

Cultural Heritage for Inclusive
Growth Collection

Narrating heritage: oral history and inclusive growth

Suzanne Joinson

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Series Editor

Dr Chris Dalglish, Inherit

Series Manager

Nikki Locke, British Council

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The Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth Collection

Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth (CH4IG) is a British Council action research programme which, since 2018, has been exploring how local culture can improve the lives of individuals around the world. The essays in this collection were originally commissioned by the British Council and Nordicity as independent thematic studies during the pilot phase of the programme. They have since been updated by their authors and edited for the British Council by Inherit.

The essays are published as part of the British Council's What Works Cultural Heritage Protection programme, which is designed to support better outcomes for heritage protection and local communities by bringing the best available evidence to practitioners and other decision-

makers across the international heritage protection sector.

Together, the essays explore the role of cultural heritage in bringing about the change which is needed to secure a sustainable future for people and the planet. The collection explores the relationship between heritage and sustainable development from different geographical, topical and philosophical perspectives. The diverse essays are bound by common themes, namely that cultural heritage is at the heart of human development; that cultural relations create conditions in which human development can occur, and; that human development is enabled by people-centred approaches and transparent, accountable and participatory governance

The author

Suzanne Joinson is an academic and writer (University of Chichester; Publisher Bloomsbury) and previously worked in the British Council literature department for ten years (<https://www.suzannejoinson.com>). In 2019, she was part of the delivery team which ran an oral history project as part of the Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth programme in Vietnam, interviewing artists in the Cải lương theatre tradition. In 2020-21, she was a Goodison Fellow contributing to the British Library's long-term oral history programme, National Life Stories.

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Contents

Introduction	06
Approaches to Oral History	07
Brief overview of the discipline of oral history	07
UK approaches to oral history	09
International approaches to oral history	10
Case Studies	14
Analysis: Oral History and Inclusive Growth	20
Conclusions and Recommendations	22
References	24

Jyunko Tarrant with her friend at a vehicle show.

Front cover photograph © Japan Association in the UK

Introduction

The notion of ‘inclusive growth’ is used by a range of international and UK national agencies to define an approach to economic and social development that aims to include all sections of the community in location-specific economic growth. This essay looks at the role that oral history activity can play in the context of inclusive growth, both in the UK and internationally.

From the Windrush Generation oral history archive,¹ to Columbia University New York’s September 11, 2001, Oral History Narrative and Memory Project,² oral history is having a renaissance in terms of its ability to fuse history and living memory with contemporary dialogue and culture, drawing on place and heritage.

Oral history is a field of study, enquiry and reflection that involves gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of individuals and communities, and presenting and archiving that information to enable present-day engagement and understanding.

In *Doing Oral History*,³ Donald Ritchie describes the practice of oral history as collecting ‘memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews’.⁴ It is a dialogue-based approach focusing on place and community, but also the role of changing landscapes, sites of memory, and intangible cultural heritage.

Whilst oral history deals with memory, it by no means only looks backwards. The discipline has much to offer for future-facing activity and engagement. It is used as a research or methodological evaluation tool; a community engagement activity; a framework for cross-generational work in schools; a way of manifesting community pride and public ownership; and a form of testimonial. Oral history re-examines assumptions and re-thinks location, culture and communities; it gives a polyphonic range of views on significant events and collective memories; and can provide value and increased skills, sharing

and community-based economic viability.

Given its versatility and range, oral history has the potential to infuse and improve cultural heritage and engender social development activities, leading to significant and meaningful interventions in the realm of inclusive growth.

In this essay I provide a definition of oral history and a brief overview of the evolution of the discipline, particularly in relation to heritage, culture and economic growth. I explore a range of international and UK approaches to oral history activity and take an in-depth look at three case studies: one conducted as part of the British Council’s Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth (CH4IG) pilot scheme, in which I was directly involved as a key delivery partner; one which was supported by the British Council’s Cultural Protection Fund (CPF); and one beyond the British Council, delivered by a cultural partner.

Drawing on case studies and examples, I offer an analysis of how oral history methodologies and activities are proven to provide benefits as interventions aimed at producing value, learning, protection and sharing, and show how these directly contribute to inclusive growth. In concluding, I provide recommendations relating to oral history, inclusive growth and international relations.

1. <https://commonwealth.sas.ac.uk/research-projects/oral-history-windrush-generation>

2. <https://library.columbia.edu/libraries/ccoh/digital/9-11.html>

3. Ritchie, 2003

4. <https://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history>

Approaches to oral history

Brief overview of the discipline of oral history

In the UK (in contrast to the US), oral history began as a history of the masses. It was community focused, with the idea of giving voice to the underrepresented, such as factory workers, miners, and working-class women. Oral history pioneer and social historian, Paul Thompson, first published *The Voice of the Past* in 1978. His statement that ‘history is not just about events ... but how they are remembered in the imagination’⁵ caused ripples in the British history community who typically preferred and trusted archival and paper-based evidence and narratives focusing on male, European, authorised versions of history.

Oral history shifted the focus from elite versions of history to collective and individual historical narratives from diverse cultural, social and geographical backgrounds. Oral history became a growth area that resonated across social history and its origins can be linked back to the Annales School, which had an emphasis on breaking down disciplinary barriers.⁶ An understanding developed that narrative, memory and history do not solely belong to official gatekeepers. So-called ‘ordinary people’ have a role to play in writing and interpreting historical narratives, especially those groups who have been marginalised by traditional historical sources and archives.

