



Cultural Heritage Agency
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

Shared past New perspectives

Shared Cultural Heritage programme 2017-2020



Introduction



An awareness of where we come from and whom we share our histories with gives new meanings to our shared past – now and in the future. This sentiment is at the heart of our Shared Cultural Heritage programme 2017-2020, which follows from the Netherlands' International Cultural Policy.

Our International Cultural Policy is based on the belief that international exchange is essential for countries to build a sustainable future together. Cultural heritage plays a vital role in this process. We all share histories with each other, and traces of our past can be found everywhere – from buildings or art collections to railway lines or shipwrecks. We all face similar challenges, too – such as how to keep our historic inner cities appealing places to live in and how to manage our cultural heritage sustainably.

In the years to come, international heritage cooperation will remain essential. When professionals form networks, learn from each other and work together on solutions for cultural heritage, we achieve something remarkable that goes beyond simply preserving what remains of the past. Rather, it involves giving new value to heritage in society. The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands is pleased to be able to contribute to this by encouraging and facilitating international connections, developing new knowledge and expertise together, and ensuring that the results of these projects are visible and accessible.

We have worked on so many wonderful projects around the world with our partner countries. These projects have created new perspectives on heritage itself, the people that safeguard it, and on society as a whole. We are proud of these partnerships. They are contributing to new insights and greater understanding between countries and cultures. Working together means accepting (and celebrating) a plurality of perspectives on the past. It requires being open to different approaches and solutions. Despite our differences, we search for – and indeed we find – shared interests.

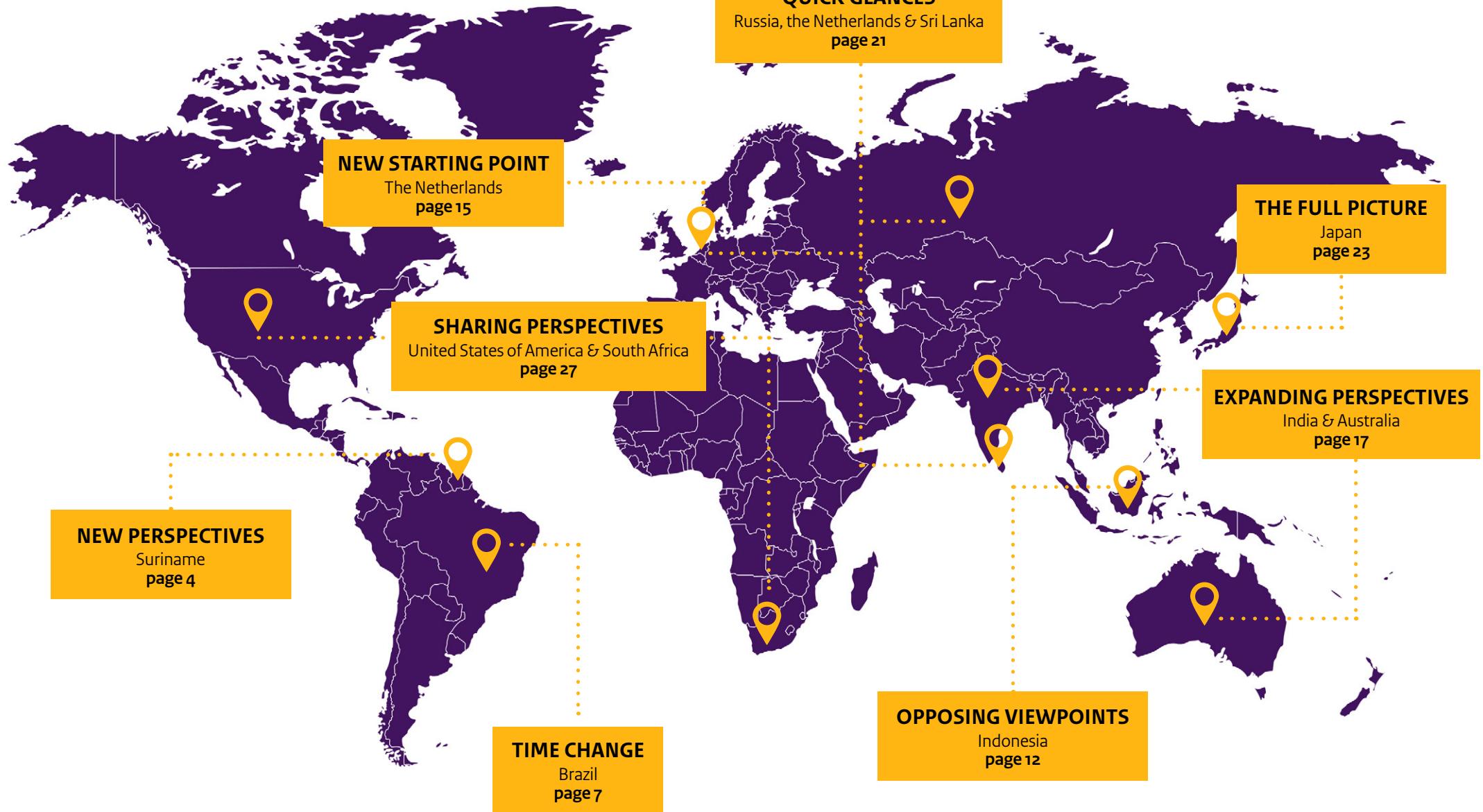
We would like to thank our colleagues in the Netherlands and in our partner countries. As this publication shows, our work together has produced some compelling results. We look forward to continuing our joint efforts and we also hope that we can inspire other countries and partners to create their own partnerships.

A world of new possibilities for our cultural heritage, driven by new perspectives and transnational conversations, awaits.

**SHARED PAST
NEW PERSPECTIVES
HOPEFUL FUTURES!**

Susan Lammers
General Director Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands

Content overview



NEW PERSPECTIVES



New sound for unique heritage in Suriname

Sounds promising!

Impressive organs, timepieces, bells and carillons: Suriname has them all – especially in the capital city Paramaribo. Many of them are Dutch in origin. In 2014, a special partnership was launched between the two countries to help future-proof this “sounding heritage” (which includes tower clocks, carillons, pipe organs and the like). And that makes Stephen Fokké very proud. He is the director of the Suriname Built Heritage Foundation and has been involved in the collaboration from the start. ‘This unique form of heritage is taking on new significance in the local community.’

