ECHOES
EUROPEAN COLONIAL HERITAGE MODALITIES IN ENTANGLED CITIES

Heritage Diplomacy – A Way Forward in for Colonial Heritage in Europe

Policy Brief

January 2020

Introduction

This policy brief builds on the ongoing work of the ECHOES project (European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities). It brings together primary research results from the project with ideas presented at a workshop held in Brussels on 24 October 2019. As several other policy briefs have mentioned, Europe's current crises (immigration – Whitehead, Eckersley and Zito 2019, nationalism and populism – Trobbiani and Pavón-Guinea 2019, Kaya et al. 2019) call for a deeper and more complex understanding of its history and its entanglements with other non-European countries and territories through colonialism. Discourses of European exceptionalism, often used in official and non-official rhetoric and policy, are dangerous as they disregard the complexity of former colonial links and their ongoing influence on current affairs. We have also noted a reluctance to discuss colonialism's lingering effects from the European perspective. European heritage is presented in official discourses in celebratory tones, European values and diversity are emphasised, whereas the contentious aspects of colonialism – including slavery or racial inequality - are disregarded. Through the ECHOES project we aim to bring to the foreground the complexity of representing colonial legacies and encourage European actors at various levels to rethink asymmetries of power. To this end, we propose a new model of heritage diplomacy, mindful of the role of colonial histories that will allow us to critically examine the European approach to culture in external relations.

Conceptual Delimitations

To begin with, a conceptual discussion is needed to outline our understanding of heritage diplomacy and how this connects to international cultural relations. Several other policy briefs have considered the current European focus on international cultural relations (ICR hereafter) (e.g. Higgot 2017, Trobbiani and Pavón-Guinea 2019). These have highlighted that the use and practice of cultural relations are frequently confused with cultural diplomacy, an older term based on notions of European exceptionalism. Ongoing research indicates state representative institutions continue to favour cultural diplomacy activities (Oancă 2019). It is expected that international cultural relations will bring about a significant step forward for the European Union in creating a cultural strategy for external relations, one that will produce innovative working mechanisms and ultimately support European ambitions. The new method of operation, built on bottom-up processes, is intended to build long-term partnerships that are

mutually beneficial, supported by trust and understanding. The current focus on ICR, as supported by the Communication 'Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations' (JOIN/2016/029 final) also suggests a commitment to intercultural dialogue and cooperation for cultural heritage. However, work within the ECHOES project has highlighted that current approaches and discourses at a European level, are still driven by Eurocentric understandings which cannot support a meaningful equal engagement with partners outside Europe. Official documents and research agendas still promote tropes of European exceptionality and power and dismiss colonial entanglements that complicate us/them binaries. To this end, we propose working with the concept of heritage diplomacy instead, conceived as a modality of interaction that mitigates from some of the shortcomings of ICR.

This model of heritage diplomacy draws on decolonial thinking and it is open to different forms of knowledge. Decoloniality offers policy makers, institutions and other agents of diplomacy an opportunity to rethink Euro- and Western-centric approaches by recognizing that there are different ways of understanding and interpreting reality (for a detailed discussion of decoloniality see Shepherd 2018). Acknowledging plurality, activities drawing on decolonial thinking bring to the fore the histories of previously marginalized groups (e.g. minorities, indigenous populations, etc.), silenced memories, heritage items and practices (e.g. the darker aspects of colonialism discussed further). Moreover, diplomacy of this sort recognizes the entangled nature of former colonial relationships and their echoes today. This means that heritage diplomacy projects need to acknowledge that people and places – including the built environment and other heritage items - are necessarily intermingled. Finally, drawing on decoloniality also forces us to acknowledge that knowledge is embodied and situated and universal models should be discarded.

The ECHOES proposal of heritage diplomacy also aims to extend the list of actors that are currently conceived as agents of diplomacy. To this end, we encourage policy makers to take into account the entangled web of people and diversified agents who deal with colonial heritage: national governments, municipal governments, NGOs, cultural organizations, activists, artists and communities' representatives.