In the 1960s there was a surge of historians using oral history tools to explore the underrepresented lives of working-class individuals and communities. As oral history developed, the discipline was involved in raising awareness around socialist, LGBTQ+ , feminist and Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority histories; ranging from large-scale National Heritage Lottery Fund activities to remembrance projects.⁷ This revised approach continues to filter through academia and school

curriculums and although there is still much work to be done in the area of representation and inclusion, oral history has proactively contributed to a re-thinking of the narrative status quo.

The process of interviewing and archiving led to the emergence of new ways of collecting oral evidence about the recent past, manifesting in academic and community-based projects and archives around the UK, notably the Imperial War Museum, the Welsh Folk Museum, and National Life Stories (NLS) at the British Library.⁸ Notions of advocacy and uncovering hidden voices were central to the way in which oral history grew in the UK, led in part by the influential Oral History Society and its journal.⁹

For several decades oral history remained an outsider discipline on the fringes of mainstream history and social science departments, which accounts for the variety of approaches and methodologies developed. Along with a range of approaches testing the consistency and reliability of interviews and memories, different theoretical avenues were explored, examining psychological ideas about memory, life reviews and self-narration.

Historian, Luisa Passerini’s work on the subjectivity of history and the way that memories are shaped by ideologies continues to exert an influence on the discipline.¹⁰ Likewise, Alessandro Portelli’s assertion that oral histories subvert our understanding of the past, not just through recall and remembering, but also regarding the continuity of meaning given to events, has had a similarly revolutionary impact on what history means.¹¹

5. Thompson, 2000

6. https://archives.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/themes/annales_school.html

7. One example of many: <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/blogs/remembering-stories-windrush-generation>

8. National Life Stories (NLS) was established in 1987 by social historians Asa Briggs and Paul Thompson with a mission to: ‘record and preserve a wide range of voices through in-depth biographical accounts, to make them available and inspire their use.’ See: <https://www.bl.uk/projects/national-life-stories>

9. <https://www.ohs.org.uk/>

10. Passerini, 1979

11. Portelli, 2016

From the 1980s onwards, community-based oral history projects emerged in the UK with a strong emphasis on places that were experiencing the disappearance of traditional heavy industries such as mining, shipbuilding, steelmaking and textiles.¹² Oral history focused on ‘unlocking silence’ regarding the past. Equally, projects about migratory and placeless peoples developed, aimed at capturing intangible cultural footprints, such as the British Library’s collection of interviews with women from the Irish traveller community.¹³

Oral history continues to grow as a discipline and demonstrates an effective means of documenting economic change and helping communities come to terms with seismic changes, whether local or global.

In the United States, oral history followed a different track. Spearheaded by Columbia University New York, the focus of the collection aimed, in its early stages, to document the voices of the political elite. Interviews covered politics, corporate life and philanthropy. By the 1960s, the ground had shifted to an emphasis on the capturing and archiving of civil and minority rights narratives, but it wasn’t until the September 11, 2001, Oral History Narrative and Memory Project¹⁴ received significant funding that there was increased understanding of how testimony, storytelling and memory links the individual experience to specific sites and historical moments. Oral history memory work showed how to contextualise intangible human experience within a wider socio-historical context. Alongside Columbia University, there is now a wide range of long-standing oral history centres offering a wealth of archival material across the United States.

Internationally, oral history has gained traction with an impressive number of diverse archives spanning the globe. There have been several chronological waves of international development in the field. Broadly speaking, the first wave included the United States, United Kingdom,

Australia and South Africa; the second wave included Germany, France, Italy, Brazil and Argentina; and the third wave spread more widely in Europe and Asia.¹⁵ Each wave is linked to developments in that part of the world and is context-dependent, such as land rights, the collapse of communism, the end of totalitarianism, and an opening up of discourse about post-collective trauma such as war or genocide. Post-totalitarian countries tend towards recovery of difficult or suppressed pasts, operating against state-sponsored histories, whereas work emerging in other areas, such as Japan and Greece, leans towards ideas focused on talking about subjective versions of the individual and communal past.

Covering both everyday narratives and significant events, oral history is an inherently inclusive discipline that engenders the crossing of borders and international collaboration. Oral history methodology is global in scope, diverse and democratic in approach, and proactively creates an opportunity for representation and accessibility.

Oral history’s most recent notable foray into the popular mainstream was through HBO’s recent smash hit ‘Chernobyl’, a mini-series which draws on Svetlana Alexievich’s *Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*.¹⁶ This success shows that there is clearly a contemporary appetite for projects, content, and cultural engagement that explores the gathering of diverse, multi-layered voices.

Oral history has the potential to directly impact key inclusive growth factors such as wellbeing, economic development including tourism, and skills-development, the preservation of culture and knowledge-sharing, as well as more nuanced outputs such as increased understanding of diversity and inclusion.

UK approaches to oral history

A wide range of institutions and agencies engage with oral history in the UK. National Life Stories (NLS),¹⁷ operating as an independent charitable trust within the Oral History section of the British Library (BL), is a leader in the field. It is one of the largest collections in the world with in-depth interviews and collections totalling around 70,000 recordings, of which approximately 3,000 are life-long story-form interviews.

