

# **A CHANGING WORLD**

## **PERSPECTIVES ON HERITAGE**

The CIE Afghanistan Program

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Netherlands

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands has made this  
Culture and Development Program possible.

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# Introduction

“Exhibitions and programs are taking place in venues that are both historically significant and politically charged is an act of living, of learning, of inspiration and self-actualization, on the individual, group, community, and national levels. These things are extraordinarily defiant preserving the past, but more importantly as an element, shaping our future”

*Dr. Omara Khan Masoudi, Director of the National Museum, Kabul*

Cultural heritage is connected with the past and Afghanistan has a long and rich one to feast on. Cultural heritage can be used for positive change building sustainable futures, and it is this that the CIE – Centre for International Heritage Activities, cooperates with in Afghanistan. The constructive role of culture in the rebuilding of a post conflict country is at the core of CIE’s program in Afghanistan that began in 2006. Today, the CIE works in various countries throughout Africa and Asia using cultural and heritage related activities as an instrument for intercultural dialogue, capacity building as well as sustainable social and economic development. Under the umbrella of the ‘Culture & Development Program’, the projects in Afghanistan range from small awareness and training programs for local communities to larger comprehensive strategies that establish cultural sectors in a country or region. Similar to the CIE’s other programs, such as ‘Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage’ in South Africa, our activities in Afghanistan are focused on capacity building and the development of the cultural sector.

What makes the Afghanistan case special is the range of partners involved in the progress of the program and their motives in participating. While the 19th century saw the rise of national

states, the 21st century became one of globalization. As a result, we realize that we are currently living in overlapping worlds where differing ethnicities, nationalist sympathies and other forms of identities are at the core of many conflicts. Additionally, both theory and practice in the heritage field are facing new dilemmas. The validity of heritage theories and its practical work as we know it, are constantly coming under fire and questioning. In addition, development work is often questioned for its effectiveness as a serious peace building element in regions that have undergone centuries of warfare. How, then, do we build cultural development projects on an ever shifting basis in an ever shifting world?

This book will address these dilemmas and the differing dynamics of the CIE’s comprehensive approach in Afghanistan whilst focusing on three levels- the international, national and local. We will go through the different challenges faced, questions asked, choices made, and the reasoning behind our decision making processes throughout the duration of the CIE’s fruitful projects. Our aim is to support peace building by enhancing a unifying identity in Afghanistan while giving space for diverse identities through sustainable heritage projects that focus on the future generations.









Heritage works on many levels. As an individual in society you determine your identity and belonging through your heritage, while on a collective level heritage holds communities together. On a national level it holds the power to unify or divide a population and plays an important role between states and national communities. It is important for organizers of culture and development programs to be aware of these multilayered aspects of heritage, and how they can correlate and conflict with one another. International organizations devoted to promoting cultural activities often focus on the improvement of a local or regional situation with consent of the national authorities. At other times they follow international (UNESCO) guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention and other principles concerned with developing a country's cultural sector. In the case of Afghanistan, the program was active on all levels with its involved stakeholders. The main request of the Afghan government consisted of three main goals: improving national capacity, serving a cultural agenda for different regions and local communities, and thirdly doing this while following international guidelines. Situated along the Silk Road, Afghanistan was for centuries acting as the crossroad or meeting point of many cultures. Its central location between 'East' and 'West' made Afghanistan an arena for century long conflicts and an incredible exchange of ideas over millennia. The result of these contacts have left behind archaeological sites and monuments that have been regarded for their Outstanding Universal Value and deemed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Interest in archeol-

ogy, heritage and later in cultural development work have attracted the international community. Today the international community has a strong hold through program funds and experts deployed at their own cultural missions or working with Afghan institutes. For some countries cultural ties with Afghanistan began with archaeological explorations from the 19th and 20th centuries. For other countries their involvement was more politically or economically motivated, where heritage sites were seen as an 'interfering' elements. An example of the latter is at the Mes Aynak site in the Logar province. Starting in 2007, the Chinese Metallurgical Group (MCC) was granted a 30 year lease to investigate the economic opportunities in copper mining on site. However, Mes Aynak also contains an invaluable complex of ancient Buddhist monasteries, temples and some 400 Buddha statues, rendering the site of incredible cultural importance. Regarding the future of the site, whether protected or exploited for economic interest, many conflicting issues remain unresolved. Every involved partner has an effect on the organization and an outcome on culture and development projects. The issue of being an outsider or an insider is not always well addressed. From an international perspective, the UNESCO World Heritage Convention of 1972 has proven to be a very effective tool for global involvement in heritage management on a national level. UNESCO has gradually become more aware of its complex role as stakeholder and is seeking mechanisms for alternative approaches of heritage management. The nature of these types of cultural cooperation and capacity building programs









makes us (an international NGO) a stakeholder too, rendering us part of a constellation of stakeholders which determines the future of Afghanistan's heritage. On the other hand, a spectrum of local communities has gradually taken an important role in the development of cultural programs, also becoming crucial stakeholders. For a program to be efficient, we must acknowledge the various involved groups of stakeholders and their level of inclusiveness. An efficient way to deal with multiple stakeholders is to create multiple and specific platforms open to intercultural dialogue.