The heritage diplomacy model proposed by ECHOES is based on a type of 'moral listening' that recognises and embraces multiple ways of being in the world, interpreting history and the present. Although policy work often sits at an abstract, meta- level, we acknowledge the

importance of locality and local diplomacy work and the significant impact it can generate at national and international level. To this end we suggest a greater emphasis on city-to-city diplomacy and collaborations between different types of actors. We believe that Europeans engaging in such acts need to be aware of their asymmetrical position and when participating in projects and activities with non-European partners should acknowledge any critique and resistance met that is a legacy of former colonial relations. This will allow participants to develop balanced partnerships based on genuine intercultural dialogue that integrates multiple ways of understanding the past, present and future.

Moreover, we believe heritage projects and activities should consider a more nuanced definition of heritage. Numerous policy briefs and official communications have highlighted that heritage is the cornerstone of identity politics. However, heritage diplomatic activities often resort to definitions of heritage that are limited to the monumental and material traces of past. Such an approach necessarily encourages a wider definition of heritage, one that understands heritage as a type of discourse, rather than a discrete object. Perceiving heritage as a set of social and cultural processes and ways of thinking, based on formal or informal recognition (see for instance Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CoE 2005), opens our understanding of what forms of heritage, including intangible heritage, could be recognised by source communities and therefore become the focus of such collaborations. In this light, it is important to also consider the social and historical processes that led to the recognition of these heritages, including links with nationhood, community, tradition, religion, and identity. The challenge also lies in denationalising and de-Europeanising such forms of heritage within diplomatic projects.

This new approach to conducting diplomacy at European level, balanced and localised, would enable a deeper exploration of Europe's colonial entanglements. Rather than focusing on the celebratory, problem-solving narrative of heritage, such efforts can bring into discussion (with the aim of healing tense relationships) topics related to colonialism such as racial inequality, slavery or structural violence. In short, we are calling for a reconceptualization of international cultural relations based on equal agenda-setting with partners, rather than proceeding from a position of superiority, promoting and imposing purportedly European culture and values outside of Europe.

Intervention Fields

a) Museums and Decolonial Practices

Recommendations:

- Policy makers should capitalize on existing heritage-work conducted by museums and citizen initiatives across Europe to build a more complex narrative on colonial heritage.
- Diplomatic projects and policy-work at various levels should recognize a wider range of actors who possess local knowledge as important actors in city-to city diplomacy.

Museums are often strong social actors involved in local, national, and sometimes international frameworks. As such, they are important agents for heritage diplomacy. Not only do they offer space for ideas and debate, they actively participate in heritage-making and identity formation as well as diplomatic activities such as international exhibitions or objects exchanges.

Research within the ECHOES project focuses on city museums in three locations: Amsterdam, Warsaw and Shanghai. During workshops held in Brussels and elsewhere, we have been presented with case studies from other museums and colonial collections that have highlighted the difficulties but also opportunities decolonial approaches bring for reinterpreting current collections.

As some of the ongoing work in museums shows (Ariese, Bukowiecki and Pozzi 2019, Ariese 2019, Bukowiecki 2019, Pozzi 2019), steps are being made to integrate new narratives in collections (especially for temporary collections) but colonial objects in main collections are still approached cautiously with conservative methodologies. Research in the various locations has shown positively that museums employ several of the ECHOES modalities – repression, removal, reframing and re-emergence (see Kølvraa 2018) at the same time.

For example, Amsterdam Museum is one of the institutions that is actively reconsidering its legacy as a colonial institution, as well as its mission to represent the city's colonial links. The museum has created a dedicated project 'New Collection Narrative', which focuses on reinterpreting the current collection. Particular objects are selected for discussion with the public, with the aim of bringing in new voices in the museum space, as well as allowing room for critical reflection for the curators (Ariese 2019).

Another example of an influential reframing practice also comes from the Amsterdam Museum, which relates to the institution's decision to no longer use the term 'Golden Age' and replace this with the Dutch 17th century. Based on extensive feedback, the museum understood that connotation of prosperity brushed over the negative aspects of the period, such as slavery, poverty or conflict. Since September 2019, the museum has been using the more neutral term 17th century, which has led to new debates on colonial heritage and history in cultural institutions, at the political level, as well as in the private sphere.