Projects range from a large-scale look at how farming and agriculture has changed over the past seventy years¹⁸ to a collection about haemophiliacs who contracted HIV/AIDS through contaminated blood products which is now being used as evidence in a major public inquiry.

NLS runs a national oral history training programme in conjunction with the Oral History Society and had a record year in 2019, providing 122 courses for 1,200 people.¹⁹ NLS also partners with other organisations to build the British Library’s internationally renowned oral history archive.

Equally influential and long-standing is the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF), which strategically prioritises oral history activity at the core of its values to produce heritage and culture related impact, outputs and outcomes. In a 2013 report exploring NHLF investment into oral history,²⁰ the analysis summarised activities as being primarily about: a specific event or activity (eg anniversaries); a group of people or community (eg LGBTQ+); or a geographical place. Oral history activity continues to be central to the development of many UK heritage centres and museums, particularly when linked to the regeneration of urban landscapes, and to be used as a method of public consultation and an engagement methodology employed by architects and planners.

Below are two examples of UK oral history activities with tangible benefits in the realm of inclusive growth and social and economic inclusion.

Chinatown Oral History Project

The aim of the Chinatown Oral History project was to connect second and third generation Chinese Londoners at risk of losing touch with their heritage and to capture that almost-lost heritage.

One of the aims was to empower older members of the community to share life stories and experiences with younger generations, as well as to increase understanding of Chinese culture, lifestyle and migration within the wider community. There was a specific intention that the dialogue-based element of the project could contribute to alleviating mental illness and social isolation within the British-Chinese population.

The organisers wanted to raise awareness of the significant contribution that first-generation Chinese Londoners have made to the cultural and economic history of the city through their impressive economic footprint, and to provide a ‘living archive’ that encourages continued trade, tourism and economic and cultural vibrancy within Chinatown.

The project explored issues around migration and increased understanding of the role of migrant communities in the fabric of the capital city. It looked at themes of globalisation, dissemination, and the integration of culture, heritage and language. It investigated wellbeing, health, community and mental health issues, as well as the role that community engagement can play in the arena of tourism and economic regeneration. The project documented the evolution of brands, chains, restaurant development and shifts from solely Cantonese culture to a widely diversified range of Asian-based cultural and food centres on offer in the capital, reflecting a change in the relationship between UK/China and wider Asia.

The short-term outcomes of the project included access to skills and shared cultural and heritage understanding and ownership. Its long-term outcomes relate to increased social wellbeing and

12. An example: <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20121101114542/http://www.songsofsteel.com/index.php?n=MainHomePage>

13. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/oral-histories-of-ethnicity-and-post-colonialism>

14. Columbia Center for Oral History (CCOH): <https://library.columbia.edu/libraries/ccoh.html>

15. A full outline of global oral history development is found in Perks, 2016

16. Alexievich, 1999

17. 1.2 million people accessed NLS’s recordings and other British Library oral history collections online in 2019 at <https://sounds.bl.uk/search?searchterm=&genre=Oral+histories> - ‘Voices of the Holocaust’ was the most viewed: <http://www.bl.uk/learning/histocitizen/voices/holocaust.htmlUNGA>

18. <https://cultureincrisis.org/projects/national-life-stories>

19. <https://www.ohs.org.uk/training/>

20. Review of the Heritage Lottery Fund’s Investment in Oral History Projects Research Report for the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF): https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/attachments/2%20Review%20of%20HLFs%20Investment%20in%20Oral%20History%20Projects%20Final%20Revised%20Report%202022_10_13_SM%20%2828.8.19%29.pdf

investment in cultural heritage and the economic viability of the tourist and cultural site of Chinatown.

Capital Growth Oral History Project

A second UK example is Capital Growth's oral history project, exploring London's food-growing heritage and its contribution to the culture of families, communities, and the city.

This project used food as a connector, linking up allotment growers and gardeners across the capital. Participants from diverse backgrounds shared experiences and narratives around growing seeds, gardening techniques and recipe sharing. It included people who have been growing food for a long time, or who can remember stories about food production in their local area, and new generations of growers.

The project mobilised a team of volunteers and created hub events. Using local community libraries and archives, the oral history activity tapped into individual and collective memories of food growing, traditions, and how they influence daily life, work and the landscape of London.

The oral history component of this project sits within a wider arena of policy-driven areas such as education, biodiversity and sustainability, regeneration, re-skilling, jobs and training, and community networks.

The project recorded multiple heritage experiences using food as a common link and language. It promoted intergenerational activity and engagement with issues including: health; food and nutrition policy; the environmental regeneration of specific sites in the city linked with

International approaches to oral history

Place-based international oral histories by their nature tap into wider, complex narratives. Oral history often provides a human dimension to divisive global and political issues and projects. Exploring the culture and heritage of cultural and geographical communities can provide rich archives and explorations into site, memory and

food; local decision-making and local networks. The project explored shared narratives around sustainable urban food production, nature conservation and gardening for health and wellbeing.

