOs interested in heritage, historic environment, communities and urban development**
- **Civil society stakeholders (neighbourhood and residents'**

(Previous spread)
Looking through gateway to the Castle of the Seven Towers.

(*Previous page*)
Yedikule Gate continues to serve as the main entrance gate of Yedikule district today

This is one of six toolkits to help you to develop innovative ways of:

- **Valorising** the past in the present
- **Engaging** and working with communities
- **Recognising** the different meanings of heritage and narratives of about places and their pasts
- **Presenting** heritage to local and non-local audiences
- **Building** social cohesion, peaceful communities and heritage tourism

Why is this important?

Heritage is what people value about the past in the present. It can be highly visible and internationally important, or relatively invisible, and important only to a small group. For individual and group wellbeing it is important for people to feel a sense of connection between past, present and future, and that one's heritage is recognised by others as important. Heritage can be a key asset for tourism, bringing economic and regeneration benefits. But it is also fundamental for people's feelings of identity and belonging, and for social cohesion.

Alongside these benefits, this toolkit can help you to align with current best practice in heritage community engagement. For example, UNESCO promotes meaningful community engagement plans as part of World Heritage Site management. This toolkit also helps you to work in the spirit of the 2005 Faro convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society. This is a key international framework for promoting heritage in order to contribute to the social, cultural and economic dynamics of communities. The convention states that 'objects and places are not, in themselves, what is important about cultural heritage. They are important because of the meanings and uses that people attach to them and the values they represent'. It advocates 'making the invisible visible', to empower communities 'to take an active role in decision making towards direct democracy and contributing to policy and strategy making regarding their local resources.'

Heritage or heritages?

Heritage can include monuments, stories and traditions from centuries ago, or more recent phenomena that have shaped our lives and values. In our case study project we worked with communities in and around the Land Walls of Istanbul, part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Walls are an ancient and monumental structure, and they are part of well-known historical story of the Conquest of Constantinople in 1453. This alone makes them important. But we also know that the Walls and their environs represent many heritages, and they mean different things to different groups. This is why we talk of plural heritages. Recognising this – and helping different groups to valorise their heritages in peaceful ways – can be an important part of positive social and intercultural relations.

UNESCO World Heritage Site:
https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/356/

There is not just one heritage.
There are plural heritages.

Which heritages?

Too often we think of heritage primarily as a set of historic materials and monuments ('tangible heritage'), or as cultural traditions and customs ('intangible heritage'), and we valorise these by documenting and conserving them and giving them official status, through listing and inscription.

[Image 4] Inside the Land Walls at Yedikule

But it is just as important to valorise the ways of life and the stories and memories that inhabitant communities share about places. This is a way of understanding:

- **how people live with history**
- **how the past 'lives' today**
- **and that recognising plural heritages can show the richness of the urban and social fabric of a place, both to inhabitants and visitors**

'Heritage is concerned with the ways in which very selective material artefacts, mythologies, memories and traditions become resources for the present'.

(Ashworth and Graham, *Senses of Place, Senses of Time*, 2005, p. 4)

This often shows us that it is unhelpful to separate physical sites, such as monuments and their environs, from the intangible and invisible aspects of social memory: how people lived in or around such sites, how their lives were marked by them and what their experiences, interactions and feelings were. Tangible and intangible heritages are intertwined

[Image 5] Pigeon market, Tekfur Sarayı

While this may seem too mundane to make it into the history books, ignoring this means that we 'freeze' heritage sites to represent only one past. We therefore miss other, less well-known histories, and their meaning and value for people in the present. We lose important and fascinating group memories that might not otherwise be documented and made known. Valorising plural heritages can also have the effect of increasing people's sense of place, pride, and belonging, and boosting tourist interest and footfall.

Not all heritage is about 'big history'. Capturing smaller-scale stories, narratives and memories can stop a site from feeling 'frozen' and add to its vibrancy, appeal and habitability.

Identifying plural heritages

If there are many heritages, even around one site, then how do we identify them? How do we decide what counts as heritage?

Our first task here is to explore the history of a site and the neighbourhoods and community groups around it. Sometimes this also means identifying historic groups who are no longer there. Ask yourself:

- **How did the site originate? Is it part of well-known historic events?**
- **What has happened to the site over the centuries? How has it changed and why?**
- **What was life in and around the site like in the past? How has that changed over time until today?**
- **Which groups lived there in the past, and why? Why did they leave, or disappear?**
- **Do their stories add depth to our understandings of places, pasts and people?**

Recognising plural heritages makes for vibrant, multi-layered places that are not 'frozen' through heritage but made alive by it, with historic depths from the remote past to the present day.

Whose heritages?

In our project, these questions led us to a mapping exercise to identify inhabitant groups* past and present. You may be able to use public information such as census records to do this, but we more often rely on historical knowledge and awareness of contemporary demographics. You may not be able to identify every group that has ever inhabited a specific place, but exploring plural heritages is an iterative process, and to make a start it is important to recognise some key inhabitants and users of the space.