HOW IMPORTANT IS SOUNDING HERITAGE TO SURINAME AND CAN YOU GIVE US SOME REALLY GOOD EXAMPLES?

‘In Suriname, we have quite a lot of sounding heritage. That includes the beautiful pipe organs of the Reformed Church, the Lutheran Church, the Grote Stadskerk (Large City Church), the St. Rosa Church and the St. Peter and Paul Cathedral Basilica. Most of the organs were made in the Netherlands. The same applies to the tower clocks at the Ministry of Finance, the Diocese and the Suriname Water Company. In addition, there are various different bells, the carillon on Vaillantsplein and the chimes of the Jong A Kiem shop on Steenbakkerijstraat in Paramaribo. The owners and managers attach great importance to this sounding heritage. In 2018, they founded the Association of Sounding Heritage in Suriname. It also gives an extra dimension to the historic city centre of Paramaribo, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and brings new opportunities for the community.’

WHAT STATE WAS THIS HERITAGE IN YEARS AGO?

‘In general, the state of repair of this heritage was mediocre to poor. The pipe organs in certain churches were maintained better, but none of the tower clocks was functioning. And the organ of the Grote Stadskerk in Paramaribo was no longer being used either. The carillon was still working, but it was in dire need of renovation. Action was absolutely essential, and now that action has been taken. That really means something for the future of this shared heritage.’

HOW DID SURINAME AND THE NETHERLANDS START TO WORK TOGETHER?

‘It all began with a request from the Surinamese Ministry of Finance to provide advice to repair and automate the tower clock in Paramaribo. Our Built Heritage Foundation did not have the expertise required to do that. So we contacted the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands because they were a long-standing partner of ours. That led to a fantastic collaboration on our shared sounding heritage, and our foundation now plays a leading role in that. The first action was to compile an inventory of all the sounding heritage and its status. Significant milestones have since been achieved within a relatively short period of time, thanks to a concerted effort. The partnership with the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands is very pleasant and smooth. Specialist in clocks and organs Rudi van Straten is one of the driving forces behind this collaboration.’ >>>



WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED, AND WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

'Following the inventory of heritage, we launched several initiatives. For example, we are rebuilding the Maarschalkerweerd pipe organ in the St. Peter and Paul Cathedral Basilica. It's a multi-year project that professionals from both countries are working together on. In addition, we have set up the tower clocks project to restore the clocks that are no longer working. The first timepiece to be restored is at the Suriname Water Company in the town of Republiek. Surinamese and Dutch experts have also been looking into the condition of the Weigle organ, which was made in Germany. The organ's owner and user – the Moravian Church in Suriname (EBGS) – would like the organ to be restored. Another great example – there is now a Multi-Year Plan for Clock and Organ Heritage in Suriname for 2017-2022, which means that we can carry out a systematic restoration over the next few years. And there are also initiatives to increase awareness about clock, carillon and organ heritage. Examples are the 'Sounding Heritage in Suriname' informative set of cards, a guest lecture for history students at the Anton de Kom University and articles in the media. And we also involve the local community in a number of ways.'

HOW IS THE LOCAL COMMUNITY INVOLVED AND WHAT IMPACT IS THAT HAVING?

'The input and motivation of managers and owners is essential. That's where it all starts, because we can't do anything without them. And clearly, that motivation is there! They are helping us and working with us on all fronts. The establishment of the Sounding Heritage Association is a great demonstration of this. It is also nice to see the collaboration between local craftsmen and experts from the Netherlands. That promotes knowledge transfer around renovation and maintenance and it also creates employment opportunities. But it is more than just that. The young Surinamese organists of the Organists Circle are also given the opportunity to learn organ music and carry out small-scale maintenance on the pipe organs. In this way, the restoration projects improve their prospects in a very concrete way. And the Roman Catholic Diocese has also launched an awareness campaign to increase support for the preservation of the Maarschalkerweerd organ.'

That is also providing funds for reconstruction. Parishioners can adopt an organ pipe in honour of a deceased family member. The names of deceased loved ones are displayed on a panel in the basilica. That really makes the heritage part of the community. Another powerful example is the DIY organ project for Surinamese young people.'

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'My dream is that our sounding heritage can continue to ring out forever'

STEPHEN FOKKÉ

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WHAT DOES THIS PROJECT MEAN FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

'The "Do It Yourself organ" is central to the project. It's a wonderful initiative to help familiarize children with sounding heritage in a playful way. It is a kit in a box, designed especially for primary school students. They can put the organ together, listen to it and play it with the help of an organist. It has been successfully introduced in the Lutheran church. Just before the coronavirus pandemic struck, the DIY organ project was offered to the Sounding Heritage Association, which now manages it. Activities with the organ have been cancelled for now due to the pandemic. Hopefully we can start them up again soon. My dream is that our sounding heritage can continue to ring out forever. Especially now that the younger generations are becoming more aware of this unique heritage. That is also what we are trying to achieve through this valuable partnership between Suriname and the Netherlands.'



TIME CHANGE



THEN →

A dynamic city of several million inhabitants, full of high-rise buildings – this is Recife in Brazil. It's a city of extremes: alongside the wealthy areas, there are neighbourhoods that lack basic facilities such as a sewage system. Something that many people don't realize is that Recife was once a Dutch outpost in Brazil. In the 17th century, this previously Portuguese-held settlement came into the hands of the Dutch West India Company. Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen carried out an ambitious expansion project in the city, which was built partly on islands and was located on the delta of three river basins. For a time, Recife became known as Mauritsstad and many canals, bridges, fortresses and roads were built. Maurits brought artists and scientists to Brazil and the city was a place of religious tolerance. But Maurits also, under the orders of the West India Company, brought the Dutch into the slave trade, as "Dutch Brazil" relied on the labour of enslaved Africans.

Over the centuries, Recife has grown to become the Brazilian metropolis that it is today. It is still located on the water, of course, but that water has gradually taken on a different significance. As the city expanded, the water increasingly came to symbolize waste, filth and danger. Once it was the domain of seamen and fishermen, but it progressively became the home of the favelados (residents of the city's slums and stilts). Much of the urban water became an open sewer and the city's river banks were largely inaccessible. Water and water systems scarcely played any role in the city's urban development anymore. Some initiatives, such as the planting of mangrove trees along the banks of the river, just led to obscure the view of the water. On the other hand, the mangroves promote a vibrant water landscape on the river and also create ecological corridors, which has both social and natural potential regarding the city's resilience. In addition, in the next decades, Recife is threatened to be submerged due to rising sea levels caused by climate change.