The short-term outcomes of the project included access to skills, shared cultural and heritage understanding, and the re-framing of community spaces and landscapes. Longer term outcomes include increased social wellbeing and investment in cultural heritage, the economic viability of tourist and community sites engaging with sustainability, food, health and shared land spaces such as allotments, feeding into wider growth economies.

As can be seen from the above examples – and there are many more to choose from – oral history activity is the leading component in terms of linking the past (heritage) with the present (contemporary culture) and proactively feeds into larger socio-political contexts and economic drivers.

Oral history activity highlights the correlations between individual experiences, landscape and place. Cultural and heritage experiences are shared through modes such as listening, recording, archiving, self-narrating and contextualising memory in tandem with an emphasis on living culture.

These direct connections bridge the communication of narrative and memory to impactful, meaningful social and economic areas of inclusive growth, as both cases demonstrate, in the context of significant contribution to inclusive growth in London.

inclusive understandings of belonging.

Oral history methodologies have much to offer when it comes to creative engagement with contested lands, diasporas, disempowered and displaced communities, or re-drawn border areas. There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that oral

Oral history methodologies have much to offer when it comes to creative engagement with contested lands, diasporas, disempowered and displaced communities, or re-drawn border areas. There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that oral history activity has the capacity to deliver projects and engagement that can effectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of complex global-political contexts. A brief sample of the many examples include: an oral history of Mizrahi and Sephardic Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa;²¹ the Armenian Assembly oral history project; the West Indies oral history project; Palestinian Al Nakbar oral history project;²² the Forgotten Greeks project; and a range of holocaust memorial oral history projects.

Often precipitated by complex political situations such as the Israel/Palestine conflict, or as a result of war, genocide, environmental catastrophes,²³ or other global historical factors, themed oral history projects provide a living response to history as it unfolds and a powerful tool for reflection following conflict or trauma. Oral history has played a tremendous role in reconciliation or testimony in nations where major political change has occurred, such as contributing to truth and reconciliation agendas in South Africa²⁴ and Chile. Oral history was at the heart of contested land rights and 'stolen generation' campaigns in Australia and New Zealand, and it played a role in post-conflict societies and reconciliation agendas such as in Northern Ireland and Rwanda.²⁵ Oral history has much to offer low-income countries, with excellent examples available through the work of the Panos Testimony Project.²⁶ This ability to operate with nuance, and the emphasis on listening, respecting, and sharing, is a potentially powerful method of community and cultural engagement.

In addition, oral history provides an excellent methodology and engagement framework for capturing intangible cultural heritage²⁷ or living heritage, as defined by UNESCO in the following way:

"intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.²⁸

UNESCO commonly links designated world heritage sites with the concept of living heritage. These and other sites of interest, whether literal, geographical, cultural or metaphorical, in many cases sit within wider heritage and tourism agendas that directly connect to economic growth. Oral history activity has a significant role to play in contributing to the cultural regeneration and interest in such places. Below are two examples and evidence of their tangible benefits.

George Town, Malaysia UNESCO Oral History project

When George Town in Penang, Malaysia, was recognised as a 'living cultural site', the heritage management and town planning committee looked to oral history to find ways of expressing, exploring and presenting the city's intangible cultural heritage. More than just an evidence-providing exercise for UNESCO committees, the issues ran deeper, culturally.

Most stories and cultural heritage were commonly shared orally from one generation to another. Hence, the lack of original historical resources has been a major problem in reconstructing Malaysian history. Without oral history being recorded and written, and with

21. Covering Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen: <https://www.jimena.org/oral-history-program>

22. <https://www.palestineremembered.com/OralHistory>

23. Such as oral history projects after Hurricane Katrina: <https://louisianadigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/ism-koh:collection>

24. One example of many: <http://restorativejustice.org/rj-library/memory-the-trc-and-the-significance-of-oral-history-in-post-apartheid-south-africa>

25. For full details refer to Perks, 2016

26. <https://oraltestimony.org>

27. This is also core at NLHF's definition of the value of oral history: <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/oral-history-guidance>

28. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>



A participant of the oral history project is narrating to the project team.

Photograph © George Town World Heritage Inc

the loss of the elders who were willing to preserve and pass along this history, cultural memories began to wither, along with many of the colorful cultures and heritage.²⁹

The oral history activity aimed to provide a self-referencing context for a community, as well as directly contribute to a resource that would create economic regeneration for the area as it developed under UNESCO auspices.

Like many heritage sites, George Town has a complex and contested history. Rather than shying away from complexities, oral history activity provided the opportunity to garner a multiplicity of voices, to provide alternatives to official versions and to allow potential visitors (whether tourists or

investors) to gain a rounded view of the site. This enabled an understanding of the depth of complex narratives.

Rather than a museumification of George Town, the oral history component showed a vibrancy and contemporary relevance that led to discussions around Malaysia's place in world history and the nature of a 'landscape of memory'. Shared memories and communication across generations provided an opportunity for community-exploring oral history activities to play a role in mediating the attitudes and sense of ownership of residents, alongside the value recognition, attitudes, and travel intentions of visitors.

29. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Reconnecting-the-Past-Through-Oral-History%3A-An-in-Halamy-Kibat/8744249b9a6f688c3b1c0e25394c3a3106acff85>

Within this context, the value of the site and its embedded stories and memories, as brought to life by oral history narration, were directly used to guide and contribute to economic tourism development and policy making.