The decolonial debate has not had the same uptake across Europe. Research in museums in Eastern Europe for instance shows this is an area where the decolonial debate has not had such an extensive impact as it is currently witnessed in the Western parts of Europe. Preliminary findings at the Museum of Warsaw, for instance, show that the institution represses the representation of the city's entanglement in global phenomena such as colonialism (Bukowiecki and Wawrzyniak 2019). Familiar narratives, such as those of victimhood during the Second World War, are represented whereas sensitive memories, e.g. in relation to socialism which we conceive as a form of internal colonialism (Głowacka-Grajper 2019), are silenced. A more complex reflection of existing curatorial practices and collections would enable museums to reconsider their colonial links. Although countries in this area were not active in the overseas colonization in the past, their museums have in their possessions postcolonial objects in collections that might need attentive care and reframing of representations. To this end, trainings and workshops with experts would be useful and should be considered in heritage diplomatic activities.

The case study of Shanghai History Museum, on the other hand, shows the dangers of perpetuating colonial discourses and ideas, as the 'management of heritage still naturalizes epistemic legacies of colonialism in its narrations of the history of the city' (Pozzi 2019: 26). This case study presents an antithesis to the examples discussed above and illustrates the complexities and challenges museums face in enacting their role as agents of diplomacy and identity-building.

Adequate policies for the museum sector should target collections but also narratives and silenced histories. Community museums, such as the District Six Museum in Cape Town, show the benefits of embracing decolonial approaches in museums. Started as a bottom-up project of memory-work, the museum was created as an itinerant exhibition to support the displaced

population of District Six. In time it evolved into a fully-fledged museum, housed in a permanent building that caters for marginalised Black communities. This decolonial museum, albeit facing challenges in terms of funding and acceptance in the museum community, allows curators to create exhibitions that address sensitive topics, including the trauma of displaced communities and their resilience. Listening to the stories of oppression, as presented through different display techniques and interventions, fosters a deeper understanding of colonial history and gives an otherwise ignored community a voice and sense of dignity. It also emphasises, as discussed above, the importance of local knowledge.

Museums of various kinds could be partners in providing forums for discussion among policy makers and diversified stakeholders, including postcolonial communities; they can also help communities to articulate their own agendas and narratives and identify heritage communities who have not been vocal and whose heritage has so far been neglected.

In addition to integrating issues of colonial heritage in event-type programs at the European level, policy makers should also work on developing sustainable policies at various levels of cultural institutions across Europe to raise general awareness of complex ways of dealing with colonial heritage. Besides events, focus could lie on community engagement projects, exhibitions, collections research, education projects, impact assessments and other evaluations.

For this to happen, however, funding is necessary. Current funding projects, when available, are often focused on end products. We think existing funding structures should be repurposed to support processes rather than end products for a more sustainable and consistent engagement with colonial legacies in museums. Projects should understand that curators are not necessarily guardians of the past, but rather shape our understanding of the present and the future and are important agents of diplomacy in their own right.

Both our research and workshop events have underlined the importance of recognising the sensitivities of communities that were deprived of objects exhibited in different European collections; community involvement is highly recommended in all possible instances.
One of the key discussions in relation to museums and former colonial relations is that of restitution of objects. This topic has been discussed in the ECHOES workshops as a problematic aspect of equitable relationships. Restitution is often a matter of national

legislation between source countries and current 'owners' of the collection, but questions of ownership and objects moves across borders fall within the category of diplomatic activities. For policy makers, we would propose to rely on the expertise of international organizations such as UNESCO and ICOM in assessing and supporting initiatives in the cultural sector related to legalities and restitution.

As agents of heritage diplomacy, museums can act as important stakeholders of city-to-city diplomacy (Europe-outside Europe). Exhibitions of various kinds can be realized in transcultural co-production, these can also involve collaboration with artists, activists, schools, enhancing the activities' reach.