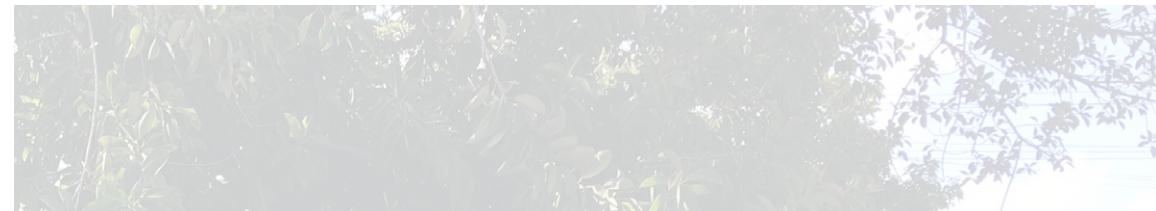
How could this be different? Brazilian administrators, planners and other professionals wanted to turn this situation around. They recognized the importance of water and its potential to play a role in sustainable urban development. But how can water and water systems make a positive contribution to the city once again? How can the cities' waterways become a powerful, connecting element? Brazil and the Netherlands have found each other (again) in Recife, and in their love for water and sustainable urban development. With a focus on the historic links between Amsterdam and Recife; two "cities on the water" whose development has diverged so much, but which clearly have so much in common too. Since 2011, the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands has been helping to foster this lively partnership. >>>



← NOW



THEN →



Viewing the city from the water means seeing a completely different perspective: quite normal in the Netherlands, but something quite new in Recife. A boat trip on the River Capibaribe gave those involved a valuable insight. In recent years, exchanges, dialogues, an exhibition and two workshops have been organized and an International Forum (RXN) is under construction for 2021. One wonderful achievement is the Water Tree Concept, developed by professionals from both countries. This visualizes the city as a big tree, taking into account the structuring dimensions that make up a city, with water as the connecting element. It brings the city together under one narrative: the beaches and waterfronts form the roots, the estuary holds the city together like a tree trunk, the rivers distribute water throughout the city like branches and leaves, while the flowers and fruit represent the city's inhabitants and civil society. This framework helps to unify the city in a narrative that takes account of Recife's natural and cultural heritage when considering the future of the city. A guideline for developing long-term strategies!

The Water Tree Concept has already been put into practice on the mainland of Recife in the Capibaribe Park Project. In the Baobab Garden, the waterfront has been transformed – from parking lots into lively, park-like spaces. In the Graças district, some busy roads have been made into beautiful thoroughfares with plenty of green space and opportunities for cycling and walking. This creates public spaces that are more open and liveable and that are better connected with water and nature. That essential connection inspires the conception of long term projects with a major purpose: to establish the basis of a sustainable development plan for Recife in its 500th anniversary, in 2037.

Learning from each other: this is the great benefit of the exchange between Brazilian culture and Dutch culture. The Dutch experience in water management and urban planning revealed the potential of working with the water systems in Recife, in combination with a reinterpretation of the historic urban landscape, which represented a change of perspective for the Brazilian partners. On the other hand, the Dutch partners have come to appreciate the added value of developing a concept that views the city as an integrated system, with the potential to guide long-term strategies and actions for urban planning and redevelopment projects.



NOW ←



A diver in a bright yellow suit is working on a shipwreck underwater. The diver is wearing a black tank and has various equipment attached to their suit. A circular dotted line frames the central text.

OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS

Cooperation on heritage provides a way out of political disagreement

‘Cultural heritage gives us an honest perspective on the past and on who we are’

In 2016, different perspectives on the past became a source of tension between the Netherlands and Indonesia. But joint research is now providing common ground, leading to collaboration and a new perspective on the values of cultural heritage!

AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE

The year was 2016 – almost 75 years since the Battle of the Java Sea. The Dutch government asked Indonesia for permission to dive to the wrecks of three Dutch naval ships that had sunk during the battle. But no response had been forthcoming from Indonesia. The Dutch government decided to abandon the plans for a diving expedition, but the Karel Doorman Fund had other ideas. The charity launched its own diving expedition to the wreck sites of De Ruyter, Java and Kortenaer ‘to commemorate the 915 marines who lost their lives on board those ships, and to help protect their graves’. The expedition would be similar to other technical diving trips that had taken place on these sites. But to their astonishment, the divers found that the wrecks had all but completely disappeared. The seabed was empty. The discovery marked the beginning of a heated debate between the Netherlands and Indonesia.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Martijn Manders, Director of the International Programme for Maritime Heritage at the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, recalls the tension: ‘The Indonesians were angry that a diving expedition had gone ahead without permission, and felt embarrassed by the situation. The Dutch could not get their heads around the fact that the war wrecks, which they still regarded as Dutch property, had disappeared. They thought that Indonesia

should have taken better care of the site. But the Indonesians saw things very differently; they did not see the wrecks as their own cultural heritage, and certainly not as Dutch property. That notion was also inconsistent with the fact that Indonesia is now a sovereign state, which once had to fight the Netherlands for its independence.’ So the issue of the shipwrecks brought to the surface two very different perspectives on the past and on historical events.

BATTLE OF THE JAVA SEA

To understand this we need to go further back in time. Back in the 1920s and 1930s, Japanese influence was spreading steadily across Southeast Asia. Japan was trying to promote self-sufficiency for a bloc of Asian nations under Japanese leadership – free from Western interference. As such, Japan was a powerful ally for the nationalist movement in the Dutch East Indies in their struggle for independence. In December 1941, the Netherlands declared war on Japan. The following January, the American-British-Dutch-Australian (ABDA) Command was formed to coordinate Allied forces in Southeast Asia. But they were no match for Japan’s military strength. On 27 February 1942, the Allied fleet was defeated in the Battle of the Java Sea. Shortly afterwards, the Allied troops in the Dutch East Indies surrendered and prisoners of war were sent to Japanese internment camps. Indonesian freedom fighters were released. >>>



HISTORIC TURNING POINT

'Independence was proclaimed by Indonesia in August 1945, but was not recognized by the Netherlands until December 1949,' explains Martijn. 'Two completely different dates, accompanied by very different perspectives. But regardless, the Battle of the Java Sea was an important turning point in the history of both countries. For the Netherlands it effectively meant the loss of a major colony, while for Indonesia it marked the moment when the country began to shake itself free of Dutch rule. The event is seen very differently by both countries – even today.'