The project created public awareness and appreciation of heritage and encouraged community engagement in heritage discourse. It demonstrated the importance of oral history in preserving the valuable oral treasures among this society, and to further enrich the local culture and heritage for future generations. There was increased communication and understanding of cultural diversity, as well as a shared understanding of ownership and the curation of sites that reach world recognition status, alongside shared interest in generating cultural tourism, economic development and skills advancement, all leading towards inclusive growth.

Short term outcomes included access to skills and shared cultural and heritage understanding and diversity. Longer term outcomes related to increased social wellbeing and investment in cultural heritage, and the increased economic viability of tourist and community sites engaging with tourism and shared land spaces under UNESCO auspices. There have also been developments in local community protection, shared ownership, shared pride and engagement with, and shared economic development of, the land-based site and associated intangible culture.

Columbia University New York Oral History of September 11, 2001

In addition to complex historical and culturally significant sites, there are also sites and places of memory linked to cultural seismic shifts. One example is New York, September 11, 2001. Three days after the attacks, Columbia's Oral History Research Office began gathering stories from New Yorkers aimed at recording personal reactions before they were completely shaped by the news media.

The project received a grant from the National Science Foundation and, in the first year, more than 440 people gave interviews to more than 60 volunteers. The study later received financing from the Rockefeller Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation and Columbia

University. To date, the project contains more than 22,000 pages of archived transcripts and 900 hours of recordings, including 23 hours of video. By the time the project ended in 2005, 202 people had agreed to be interviewed again, allowing the team to study how narratives changed with time. This model of quick and immediate reaction, followed by a reflective response, became a model for similar studies, like those begun after Hurricane Katrina.

Though many other oral history studies, including those related to 9/11, sent out broad requests for people who were interested in telling their stories, the Narrative and Memory Project actively solicited a wide range of New York voices. People who often hesitated to speak, including Muslims, Arab Americans, Latinos and Sikhs, were asked to give their accounts.³⁰

The project engaged with themes such as the communal and individual ownership of narrative. It explored the active process of recovery, memorials and shared ownership of experience. It looked at the ability to navigate the World Trade Centre site, its interest to visitors and the wider world, and its integration within their existing economic and cultural realities.

The short-term outcomes included access to skills, shared cultural and heritage understanding, and shared understanding of trauma. Longer term outcomes relate to increased social wellbeing and investment in the cultural heritage and economic viability of tourist and community sites engaging with historically impactful events as well as developments in local community protection and shared ownership feeding into economic growth in the city.

As shown above, international and national approaches vary, but oral history is clearly a recognised force for intellectual discourse and activity. It has the potential to cover history, autobiography, creative non-fiction, reminiscence, cultural preservation and interrogation. It shows that the memory and collective understanding inherent in heritage is not fixed and that cultural heritage is a fluid, evolving process. Direct links can be drawn from the sharing and communicating of narrative and memory to impactful, meaningful social and economic areas of inclusive growth on an international scale.

30. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/08/us/sept-11-reckoning/escape.html>

Case studies

Having looked at a range of international and national oral history projects, I will now look closely at three recent oral history projects and examine the opportunities for inclusive growth inherent or overtly demonstrated in the projects. These are: An Oral History of Cải lương Theatre of Vietnam (part of the British Council's CH4IG programme); Protecting Intangible Heritage in the Upper Tigris Valley, Turkey (supported by the British Council/DCMS Cultural Protection Fund); and The Wasurena-Gusa Project (a Japan Association/Japan House project). I was part of the delivery team for the project in Vietnam. For the project in Turkey, I spoke to CPF manager Stephanie Grant, and for the project in Japan, I spoke to the project manager, Momoko Williams.

An Oral History of Cải lương Theatre of Vietnam

This project took place in 2019 when a team from the University of Chichester (including myself) were awarded a grant to research Cải lương as part of Heritage of Future Past (the name for the CH4IG programme in Vietnam) in order to support inclusive growth through public heritage. The aim of the project was to celebrate, document, archive and disseminate an oral history of the hard-to-reach folk theatre community, a declining, complex, intangible culture with much to offer in terms of heritage. The UK team devised an oral history methodological framework and then worked with the British Council CH4IG team in Vietnam to deliver it.

The research team worked collaboratively to establish a methodology for in-country oral history interviews. This meant defining common notions of theatre and suggesting the range of potential interviewees. The team defined Cải lương theatre broadly to allow a range of voices and historical memories to be recorded, ranging from directors, writers and stars, to fans, theatre managers and costume designers.

The project was conceptualised around recording the memory of a troupe as a whole entity, exploring both individual and communal memories. It also

reflected on the ethics of oral history in an international, post-colonial conflict environment and in the context of a community that had experienced war, disruption and seismic political shifts.

The interviews were mediated by an interpreter. Using tested models, the questions were devised to encourage both a chronological reflection on Cải lương (the shape of its history) and gather unique anecdotal memories such as the key turning points or telling moments in memory.

The fieldwork was undertaken over ten days in April 2019 in Ho Chi Minh City and Dong Nai province, with data collection and attendance at performances. This field trip brought the UK and Vietnamese teams together to capture twenty-one, 45-60 minute interviews from across the Cải lương theatre community. It allowed the research methodology to be tested and applied in country. The methodology proved to be robust and garnered a significant range and balance of testimonies. The range of subjects interviewed achieved a good balance of gender, age and professional roles.