In line with this ideas, we propose to expand the definition of agents of diplomacy to include artists also. ECHOES researchers' work with artists in Bristol (e.g. Schütz and Zabunyan 2018), Marseille (Schutz 2019) and Cape Town (Joffe 2019) have shown the important intervention art can make in countering official biased narratives. Moreover, artists of immigrant backgrounds, such as those connected to the Arnolfini Art Gallery and Black art movement in Bristol are providing alternative interpretations of the empire, colonialism and slavery. Moreover, through their immigrant backgrounds, these artists can act as mediators of entangled communities. The Cape Town research (Joffe 2019, Knudsen and Andersen 2019) also emphasised the important contribution artists have made in reinterpreting and problematizing the lingering effects of colonial legacies. The Cape Town example of the Rhodes Must Fall movement, shows the important effects of artistic interventions, particularly when they are paired with advocacy campaigns. The movement has produced social and political reform not only in South Africa but has spiralled into international decolonisation initiatives in UK and other places.

b.   Indigenous Knowledge

Recommendations:

- Building on the proposed decolonial approach to heritage diplomacy, policy-makers should consider and integrate indigenous knowledge in programmes and activities proposed.

- Intercultural dialogue should be at the cornerstone of all diplomatic activities.

As discussed at the beginning of this brief, our research has highlighted the often unidirectional and Eurocentric approach to heritage and science diplomacy in Europe (Andersen 2018). Ongoing research in different academic fields shows there is an imbalance in the production and acceptance of knowledge systems. The Northern countries, many of these part of Europe, tend to monopolise knowledge production and export this to the rest of the world, for instance through technical assistance or research projects. Examples from across the world, however, especially those coming from the Global South, emphasise that knowledge is local and often embodied. Knowledge systems vary and sometimes they are not compatible with scientific models as conventionally recognised in the North. Local archives of community knowledge address different fields of activity (e.g. agriculture, traditional medicine, building techniques). Language and linguistic resources are also important reservoirs of community knowledge, as are storytelling and oral traditions.

In postcolonial areas with diverse communities, such as India, for instance, recognition for local intangible heritage and indigenous knowledge also enables the perpetuation of local memory. This is the focus of some of the projects prepared by the Centre for Community Knowledge at Ambedkar University, Delhi. Researchers at this centre work to map indigenous knowledge in the area (in particular in relation to agriculture) that had been forgotten or had little purchase at city level, and reintroduce it through events, art installations and travelling exhibitions. This example reinforces the importance of integrating localised knowledge in heritage activities and projects, even when these do not map to existing models of scientific knowledge.

Policy makers should also support museums in co-creating exhibitions with experts from other systems of knowledge, rather than aim to 'translate' their systems of knowledge into a Western format. Similarly, heritage diplomacy projects should enable intercultural dialogue that allows participants to understand and productively draw on different knowledge systems as needed. Such projects should enable the transmission of local knowledge rather than replacing it with Western scientific approaches.

c.   Diplomatic Activities and Networks

Recommendations:

- Official diplomatic agents should consider the country's role in colonialism and whether reparations are needed.
- Policy makers should revise existing models for collaboration for heritage diplomacy to include networks and movements that are influential at local, national and international levels.

The model of heritage diplomacy proposed does not abandon current official diplomatic activities. Our workshops have shown that change needs to happen at all levels, including formal interaction of representatives of states and diplomats. At this level, for instance, cultural reparations are important in mitigating for some of the wrongdoings of the colonial times. Reparations and formal apologies also run the risk of becoming meaningless if they do not follow the principles outlined at the beginning of this brief.

At the same time, research within ECHOES project has outlined the importance of people's movements we consider as unofficial agents of diplomacy.