The discussion about the shipwrecks reflected those differences, and reached the highest political levels. Ambassadors and ministers from both countries became involved and the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte held meetings with his Indonesian counterpart, President Widodo. The relatives of the crew members of the navy ships demanded an explanation, while the media also jumped on the story.

So how could the two countries find a constructive way forward? The solution: investigate what had happened together. A working group was set up for this specific purpose, including Dutch and Indonesian archaeologists, heritage experts, diplomats and legal scholars. It fell to the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands to coordinate the working group from a cultural-historical perspective.

POLITICAL SENSITIVITIES

'We opted for a three-phase study,' says Martijn. 'The first step was quite simple: based on the data available, we confirmed together that the three shipwrecks, which had been 170, 155 and 110 metres in length, had in fact disappeared from the seabed.' This fact check formed the "common ground" from which to continue to phase two. 'That was the most difficult phase, because it involved finding answers to the questions "who did this and why?". We already knew that this would be a challenge: this was politically highly sensitive, but there was no way around it. The conversation was tense at times, but both countries kept talking and kept working together. What made it work? Both parties had equal say, were willing to listen to each other, and they shared a determination to work things out together.'

As expected, no conclusive answers were found to the research questions. But one result that this phase did yield was a better understanding of each other's points of view. 'In the third and final phase of the study, we were able to build on that shared perspective and consider the question "how do we make sure that this never happens again?"'

CLOSER TOGETHER

A conflict over fraught cultural heritage has ultimately brought the Netherlands and Indonesia closer. Where the countries used to be diametrically opposed, they are now working together. They are sharing knowledge about cultural heritage management, carrying out joint heritage projects and they are even planning to set up a memorial site for the Battle of the Java Sea together. The countries have also come together politically; a Letter of Intent has been signed regarding cooperation in the Java Sea and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) includes a separate section on joint Maritime Heritage Management.

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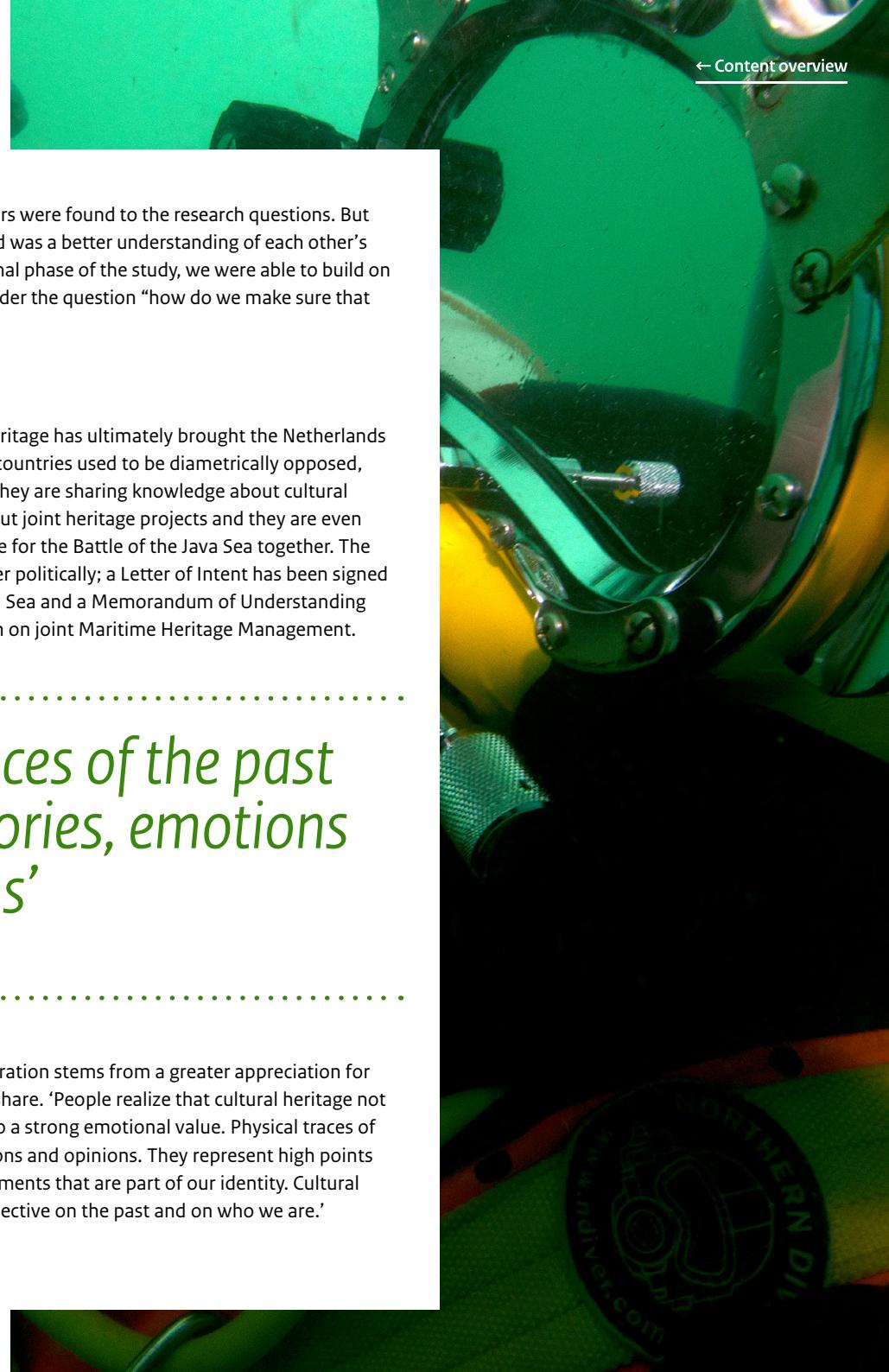
'Physical traces of the past evoke memories, emotions and opinions'

MARTIJN MANDERS

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HONEST PERSPECTIVE

According to Martijn, this collaboration stems from a greater appreciation for the heritage that both countries share. 'People realize that cultural heritage not only has a material value, but also a strong emotional value. Physical traces of the past evoke memories, emotions and opinions. They represent high points and low points in our history, moments that are part of our identity. Cultural heritage gives us an honest perspective on the past and on who we are.'