The open question technique which we used, facilitated testimonies that included family memories of stories that had been passed down through the generations, including materials relating to early twentieth century history. It also facilitated commentary on the state of contemporary Cải lương compared to perceived 'golden age' periods. The theme of women's experience was an equally important emerging theme.

Each interview was filmed (visually archived) and there was evidence of much economic potential – reality TV shows, family theatre shows drawing on heritage – and renewed interest from a new generation.

The project produced a publication called *Beautiful and Real: An Oral History of Cai Luong* (English language and Vietnamese editions, 2019).³¹ There was an exhibition and open conversation/writing workshop on oral history and creative writing



Interview with actress and producer Kieu Chinh, as part of Saigon Cinema before 1975 research by Le Hong Lam – a FAMLAB Fund project as part of Heritage of Future Past Viet Nam. A Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth project.

Photograph © Vu Khanh Tung

practice in Ho Chi Minh City, and opportunities for networking and engaging with the media.

The project faced some linguistic and cultural challenges. Working on oral history in international settings means engaging in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural learning. Interviewers had to think through the clarity of their questions and interviewees explained the past not only to archive memory, but also to explain to a non-native speaker and introduce their history to a more neutral but receptive outsider. Here the interpreter mediates and also relays each aspect further. It can sometimes be easier to find heritage when talking through and across cultures. Oral history becomes a theatre for international cooperation and better mutual respect.

In terms of the outcomes of the project, working together to create an archive of oral history made

by the community itself (with our methodological insights) created new confidence and dynamism. The project also contributed to the promotion of a declining art practice, raising its profile through a range of public outputs and through workshops with younger people disconnected from their traditions by the wider media-landscape. Communities that gain an improved common understanding of their heritage gain social resilience which assists economic growth. The project promoted a form of cultural relations activity, using oral history and public heritage to support economic and social development through providing arts communities a sense of identity, history and heritage. It resulted in new Anglo-Vietnamese research conversations and unprecedented levels of trust, shared exchange and engagement within hard-to-reach communities.

31. The English-language edition is available at <https://issuu.com/bceastasia/docs/cai-luong-en>



Still from *Glorious Pain* documentary film, a FAMLAB Fund project as part of *Heritage of Future Past Viet Nam. A Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth* project

Photograph © Doan Truong Vinh Hoa

Protecting Intangible Heritage in the Upper Tigris Valley in Turkey

Through this CPF-supported project, The History Foundation (Tarih Vakfı) trained communities in the Upper Tigris Valley to document a disappearing intangible cultural heritage and established a new research resource to boost the regional profile in the heritage and museum sector.

The Upper Tigris region is particularly notable for its diversity, representative of Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians and Yazidis, among other groups. The traditional crafts, storytelling, *leyli* nights (musical celebrations), *reyhani* (music bands), *rahyan* horse racing and communal festivals (such as Nevruz and Bilal'i) represent the cohesiveness, as well as the diversity of these groups. Memories, oral histories and other intangible heritage related to these activities are considered vitally important by the local people and diaspora communities but

are not easy to document. There are no paper-based archives available.

The History Foundation is a non-governmental organisation based in Istanbul, founded in 1991 by the joint initiative of academics, creatives and historians of various backgrounds and professions. The Foundation aims to enrich people's understanding of history, encourage the conservation of historical heritage with a deep-rooted sensitivity, and to promote the active participation and inclusion of diverse sections of the Turkish population.

The aim of the project was to find out and document the intangible cultural elements of Mardin, Siirt, Şırnak and Batman cities and their surrounding rural environment. There was an emphasis on awareness-raising and capacity-building and the approach was intentionally cross-generational and inclusive, working with local researchers,

governmental offices, directors, young experts or students of social sciences, teachers, students and local people. Partnerships were made with four city universities, with university teachers being trained in oral history and then working with students to cascade skills.

Feedback reported in the project evaluation included:

This region of Anatolia is known as the cradle of the civilisation. But because of modernisation, most of the cultural heritage elements are under the threat of annihilation. Most of the people especially the young generations are also in the trend of forgetting the old culture and production systems. Migration started after '90s because of security reasons also caused

negative effects on the rural parts of the region. This made the project team design a project aiming first to tell people of the region the value of their heritage for the sustainability of their culture and life style.³²

Through the project, teachers and their students produced immediate outputs such as exhibition materials. The broader outcomes included long-term skill sharing, increased understanding of heritage and landscape and site shared ownership. There was sharing across the generations of stories, memories and narratives, drawing on and celebrating diversity and connection to place, as well as an increased understanding of the economic potential of intangible cultural heritage and potential for increased economic development, connected to tourism and heritage.



CPF-funded project *Protecting Intangible Heritage in the Upper Tigris Valley*.

Photograph © Tarih Vakfı

32. Available from Stephanie Grant, Cultural Protection Fund, Senior Programme Manager, British Council

The Wasurena-Gusa Project

This project,³³ run by the Japan Association in the UK, is an ongoing collection of oral histories that explores the journey of Japanese youth who headed abroad in search of new adventures in the 1960s and 1970s, by recording the stories of those who settled in the UK.