We believe European institutions need to highlight immigrant voices and that this could be achieved by supporting citizens initiatives that engage with those in Europe who have experienced first-hand the legacies of colonialism. A case study that outlines the importance of citizens' interventions of this type comes from Portugal. Here, researchers in ECHOES follow the Djass initiative in Lisbon, a group formed by Afro- descendants' activists and historians that works to create a counter narrative to the current Portuguese colonial discourse that focuses on the positive, celebratory narratives of discoveries. The Black communities in Portugal, whose ancestry is often linked to colonial exchanges (ancestors found in territories once occupied by Portugal), is still marginalised today and faces racism and discrimination. To mitigate the marginal position of this community in Portugal's social and political life, the group works towards a re-emergence of afro-descendent narratives on Portuguese colonial history and a more nuanced presentation of the slave trade (Andersen and Gianolla 2019). Such groups can be great allies for more inclusive heritage projects and activities.

Elsewhere, the recent the Brexit discussion has shown how the colonial past has had a formative role in past and current images of what the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern

Ireland can and should be. Some of the cities in UK, such as Liverpool, have had long-standing debates and took measures to critically reflect on their colonial pasts. Recent initiatives have seen other cities follow suit, with universities across the country starting projects of research and/or reparation based on their colonial history. Bristol is not included in this list of active cities, yet some important citizens movements are researched by ECHOES researchers that are changing the status quo (Schütz and Zabunyan 2018). Thus, several networks of historians and individuals have set themselves the task to review and reframe the colonial history of the city. Their work focused on one of the key slave traders in the city, Edward Colston (1636-1721), a figure who is celebrated in the city with no mention of his slave trade activities. The campaigners sought to remove or reinterpret the local Colston statue - an idea which resonates with the #RhodesMustFall influential movement. The *Countering Colston* initiative as well as the *Bristol Radical History Group*, supported by interested individuals, work to reframe narratives of the city's colonial history. The latter group has organised hundreds of public events since 2006, including preparing a petition for a Slave Memorial to be erected in the city. The group emphasises the importance of participatory approaches to public history and their activities are guided by the understanding that there the city's history and heritage celebrated today has an unavoidable link with colonial trade activities.

We believe such groups and movements need to be seriously considered in diplomatic activities, as change-makers that can support a better understanding of colonial complexities at local level. In light of existing colonial entanglements, through population exchanges or migration, these groups present opportunities for bringing together different communities, both inside and outside of Europe in former colonial places. Moreover, such groups possess the local knowledge that is necessary for any successful heritage diplomacy activity to foster intercultural dialogue (Andersen 2018, Ifversen 2018).

Conclusions

This policy brief has presented ongoing work in the ECHOES project that suggests a more nuanced model of ICR is needed at the European level. This model should proceed from a deeper understanding of Europe's colonial legacies (see for instance Buettner 2018). This should also be sensitive to the diversity of perception for colonial histories across member states. Rather than follow well-rehearsed discourses of heritage as an economic tool or a

resource for addressing social and political issues, this approach would allow a discourse change around Europe's colonial past. Positive steps have been made over the years in integrating the Holocaust in the discourse of what a shared European heritage might entail and we believe that heritage diplomacy can support the creation of a new narrative of Europe's colonial history also. Acknowledging the deep entanglement, through colonial links, with seemingly non-European places, would allow us to revisit implicit us (European) them (non-European) categories for both people and heritage.

As we have argued here, we believe productive heritage diplomacy activities and projects conducted by both official and non-official actors of diplomacy, as discussed above, should be based on equal agenda-setting between participating parties and genuine intercultural dialogue. These should not proceed from or try to impose European interpretations of culture. The ideas presented in this brief do not present the full complexities of colonial heritage debates, however, and we would also suggest that policy makers could benefit from visiting the places where various conversations take place, be these in museums or other events across Europe.

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EUROPEAN COLONIAL HERITAGE MODALITIES IN ENTANGLED CITIES

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FUNDING SCHEME	Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme 2014-2020, 'Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies' (Innovative Societies), H2020-EU.3.6.2.4. - Promote coherent and effective cooperation with third countries
DURATION	February 2018 – January 2021 (36 months)
BUDGET	EU contribution: € 2 461 890
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ECHOES has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 770248.
ONLINE PRESENCE	Website: http://projectechoes.eu Twitter: https://twitter.com/EUEchoes