NEW STARTING POINT

The full potential of cultural heritage

International cooperation on heritage, with one partner country or several. In recent years, I have experienced how enriching this can be for all those involved. The thing I like best is that we are all able to connect with each other, despite the differences in context, perspective and approaches. Because we all want to build a better society and we know that heritage can play an important role in this.

But this does not mean that it is always easy to find common ground. For the Netherlands, for example, it is important to work on “shared heritage”: heritage that arises from our shared history with other countries. Trade, colonialism, cultural exchange and migration have left many traces of that history, both inside and outside the Netherlands. Those traces show how our country became intertwined with other countries and cultures in the past, and how without this knowledge we aren't able to properly understand our world today.

But each partner country views that “shared heritage” from a different angle. Sometimes it concerns the remnants of a past that has largely disappeared from a country's collective memory. Other countries are giving new impetus to remembrance by reconstructing buildings dating from that period. But even if shared history is hard to escape, the significance of shared heritage is not

always straightforward. So although a shared past can provide a starting point for collaboration, our focus must be, above all, on the future. After all, every country now faces comparable societal issues, such as climate change, sustainability, participation and social inclusion. Themes that require continuous development, the ability to respond to changing needs and circumstances and a joint search for appropriate solutions. The curiosity, openness and innovation that are required for this transcend national borders. In fact, it is only by reaching out to one another and learning together that we can enhance our ability to develop and build a sustainable future.



Jinna Smit

Programme Director International Heritage Cooperation
(formerly Shared Cultural Heritage)
Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands

When it comes to heritage, we look both backwards and forwards before initiating new developments. That applies to our programme for international heritage cooperation too. In the future, it will not be the shared heritage that will take centre stage, but the societal challenges where international cooperation can add real value. The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands wants to facilitate that professionals from across the world can learn from each other, jointly develop knowledge and expertise and share their results. Because international cooperation is not only enriching for those involved, it is also essential to utilize the full potential of heritage for society.



EXPANDING PERSPECTIVES

Training Sharing Stories on Contested Histories

Expanding perspectives on contested stories

Every nation's history inevitably includes aspects that are contested. At the Sharing Stories on Contested Histories training programme, museum professionals and academics from across the world exchange experiences and explore approaches to presenting complex stories from multiple perspectives. The Reinwardt Academy and the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands organized the training programme jointly in 2018 and 2019. Two participants explain how the training changed their perspective on contested heritage and their work.



Juhi Sadiya
Assistant Professor in the department of
Museology, National Museum Institute of
History of Art, Conservation and Museology,
New Delhi, India

[Read Juhi's story →](#)



Damien Webb
Manager of the Indigenous Engagement
Branch at the State Library of New South
Wales, Australia.

[Read Damiens story →](#)



Juhi Sadiya:

'I learned how to present the dark side of history in a bright light'

'India, a multicultural nation, is a land of many languages, ethnic groups, traditions and lifestyles. A single object may have a wholly different meaning in a different contextual setting. While designing exhibitions and educational programmes, and during my doctoral research work, I have dealt with themes and collections with multiple narratives which can be attributed from a number of perspectives. For example, an exhibition on India's first prime minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, a series of educational workshops on our nation's father Mahatma Gandhi, a research project on the modern history of Kashmir and research papers on the relevance of natural history collection in sociocultural practices of the Indian society.'

HOLISTIC APPROACH

'I have encountered many challenges in the presentation of contested heritage. Like: what data sources should be used when collecting multiple perspectives? How to weave together multiple contexts associated with objects? And how to take a holistic approach in narrative building? India and the Netherlands share heritage in the fields of trade and art. The training provided me with an insight into possible methods and approaches which can be used to communicate this Indo-Dutch connection. The visits to different Dutch museums during the course familiarised me with the best possible practices or approaches of sharing stories that contain multiple perspectives. The strategies that are used by Tropenmuseum, Rijksmuseum, The Black Archives and Imagine IC helped me to explore ways that can be used to make Indian museums more inclusive and participatory. It also gave me a better insight into the methods necessary to include voices of the communities and associated people.'

CREATE COMPLEX NARRATIVES

'The thoughtful participation and open approach of my fellow trainees from different countries gave me a chance to understand diverse contexts, cultures, people, social practices and museums of different countries. We shared our contested histories, perspectives and experiences with each other. Enlightening discussions helped us to find ways to create complex narratives. Case studies and experiences shared by participants helped me to understand the current museum practices of different countries, which challenges heritage professionals face and how they deal with them. The training is of great help in my profession. I share the knowledge and experience that I gained with my students and use museum collections as case studies. I also help them to rethink the present narratives associated with our museum collection and how the narrative can be modified when needed. The takeaways from the training have helped me to guide Master's seminars and dissertations on contested histories. For instance: one of the students under my supervision has worked on the topic "Museums and representation of social conflicts".'

EMOTIONAL NETWORKING

'I use the strategy of emotional networking and the biographical approach in designing educational programmes and developing exhibitions. And I am analysing the strategies that are being used in the research projects in which I am involved, most of which are community and participant-oriented. Most of all, the training programme taught me how to present the dark side of history in a bright light, with sensory and empathetic engagement.'



Damien Webb:

'It let me rewrite the entire exhibition'

'Despite progress on civil rights and the end of some forms of oppression, there remains a deeply conservative undercurrent in every colonised country, which is resistant to any perceived change to the status quo. When your job is to dive to the heart of beloved but flawed historical narratives and rewrite them, the outrage from those who hold power can be quite severe.'

NARROW SPECTRUM

'While we often claim that our institutions are for everyone, the truth of our exhibitions and activities is that they often speak to a very narrow spectrum of identity and experience. I signed up for the training because I wanted to find ways to deal with my frustrations which had built up working in this space; to learn how others were curating these sorts of stories and how they were dealing with their nations' complex and contested legacies. It was a humbling experience to be around so many professionals and peers. The conversations we had between and outside of the sessions helped me to remember that this work is never done in isolation; that we have networks of like-minded colleagues all over the world.'

