

## Smells with cultural value: How to recognise and protect this heritage at risk?

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Our engagement with heritage is largely visual whereas the potential of other sensory approaches is largely unexplored. Olfactory heritage is an emerging, interdisciplinary field linking material, intangible, and digital expressions of heritage. Recent studies have demonstrated the potential of a ‘nose-first’ (smell-centred) approach to past and living heritage, and that olfactory qualities are integral to the identity of a site and can make museum visits more memorable. However, while heritage authenticity in odours and olfactory engagement in historic buildings have been explored, smells with cultural significance are neither recognised nor protected as heritage and are therefore at risk of being lost. Heritage-related smells can be classified as (1) smells as objects with cultural significance (civet, historical perfumes); (2) smells as attributes of historical artefacts and sites, carrying valuable information about the past (pomanders, historical libraries); and (3) smells associated with cultural practices significant to a community (incense burning in churches). A review of smells in heritage guidelines and practice reveals several challenges. First, the Burra Charter (ICOMOS, 1983) states that the sensory qualities of buildings are culturally significant, but there is no guidance to identify smells and their value. Second, a few of UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage (ICH) inscriptions include olfaction as a source of traditional knowledge (e.g. the Holy Week processions in Popayán), but there is no method to record smells during the inscription process, nor an awareness by stakeholders of how to do so. Third, in material conservation, smells emanating from artefacts and sites have traditionally been seen as indicators of risks and therefore often an attribute to be removed. A systematic, sustainable policy effort towards the recognition and protection of olfactory heritage is thus being developed to meet these challenges. This effort includes the creation of a large online database of historic smells – and their connection to places, people, and practices – that can be integrated in digital heritage collections (Odeuropa data model for olfactory heritage information, 2022) as well as the development of a framework for heritage smell preservation, thereby ensuring the successful safeguarding of living heritage environments. In addition, a pilot project is in the works, the aim of which is to provide guidance on recording sensory attributes for French ICH nominations. Guidelines for best practices in olfactory heritage have also been published and provide a decision-making pipeline for heritage professionals working with smell. However, it is clear that heritage smells require an underpinning in conservation theory to explore the conflict between the values they embody and the conservation risks they may represent, as well as questions related to smell conservation theory and practice, documentation, and authenticity. In summary, the recognition and protection of smells with cultural significance faces several challenges, which are currently being addressed by a dedicated policy strategy. The involvement of heritage stakeholders in the development, integration, and promotion of olfactory heritage is essential for this effort to succeed.