When thinking about the Land Walls we were dealing with an unusual site, because it is 6 kilometres long. We could identify groups in all of the different neighbourhoods along the lengths of the walls, but simply living in the same place is no guarantee that people have something in common, or constitute a group. Instead, we started with broad categories:

- **People still there**
- **Recently arrived**
- **Displaced/gone**
- **Displaced within Istanbul**
- **The dead**

Each of these broad groups is heterogeneous. 'People still there' for example, includes multiple communities with different ethnic, religious, socio-economic characteristics. They also require different ways of working. To understand the stakes that a displaced community may have in a historic site we may have to visit them in diaspora places, far from the site itself. We cannot 'work with' the dead, but burial practices, cemeteries and living people's sense of ancestry may be important for our understandings of plural heritages. Try to be comprehensive (within reason, because we work on a principle of starting iterative processes), and consider how you can:

- **Recognise minority and majority voices**
- **Make visible the invisible**
- **Recognise the validity of 'small stories' and non-authorised heritage**

As an example, when researching the Land Walls we noticed some unusual 'user groups': bird keepers, allotment gardeners *(Bostanci)*, young male adults who walk atop the Walls for fun, companionship and for the view. Each of these groups provided us with rich stories about the meanings and histories of the walls for them. This told us something new about the social and urban historical fabric, adding layers of interest to our understanding of a monument that is usually celebrated because of its deep past and its architectural and archaeological value.

Of course, walking on the Walls does not help their conservation, and puts the young men at risk. We may therefore wish to discourage this, while also recognising it as an important historic use of space. Dealing with dilemmas between social and conservation aspects of heritage is part of sensitive practice, capable of balancing out the different values of historic places.

What is a group?
Categorising people into groups can be controversial because it can reinforce lines of difference, for example based on ethnicity, religion, disability, age and so on. This is also about who has the power to classify people in groups. Ideally, people should self-identify as part of a group and practise membership of that group, through everyday activities and socialisation.

Bear in mind also that people usually belong to many groups simultaneously, and that groups can also be based on things people do, whether in relation to occupations or pastimes.

All of this means thinking carefully about the political dimensions of identifying and working with groups.

Identifying and recognising plural heritages can enrich our understandings of places and their inhabitants and histories, creating civil benefits and potentially adding interest for tourism.

In our second toolkit – ***Working with Communities to Revalorise Heritage*** – you can explore ways of engaging and collaborating with groups and making available their stories with forms of heritage interpretation and co-production.

Are plural heritages conflicting heritages?

The idea of plural heritages means that there are many ways of relating to and valorising the past within society. While heritage is often thought of as something that can unite people, it is also true that the meanings people take from the past and how they use it to think about the present can be conflictual. It is now common to think about conflict as a natural part of heritage, and that, rather than ignoring this, we should try to understand it and to create the grounds for different groups and heritages to coexist peacefully. The marginalisation and silencing of heritages is more likely to lead to division and senses of disenfranchisement than the recognition of different, even conflictual heritages. In our 2nd toolkit – Working with communities to revalorise heritage – you can learn more about how to approach this issue

While heritage can unite people, it can also be a factor in conflict and division. This should not be ignored and needs to be recognised and managed in order to build the grounds for peaceful social cohesion.

The Faro Convention acknowledges that the presence of diversity of peoples, places and narratives may lead to conflictual situations, but proposes good practices to contribute to inclusive societies with respect for dignity and multiple identities.

When trying to understand people's lives and memories in depth, it is generally important to use qualitative research methods. This makes it difficult to have a representative sample, especially where a population may be in the hundreds of thousands or millions. In such cases we should try to reflect diversity in the population as sensitively as possible, attending to the most prominent vectors of social groupings. These will be different in different places

The key messages from this toolkit are:

- Heritage is about the meanings and values that people give to traces of the past.
- There is not one heritage. There are plural heritages.
- Not all heritage is about 'big history'. Capturing smaller-scale stories, narratives and memories can stop a site from feeling 'frozen' and add to its vibrancy, appeal and habitability.
- Identifying and recognising plural heritages can enrich our understandings of places and their inhabitants and histories, creating civil benefits and potentially adding interest for tourism.
- While heritage can unite people, it can also be a factor in conflict and division. This should not be ignored and needs to be recognised and managed in order to build the grounds for peaceful social cohesion.

This series of toolkits was produced by an international team of researchers based in Newcastle University, UK, and Istanbul Bilgi University and Bursa Uludağ University, Turkey. They are for general use by people who are involved in engaging with heritage and communities.

The toolkits are based on our 'Plural Heritages of Istanbul – The Case of the Land Walls' research project and the aim of the toolkits is to share what we learned from our experience. We asked how communities give meaning to major heritage sites and what happens when such meanings are intertwined with marginalisation, or are not recognised in official heritage interpretations. Our project explored the 'plural heritages' of the Istanbul Land ('Theodosian') Walls and their environs. This 5th century UNESCO World Heritage site stretches over six kilometres setting a boundary to the Historic Peninsula of Istanbul. In this context we asked how ethnographic studies, community co-production and dialogue with heritage agencies could contribute to a more 'plural' account of the site's heritage.

www.pluralheritages.ncl.ac.uk

Toolkit 1: Different Experiences of Places and Pasts
Christopher Whitehead

Toolkit 2: Working with Communities to Revalorise Heritage
Christopher Whitehead
Gönül Bozoğlu

Toolkit 3: Creating Memory Maps
Tom Schofield
Gönül Bozoğlu
Figen Kıvılcım Çorakbaş

Toolkit 4: Community Co-production
Tom Schofield
Christopher Whitehead

Toolkit 5: Understanding and Documenting Intangible Cultural Qualities of Urban Heritage
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Toolkit 6: Rethinking 'Outstanding Universal Value' at Urban World Heritage Sites
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