DEFINING COLONISATION

'Perhaps the most illuminating insight for me was the different way participants defined the term "colonisation". For some it simply referred to a specific era in their history; the time they were occupied by Dutch, English or French invaders. I found it fascinating that a term which carries so much baggage and violence in Australia was simply a temporal adjective for other

countries. It may seem obvious, but it really helped me to understand that my curatorial approach needed to include entry points for these forms of understanding. The training took place in the middle of my most difficult exhibition to date, one which was the anniversary of invasion and which sought to interrogate a narrative which is central to white Australian identity. For much of the country it is akin to our "Golden Age"; a story of European ingenuity and bravery which is fiercely defended against any criticism. For my people - First Nations Australians - this story is one of invasion and genocide and we continue to protest the uncritical treatment of this narrative to this day. The lessons I learned from this programme led me to rewrite the entire exhibition - every panel, description, caption and word - in order to provide entry points for people who were perhaps only now discovering their national history was one-sided.'

AWARD WINNING

'The exhibition received national acclaim, won the "Australian Museum and Gallery Award" for 2020 and importantly was respected by both First Nations Elders and white historians alike. I cannot overstate how instrumental the Sharing Stories on Contested Histories training programme was in that success. The training taught me to be empathetic in my convictions, and to be open-hearted in my exhibitions. It can be difficult to separate ourselves from our work, but this wonderful training programme reminded me that we do not always have to. There is a place for strength and to pioneer new ways to tell old stories in our grandest institutions, and I am honoured to be part of a group which perhaps helped to cement that idea.'





QUICK GLANCES
Russia, the Netherlands & Sri Lanka

[← Content overview](#)

QUICK GLANCES



FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Rostov Veliky (or “Rostov the Great”) is part of the “Golden Ring” of historic cities around Moscow. Its historic centre is surrounded by earthwork fortifications built in 1634 by Dutch engineer Jan Cornelius van Rodenburg. Over the centuries, however, this shared Russian-Dutch heritage site – and all the associated memories and knowledge – have fallen into a state of neglect.

To engender new ways of keeping the city attractive and economically vital, a partnership was begun between the Netherlands and Russia in 2013, initiated by Rostov’s city council, as part of the Shared Cultural Heritage programme. Involving a wide range of stake-holders – the city authorities, museum professionals and civil society – the aim was to raise awareness of Rostov’s fortifications and enable them to contribute to the social and economic development of the city.

After seven years of research and knowledge exchange between Russian and Dutch experts about the history of the site and innovative approaches to sites such as these, Rostov’s fortifications have been brought back to life for the benefit of the local community. This was evident at the event that took place this summer, in which artists from different cities engaged creatively with Rostov’s ramparts, and at the upcoming exhibition at the Rostov Kremlin Museum, in which the fortifications will be a prominent feature.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE RCE’S ART COLLECTION

In 2018, the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE) initiated a study guided by the questions: does the RCE’s art collection contain objects that are connected to the Netherlands’ colonial past? How can people search for relevant objects if certain topics have not yet been specifically named and described? To tackle this, the Cultural Heritage Agency initiated the pilot project ‘Traces of Slavery and Colonial History in the Art Collection’ as part of its Shared Cultural Heritage programme.

A diverse, external Advisory Board was installed, and its members advised the RCE on matters such as whether to maintain the original title given by the artist, even if it contains offensive or outdated language. Quotation marks now indicate that the title comes directly from the artist. Inspired by the work of other institutions and through collaboration with professionals working on these topics, this project yielded many new findings and a new approach towards the RCE’s art collection, compiled in a publication. This project has resulted in a new way of searching the collection, which enables people to look at it from different perspectives. Thus new layers and meanings can be added to the objects, giving a voice to these long silent witnesses from the past. The results are unexpected and sometimes confrontational.



LOOKING FOR COMMON GROUND

The building in which the Dutch Period Museum in Colombo is located was built in the seventeenth century by Thomas Van Rhee, the Dutch Governor of Sri Lanka from 1692 to 1697, as his official residence. It has been used for several different purposes since then, and in the 1970s the Department of National Museums of Sri Lanka, with the support of the Netherlands-Sri Lanka Foundation, restored the building and created a museum about the Dutch colonial presence in the country.

Over the past few years, however, the state of the building has deteriorated. Several plans have been drawn up to improve the condition of the building and the museum. For some years, Sri Lankan authorities have been exchanging ideas regarding the future of the museum with several Dutch organisations. The goal is to secure a long-term future for the building through knowledge exchange. Concrete measures have, nevertheless, been hindered by lack of consensus regarding what to do with the building. The current economic situation in Sri Lanka, in combination with the 2020 global pandemic, have added to this challenge. However, new plans are expected by the Sri Lankan Department of National Museums in 2021, in collaboration with the Netherlands Embassy and the Cultural Heritage Agency. This example shows how collaboration can sometimes be complicated when many parties are involved, and when interests, needs and possibilities are not entirely aligned.



THE FULL PICTURE

How personal memories shape historical stories



Oral history* is all about collecting the memories and perspectives of individuals in a community. In 2019, the Cultural Heritage Agency used oral history as a method of collecting information for several of its projects. These projects ranged from listening to the descendants of the victims who perished on World War Two warships and including them in the management of the associated heritage, to unravelling the stories of ships and their wrecks in South Africa and Japan. >>>

*About oral history

Oral history is a form of historiography based on the memories of eyewitnesses. As a source of information in cultural heritage management, it is usually collected through interviews, which are used to record and archive the memories and experiences of individuals and groups. Since traditional historiographical sources are often influenced by the dominant sections of a society, oral history can have a democratising function, giving a voice to heritage communities that would not have been heard if only traditional sources had been consulted. This can promote a sense of recognition and empowerment among those involved. In some cases, it can even give a voice to the suppressed or the misrepresented.

1.

One of the projects that included oral history centred on the Dutch-built Japanese warship the Kanrin Maru, which was wrecked in the north of Japan in 1871. The International Programme for Maritime Heritage has teamed up with Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology for this project.



2.

The project combined maritime archaeological surveys to try to locate the remains of the wreck itself and collecting oral histories in several communities that were closely linked to the heritage of the Kanrin Maru. The interviews with – among others – members of the Society of Kanrin Maru Crew Descendants, revealed deeply personal layers of significance among those involved.