Wasurena-gusa is Japanese for the flower 'forget-me-not'. The model of the modern Japanese passport came to be in the 1920s, when it changed from a simple form made of thick Japanese paper to a booklet with the emblem on its front. At that time, moving from Japan abroad was rare and tourism was not considered a valid purpose to obtain an authorisation to travel, but in 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympic Games, the Japanese government lifted the usual tough restrictions on overseas tourism and issued thousands of passports for that single year. As a result, there was a significant migrant exodus.

The aim of the project is to record the history of the Japanese community in the UK from the 1950s to the early 1980s to provide a valuable oral-based archival resource for the future generations of Japanese and academics. It was started by Mokomo Williams from her personal experience of being unable to find much information about her predecessors who settled in the UK. She gained funding and training and worked to gather a collection of volunteer interviewers, translators and editors.

The project has an emphasis on capturing the specific intangible heritage of the Japanese community. According to Williams: 'a core element of the project was that once a person is gone, all his/her personal history were lost forever and that generation represent a very interesting chapter in history'. The concept was that there was much to learn about the Japanese community and their history and that it would create a living link for the Japanese community who come to the UK later.

The project has faced several challenges around language. The original idea was to collect interviews in Japanese, but the team realised that these would be more accessible if translated. The website, therefore, is in English and Japanese and the audio is edited to include English samples (not the whole interview). Williams has said that: 'one of the objects of the project is to pass on the

community's history to the next generation. Large numbers of the second generation, eg my children, do not speak Japanese, therefore at least some subtitles are helpful to them'.

So far, the project has interviewed approximately 70 people. They could interview many more people but do not have enough volunteers to edit and translate. However, they hope to carry on the project to the next stage, say from the 1980s to the 2000s, by handing over to the next team.

A series of high-profile events connected to the project have taken place at Japan House in London, featuring individuals such as fashion designer Koshino Michiko, actress and performer Hohki Kazuko, and photojournalist Kato Setsuo. The project has produced an accessible archive of interviews in both Japanese and English, and increased understanding of the role of the Japanese community in the cultural and economic life of the UK. Discussions have begun with institutions such as the British Library and universities regarding the depositing of the archives.

33. <http://wasurenagusa.org.uk/en/project/>



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Mr Setsuo Kato, photo journalist.

Photograph © Japan Association in the UK

Analysis: oral history and inclusive growth

As is clear from the case studies and examples above, oral history has much to contribute towards inclusive growth. Here, framed with reference to the intervention points identified in the British Council's initial report on Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth³⁴ – ie interventions relating to Value, Learning, Protecting and Sharing – I show findings from the oral history activities and highlight whether these activities reach the accepted markers of inclusive growth.

Valuing

- Oral history activity clearly demonstrates an ability to intervene in the area of community engagement and social action, regardless of context or political background. This in turn leads to levels of engagement with social action and the ability to provide educational and outreach activity.
- Sharing heritage and narrative understanding is empowering for communities and provides a mode of recognition and validation of collective and individual experience.
- The projects engage in, and are directly created by, groups who often feel undervalued or, in an international context, have limited global exposure and may counter stigmatisation of the group or, in an international context, may prove a diplomatic bridge between previously mutually suspicious groups.
- The practical investment of developing collections, projects, exhibitions, publications, and archives shows how an organisation or nation values each subject. Investment and focus offer demonstrable outcomes of new living history. It's a chance for lost stories that have not been valued to become part of a public historical record.

- There is also the possibility of creating a new archive or output through both physical and online platforms or through surrogate partners for countries where freedom of speech prevents certain types of archives.

Learning

- The passing on of knowledge, memory and experience by word of mouth and turning that into a living archive offers up vast research, learning and educational potential.
- Oral history is unique in the opening-up of oral testimony for public access, allowing an increased level of cultural, historical and intellectual learning in relation to a specific target subject, site, culture, history or activity.
- Oral history offers vast potential in the area of cross-generational and schools-based learning.
- The opportunity that oral history has to offer in the arena of learning for individuals is proven to be hugely beneficial including technical skill sharing, personal development, community engagement, leadership, listening, archival and depository skills, and more.
- The acquisition of new transferable skills, knowledge and experience that can contribute to an individual's life path and career.
- There can be significant legacies of training oral history interviewers in the method. Here the interviewer gains as much as the interviewee. Volunteers may be initially untrained, unemployed, older people, feeling isolated. Engaging practically in learning the skill of interviewing and working in a new professional environment can give not only skills but also new confidence. It's stimulating to engage and listen to people's histories and

work in a team to gather them. This learning also includes ethical and legal frameworks for data collection and storing.

Protecting

- Oral history directly contributes to living heritage or intangible culture. This engenders a more democratic process in the creation of history and 'cultural democracy'.
- The activity enriches heritage collections for the future which inform culture and knowledge, including providing content and material for archival and research purposes.
- Oral history has a strong role to play in providing preservation, conservation, archiving and digitisation, as well as contributing to a holistic understanding of place and sites.
- Oral history provides generational protection. The stories of the older generation gathered before it is too late for them to be passed on. Unlike buildings, which can be maintained or rebuilt, individual memory, if not captured, is finite.