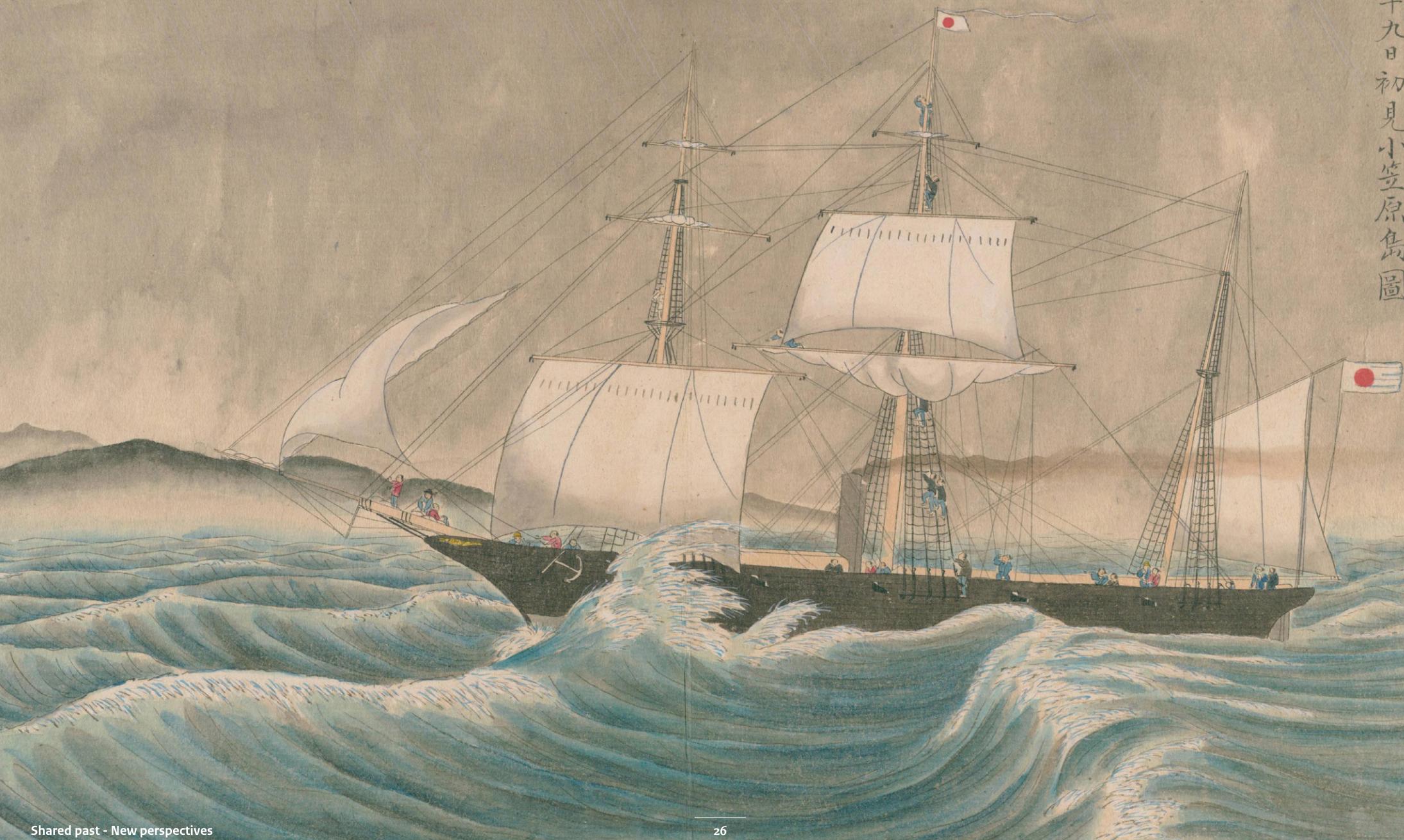
3.

Occasionally, information on historical events is passed down through oral tradition and can provide a fresh perspective on the significance of maritime heritage, whilst also aiding a search for physical remains. In the end, the Kanrin Maru project did not locate the shipwreck itself. However, it certainly did help to reanimate the historical story as part of the outward communication and sustainable preservation of this heritage.

4.

Oral history is an accessible method of granting heritage communities and individuals a sense of inclusion. By contributing a piece of their own personal story to the project, people feel personally invested, which in turn results in added commitment to the goals of the project and to preserving the heritage for future generations.

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SHARING PERSPECTIVES





Urban Heritage Strategies Training Programme enables participants to take a new perspective

'This was a rewarding experience'

Built heritage is of vital importance to cities. If it is positioned in the right way, it can become an asset for inner-city development. In many cities worldwide, however, heritage is under pressure. So, together with the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS), the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands offers a training programme entitled Urban Heritage Strategies (UHS).

The training helps professionals to develop a better understanding of the complex relationship between urban development and heritage management. Zahira Asmal and Ian Stewart took part in the training - now they would like to share their experiences!

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS TRAINING?

Ian 'I strongly believe that the preservation of urban heritage is key to preserving our entire heritage. Cities are where humanity tends to create some of its most compelling physical heritage. And I wanted to learn from experts from around the world.'

Zahira 'I am interested in new methodologies for engaging with our past, in the present. And just like Ian, I was interested to learn from the perspectives of people from other places. Since 2017, I have been working with various Dutch governments, institutions and individuals on a project titled See. The training provided an opportunity to obtain a deeper understanding of history, memory and identity in various places.'

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT INSIGHT THAT THE TRAINING GAVE YOU?

Ian 'Understanding the various ways in which urban heritage can be identified and valued has proven to be an invaluable tool. The action planning methodology I learned from UHS is well thought out and can easily be adapted to approach problems within an urban setting, and it has allowed me to view issues here in the United States in a clearly defined way.'

Zahira 'For me, it was the various methodologies and strategies that our lecturers taught us. I'm interested to advance these in my daily work.' >>>



Name: Zahira Asmal

Country: South Africa - Cape Town and Johannesburg

Position: Director of The City, a research, publishing and place-making agency. Works on social, cultural and spatial challenges in post-colonial environments, and strives to achieve cultural equity in the built landscapes of South Africa, with a focus on creating inclusive and integrated cities. Also serves on the board of advisors for the International Archive of Women in Architecture.



Name: Ian Stewart
Country: USA - the Albany, New York State area, but travels extensively
Position: Owner of New Netherland Timber Framing and Preservation, a company that specializes in architectural conservation, as well as preservation planning. Also develops curricula and teaches preservation carpentry at a local Community College, in conjunction with the New York State Historic Preservation Office.

WHAT ROLE DOES HERITAGE PLAY IN YOUR WORK?

Zahira 'In Cape Town I am working on See - a transnational project which brings together cities, institutions, activists, artists, designers and other creatives. We exchange ideas, debate and develop methodologies to bring about representational equity in the public life of our cities. The project proposes drawing on emergent and growing transnational solidarity and coalition strategies to fashion more equitable urban futures in the aftermath of colonialism, slavery and apartheid. In Johannesburg I initiated and directed a placemaking project that reimagines underused and abandoned spaces at Johannesburg's prominent Park Station, said to be Africa's busiest transport node. The aim is to create a welcoming space in the hidden architecture of the 1932 station, which was created only for white people. Changing an exclusive space into an inclusive one with high visibility and movement. A place for everyone.'

Ian 'I primarily deal with the physical aspects of the preservation of cultural heritage, whether actually doing that work myself, or teaching others to do so. My primary specialty is the timber framing of New World Dutch structures, whether they are domestic or agricultural, but I work on pretty much any historic building. I was also the President of the Preservation Trades Network, which is an international group specifically dedicated to furthering traditional trades education, for four years.'

WHAT IMPACT IS THE TRAINING PROGRAMME HAVING ON YOUR WORK, AND WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH IT?

Zahira 'I find the methodologies useful in engaging with various perspectives and communities. The major difference between heritage work in the Netherlands (and hence the training we received) and South Africa (my work) is the preservation of history. My questions to our lecturers included: "What about contested histories? What about histories that are decimated through colonialism? How do we engage with these histories that are no longer spatially present?" So, in the

case of South Africa, Brazil and others it is less a matter of preservation for most people, as this only serves a privileged narrative and not a democratic one. I am interested in exploring these topics in future.'

Ian 'Specifically, using the action planning methodology has allowed me to further identify issues in cities like Albany or Troy. This is extremely useful when dealing with the various preservation trades programmes that I am helping to develop with the State Historic Preservation Office. It has allowed me to make a persuasive argument regarding the value of teaching people about the buildings that comprise their cities and giving them the skills to work on them themselves. Working with people from across the world has allowed me to see that the skills gap which exists in the United States exists across the world. It has given me professional connections on multiple continents who all share a common vocabulary thanks to the training we received at IHS. Not only is this training valuable for the heritage in my area, but I believe wholeheartedly that it would be valuable for urban heritage anywhere in the world.'

HOW DID YOU LIKE WORKING WITH PARTICIPANTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD?

Ian 'Working with fellow professionals from different countries was extremely rewarding. Other nations have different cultural values, but more often than not, it was apparent that the similarities well outweighed any differences. This also allowed me to make professional connections and friendships in multiple countries in a short period of time. And as a carpenter, in a room with academics, city planners, and bureaucrats, the varying perspectives were fascinating to share.'

Zahira 'Yes, it was a rewarding experience. We learned from the diverse skill sets, geographies, experiences and more intimate details of how our histories affect us individually and nationally. We remain close and in contact. I have a feeling that some connections will be there for life.'



‘The participants have widened our perspective on redevelopment!’

Denise Güth, City of Rotterdam

The participants in the Urban Heritage Strategies training were presented with a case study involving Katendrecht. This was an underdeveloped Rotterdam district which has received substantial investment over the last twenty years. The area’s cultural history also plays a role in this. The meetings between participants and the City of Rotterdam regarding the redevelopment of Katendrecht led to some interesting new perspectives!

Various issues converge in Katendrecht. It was an underdeveloped neighbourhood that includes many social rental homes; it has poor accessibility and its stock of buildings date from various periods (pre-war, post-war as well as the 1970s and 1980s). It is a typical Rotterdam district, close to the port and city centre and fairly compact. The City of Rotterdam has recently taken steps to improve the accessibility of Katendrecht. Its monotonous housing stock has also been addressed and businesses are being encouraged to locate in the district. Katendrecht’s cultural history is playing a role in this. The municipality wanted to find out which ideas the participants in the UHS training programme had about this local transformation project.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

‘It was interesting how different ideas were put forward within the group regarding which direction Katendrecht should go in,’ explains Denise Güth of the City of Rotterdam. ‘The ideas were different to the approach that has been taken by the local authority. For example, the group was critical of gentrification in the area, which has been encouraged in order to attract new residents and companies to Katendrecht. The participants saw this as sacrificing the “real Katendrecht”. The participants focused mainly on the social problems in the area and on the value of its intangible heritage. There is certainly plenty of that, especially compared to its built heritage. Preserving these social and immaterial aspects played a less central role in the current approach. We have now become more aware of the importance of this, and how it can be used in other neighbourhood regeneration projects.’

VALUABLE

The municipality found these insights valuable. Denise: ‘It is good to view redevelopment from a range of different perspectives. It is true that this group mainly saw things from the perspective of heritage, though. But they have certainly widened our view of redevelopment! The transformation of Katendrecht is already at an advanced stage, so making changes in the chosen approach for this district isn’t desirable. But the ideas and proposals of the group can be applied to other developments in the city, such as the Zomerhofkwartier and Merwe-Vierhaven area!





FURTHER READING

<https://english.cultureelerfgoed.nl/publications>

Traces of Slavery and Colonial History in the Art Collection - edition 2.

Newsletter Sharing Heritage Expertise

- article newsletter No.9, 2019: The use of oral histories for the understanding of shared maritime heritage.
- article newsletter No.10, 2019: The 'Sharing Stories on Contested Histories' training programme.
- article newsletter No.11, 2020: Good practice: creating a conceptual framework as a guideline for urban redevelopment.
- article newsletter No.12, 2020: Good practice: giving the past a future by involving younger generations.
- article newsletter No.13, 2020: Good practice: international collaboration on shared difficult heritage.

COLOPHON

Title: Shared past – New perspectives.
Shared Cultural Heritage programme 2017-2020

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This publication highlights new perspectives gained through international heritage cooperation. In these projects, the Cultural Heritage Agency worked closely together with partners in Australia, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Netherlands, Russia, Sri Lanka, Suriname, the United States of America and South Africa. In the coming years, the Cultural Heritage Agency will continue to encourage and facilitate international cooperation. Only by reaching out to one another and learning together, we will be able to utilize the full potential of heritage for society.