Sharing

- Oral history is inherently a sharing and listening practice. Memory and collective understanding inherent in heritage is not fixed and static. Cultural heritage is a fluid, evolving process and oral history recognises this.
- Thinking about a shared history brings communities together. Interviewees talk among themselves before the interviews and often host the interview with family members present. Communities then come together to visit exhibitions and book launches or similar activities.
- Individuals gain new-found respect from having international visitors investing time to listen to stories of their cultural or historical realities.

- Archives of memories can be made open-access and shared across distance and space.
- The NHLF report into oral history investment unearthed a view that oral history had a special contribution to make regarding sharing, above and beyond other forms of heritage activity: 'It's stronger than other sorts of heritage activity. The spoken word is very powerful especially where physical material may not be available or where the written word is not as an important part of community transference of heritage.'³⁵
- Oral history is seen as a way of directly engaging with communities and individuals who would not necessarily have an interest in visiting, or the motivation for engaging with, more traditional heritage organisations. It reaches beyond the walls of museums and archives into the community and acknowledges that heritage can be valued and evidenced in different ways.

By enabling valuing, learning, protecting and sharing, oral history contributes towards inclusive growth outcomes relating to the economy, environment, education, infrastructure, and business vitality.

Conclusions and recommendations

Oral history is, by its inherent nature, a collaborative undertaking. It is not possible to undertake oral history activity without the full engagement of local partners and significant members of the subject-focused community or key individuals. Partnership building, trust-gaining, and dialogue is key, as well as a respectful position (you might call it an anti-colonial approach) in which the endeavour is to listen and share, rather than to judge or instruct. On a wider level, the 'soft power' influencing potential, in terms of dialogue, access and shared information, is potentially very great.

Conclusion: how oral history methodology can contribute to inclusive growth, international relations and beyond

Oral history informed heritage activity cannot be underestimated in terms of its potential for impact on inclusive growth and enabling people and places to contribute to, and benefit from, economic success. These factors directly address issues around poverty and access.

Oral history is unique in that it links memory and heritage to the present, using dialogue and mutual trust-building and the sharing of both personal and collective experience as a core value. As a practice, it is about connection and has the potential to greatly increase the opportunity to foster cross-national relationship-building, mutual understanding and influence within the context of international relations.

Alongside the active participation of wider civic society, it can bring about social inclusion and advance equality and diversity in society. This approach to heritage contributes to inclusion in the following ways: enhancing self-esteem and identity; building skills and confidence; breaking down discrimination and isolation; and contributing to employment and social engagement activity.

Cultural heritage has been proven to constitute an

essential engine for economic development. The possibility to generate income from cultural assets creates employment, reduces poverty, stimulates enterprise development, encourages dialogue, draws on private investment, articulates the need for cultural conservation and tourism opportunities, and generates resources for environmental and cultural development. Living heritage therefore benefits all levels of society and has the potential to bring social cohesion and economic growth to emerging economies.

Oral history can be a key component to all living heritage activity. Consequently, oral history impacts directly on the Inclusive Growth Outcome as defined by the Centre for Economic Inclusion.

Oral history's inclusive nature creates a tangible bridge between heritage and economic growth, based on inspired, informed active citizenship. Participation in selecting and interpreting a shared cultural heritage provides a significant, profound step towards meaningful social inclusion and change.

Recommendations

The British Council and other organisations working in culture, the arts and education could:

- Recognise the unique role that the discipline of oral history has to play in cultural heritage focused activity;
- Build in oral history work across subject and discipline areas, providing a cohesive line that focuses on heritage and the wider issues rather than traditionally defined areas, eg education or the arts;
- Recognise the democratic elements of oral history activity in the early stages of project planning and conversations, for example, using oral history methodology to explore a

range of opinions that allows for a multiplicity of voices, rather than talking to the 'usual suspects'; and recognising that oral history can also be used as an evaluation tool;

- Be braver in focusing on contested, complicated and complex sites – whether cultural, heritage, or less tangible – respecting indigenous communities, reflecting diversity, always questioning assumptions and inherited potential bias in a post-colonial world.

Specific oral history projects could be developed to reach key subjects such as gender-focused or geographically focused, culturally focused, UNESCO or similar, and to draw greater attention and focus to geographically strategic sites.

Oral history projects could help to diffuse, influence, or compliment complex sites where diplomacy is key, eg Iran, China, Russia.

Oral history projects could be used where identity issues are present, allowing individuals to explore the meaning of community. The opportunity to revisit the past in a present context can allow room to reinstate or re-examine identities. This enables explorations of issues around gender and inequality, finding scope to give voice to underrepresented or disparate communities.

Oral history can be used to enhance social activity, tourism, economic growth and skills development. Working with essential partners, it can provide skills and training at exactly the correct point of intervention to provide the maximum beneficial outcomes.

Oral history, with an emphasis on listening and sharing, can contribute to nuanced cultural relations and soft power relationships, conversations and activities.

Oral history can provide a component to wider programmes of activity, particularly urban environment, heritage, town and geography, and sustainable communities.

Oral history can be used in the preserving of cultures and breaking down of stereotypes.³⁶

36. eg <https://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/roma-stories-roma-oral-history-project.html>

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To find out more about the Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth Collection, please visit:

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/cultural-heritage-inclusive-growth-essay-collection>

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The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities