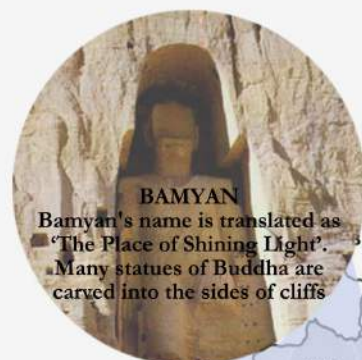
Since 2006, the CIE, with generous support of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has participated in an innovative capacity building program initiated by the Ministry of Information and Culture of Afghanistan. The Afghan ministry requested our assistance with two projects: the National Museum and the development of a regional museum in Kholm. Our entrance into the heritage field has been at the Afghan national level. Naturally, we could not start the implementation of this program without taking the international arena (UNESCO and other NGOs) into account. However, at the same time, the program had to address the needs, wishes and perspectives of the Afghan local communities. Many challenges characteristic to heritage management and preservation efforts in conflict zones arose in this case too. The eight year process for both the NMA in Kabul and the BJN Palace in Kholm serves here as a case study to the implementation of cultural development programs. Operating on multiple platforms and dealing with specific requirements and ambitions of stakeholders brought us insights and an understanding of

the way these programs function. The book will reflect on the subsequent learnt strengths and weaknesses. The experience also helped us develop methods for trusted networks on local, national and international levels. And these networks created a basis for cooperation between partners and communities. From our experience, a program can only be successful if it acknowledges the importance of various groups of partakers that range 'from UNESCO to community'. A program can achieve an inclusive and sustainable outcome by patient, thorough communication and tailor-made approaches.

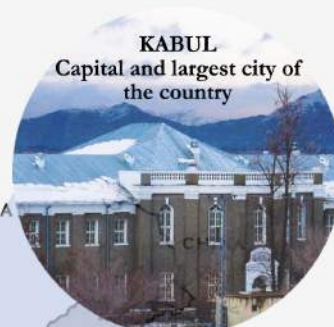
Since sustainability is regarded as a necessary outcome, inclusiveness and ownership are the essential route. For this reason, it is important to understand how different partakers in the program turn into stakeholders. Being involved in an active process, you cannot consider yourself an outsider. This understanding is key to create a reciprocal platform that does justice to the nature of heritage production and management. The fact that the stakeholders come with different ambitions, interests and responsibilities doesn't mean that there is an intrinsic hierarchy between the different groups like UNESCO, a national government, local community, NGO, or an individual expert. Cooperation focusing on common interests and diversity provides a window for dialogue and allows ownership of projects both to national and local groups.

The CIE shifts its work from a project with objects to process with subjects. This is our approach to building the first steps towards sustainability.





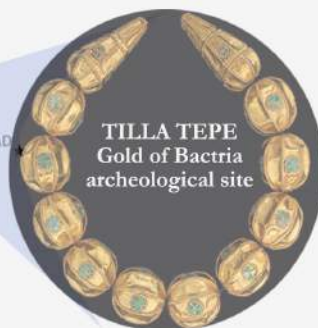
**BAMYAN**  
Bamyan's name is translated as 'The Place of Shining Light'. Many statues of Buddha are carved into the sides of cliffs



**KABUL**  
Capital and largest city of the country



**HERAT**  
The city has a number of historic sites, including the Friday Mosque



**TILLA TEPE**  
Gold of Bactria archeological site



**KAJAKAY DAM**  
is one of the two major hydroelectric power dams in southern Afghanistan.



**KANDAHAR**  
trading center for sheep, wool, cotton, silk, felt, food grains, fresh and dried fruit, and tobacco.



# Background

“The ethnographic objects are the identification of our country. Our customs, our clothes, are what identify us as Afghans; they are distinct. The role of the museum is very important in displaying this. It is important for people of Afghanistan – those who lived outside as refugees- to learn who we are, what we are.”

*Ms. Fauzia Hamraz Safi, Director of the Ethnographic Department of the National Museum Kabul*

Archaeological research draws a history of Afghanistan that spans almost four millennia. The cultural history of Afghanistan as we relate to it today dates back to around 20,000 BC and has known many different phases. These various phases include many foreign interventions including the more modern engagements with the English, Russians and Americans and alternating with peaceful encounters on the world's largest trade network and unprecedented cultural interchange and shopping highway, the 'Silk Road'. The good, the bad and the unavoidable all contributed to the diverse cultural landscape and society that makes Afghanistan the country it is today.

Unfortunately the contemporary history of Afghanistan has been ravaged by war. Since 2002 the country has struggled with a post-war situation of instability. In times of conflict death is high, security low and jobs scarce. No wonder today's Afghanistan scores low on all development indices and currently ranks as number 169 of 174 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI). Sadly for all its individuals today

Afghanistan has the highest maternal and infant mortality rates and the lowest life expectancy in the world. In dire times solutions of survival can be devastating too, the country is the second largest producer of opium in the world. When most citizens have a fragile beginning of life, early death and short life expectancy, dignity and quality of life are extremely important.

## **Afghanistan?**

With all these facts and layered histories, what is the Afghanistan we are looking at when we approach it with a heritage and culture project? When we talk about Afghanistan today, it is important to be aware which Afghanistan we are referring to.

The general web-search would give you: Afghanistan is war, destruction, inequality, chaos and hopelessness. You need to specifically look for 'culture' to find anything different. When you find the words 'Afghanistan and culture' together, you are given...the past. The past is a long glorious history, but are the present and future outside the cultural sphere?







How does this relate to today's Afghan's?

How do UNESCO World Heritage Site listings relate to the living Afghan culture? And what about the local culture of today?

Cultural programs have to deal with two simultaneous elements. The first is the cultural work, and the second is the management of the program. In Afghanistan this means:

1. Content: cultural work dealing with 'unity and diversity'.
2. Project management: navigating simultaneously between the international, national and local levels.

We will explore how projects navigate all the above levels and balance between different interests, realities and outcomes.

**“Afghan identity is a complex one, made up of multiple languages, multiple traditions, physical and built heritage -it's part of people's religious practices, beliefs and customs.**

**Afghans are rebuilding and re-imagining their country but for sure you need to acknowledge the past, to bring the past with you to go forward.**

**Working in heritage means connecting people to an identity which can enable one to engage in the world, as a person with dignity, respect for their country and to build mutual respect with other nations and continue to develop their country.**

**What I wish for cultural heritage in Afghanistan, is a peaceful Afghanistan in which monuments and sites, art, poetry and music, could be enjoyed by Afghans themselves.**

**To be possible to travel the different parts of the country and then also to have an international tourism targeted at a higher end to contribute significantly to the economy.”**

*Brendan Cassar, Program Specialist for Culture Department, UNESCO*



# THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFGHANISTAN

## Kabul

The National Museum of Afghanistan is located at the end of Darul Aman Road (roughly translated ‘House of Safety Street’). The idea of an Afghan National Museum is nearly a hundred years old and emerged already in 1919. It was part of an ambitious plan for a new modern Kabul. The museum was part of political, cultural and social developments which characterized Afghanistan at the beginning of the twentieth century. This was during the times of Amanullah Khan who introduced similar changes to Afghanistan as those brought to Turkey by Atatürk. In 1931 the collections were placed in their present home just outside Kabul on the grounds of the former Royal Palace. The intention of having a museum was to provide an appropriate place to showcase the treasures of Afghan culture to modern Afghanistan.

As far back as classical times, Afghanistan drew on and assimilated a variety of cultures. Its influence spread through the Silk Road and linked the primary cultural centres. For decades Europeans accessed the routes to ‘the East’, and particularly to Afghanistan looking for its wealth of remnants from the past. Naturally the museum in Kabul has rich collections. It exhibited, housed and preserved around 100,000 pre-Islamic, Islamic and ethnographic objects. This rich collection, in then peaceful Afghanistan, with vast scenery and busy university, was among the main tourist attractions.

A painful period hit the National Museum in the 1970s. And on 26 December 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. As invasions usually go, it caused great political instability and the destruction of the economic and cultural infrastructure. The security situation in Kabul continued to deteriorate. Between 1992 and 1994 Kabul was devastated by guerrilla fighting. And in 1994 the National Museum was being used as a military base when it was hit by a rocket and it burst into flames. Though the museum had turned into a damaged battle field, the collection was still inside. Two years after the incident in 1996, just a week before the Taliban seized power, an important decision was taken.

The Ministry of Information and Culture decided to move the remaining collection to two locations. Part of the collection would go to museum storage and the rest would be stored at the “Kabul Hotel”, a hotel in the capital. At the beginning of 2001 the National Museum faced further disaster. The Taliban decided that all images must be destroyed and appointed a special group charged with the task. The special group was active and destroyed around 2500 works of art and the museum storage was destroyed. But the objects brought to the “Kabul Hotel” were spared. The next year in 2002, seventy one years after its establishment, the restoration and repatriation of the collection began.











# Unity and Diversity

“We need to step away from the culture of war to the culture of peace. We would like to show the world that we have a culture that we want to share. Afghanistan is not killing, bombing or burkha. We want to create awareness for the young generation of Afghans. Some of them have grown up in other countries. For example the looting that is taking place in the archaeological sites, you cannot stop it without the people. You cannot get their approval by force. We need to have the cooperation of the people.”

*Mr. Omar Sultan, Former Deputy Minister of Culture Afghanistan*

Heritage work is about finding, protecting, developing and facilitating different objects, stories and narratives. Museums are some of the major places for that work, collecting and interpreting both tangible and intangible material. One of the most important centres and symbol of the rich cultural heritage of Afghanistan is the National Museum of Afghanistan (NMA) in the capital Kabul. The CIE's cooperation with the NMA and its rehabilitation is an important part of this program. We had to ask ourselves one main question for the success of this project. How exactly do you revive a National Museum in the capital with the intention of reconnecting a nation in a (post) conflict society?

Many countries are struggling to build a stable, peaceful and prosperous nation-state, therefore the role and importance of national museums has not at all diminished. In Afghanistan, or say Syria, Macedonia, France or the Netherlands, diverse societies are a core and sometimes problematic issue. One of the museum's

goals is to amalgamate both the 'collective' and 'unifying' roles it plays for its audiences.

The aim is not to replace the diverse and rich identities of the Afghan society, instead museums and other memory agencies aim to find a common ground to replace the old thinking that: 'different' is oppositional, or 'different' is hierarchic. Museums can convey, if not a national narrative, a unifying narrative in dialogue. Cultural institutions can propagate different shared histories as stepping-stones in the process of unification.

Narratives, heritage and identity have been peace breakers in Afghanistan. Shared heritage is an important currency and cultural development work can enhance a common ground of belonging. As cultural and heritage professionals we, the CIE, want to enhance the role of culture as a binding agent in society. How does a museum relate to unity and peace building? Can museums serve as identity-agents and peace brokers?



## A DAY WITH OMAR SULTAN

**Former Deputy Minister, policy maker, archeologist, producer of heritage, educator, bureaucrat, advisor and consumer of culture and heritage.**

“In 1969-75 I went to Greece with a scholarship to study archeology. It is my love and my blood to work in the field. In 1978 I got the second scholarship and suddenly the communist regime came. I was in house-arrest under the communist regime, but escaped with my wife. I was 26 years old, very young when I left Afghanistan. It was like suddenly something happens and you don't have a country any more. I went back to Greece and from there to the US. But believe me from the first day I arrived in the US, I had the dream of going back to Afghanistan. Being 26 and leaving Afghanistan was really difficult. I had just started my career and suddenly I had to leave. I needed to survive, to feel alive!

I went back in 2002, as an advisor to the minister. In 2005 they asked me to accept the post of Deputy Minister for Culture. And I had to think about it. But again because of the love of Afghanistan I kicked everything, my retirement and everything. Sometimes I think I made a mistake, but I will never regret that I quit my job in the US. It was for the love and the passion of my people.

### **When everything is lost**

The day I went to Afghanistan 2002 February 24, I could not believe that this is the country that I left. It was completely destroyed. I couldn't believe that we Afghans did that. I went to my high school, it was completely destroyed and all my friends and my childhood friends were gone. Everybody had left; either that or they were killed during the civil war. There were no friends, and I was just a stranger. Two weeks I cried. And then I accepted reality.

I was faced with a simple question: do you want to go in and be part of the building of the country or do you want to go and work for a more prosperous personal life? And I decided I wanted to stay.

The price of working in this field for me is that now almost for 12 years I have not lived with my family. This is a very sad tragedy. I love my family; I go visit them every 4 months for 2 weeks. That is not enough. But I really love what I'm doing...(laughing) unfortunately.”





## Memories and unity

Who controls the past, controls the present. Who controls the present controls the future. Museums are cultural memory institutions which choose certain memories and then have the power and choice of how to present them. Memory itself is a shaping instrument of the past. The way we remember or chose to remember reconstructs history. It is hard to leave each individual to reinvent a new collective narrative in a void. A museum is an excellent place to collect memories and heritages and offer new understandings. Even if we do not like the narratives a museum offers, at least we have something to oppose, reshape and debate. A museum can construct and reconstruct narratives of unity, find and redefine connecting elements.

After a long period of destruction, unprocessed histories, memories and dichotomies can cripple cultures. In (post) conflict cultures museums can function as catalysts and help transfer a culture from longing to belonging. A cultural institute can process memories and the painful dividing past and present, making space for new beginnings. By redefining memories and narratives museums reshape identities, an important process in peace building.

## Stories and history

History is essentially stories retold by humans. There is no simple story of what 'truly' happened. History is not 'what happened', but memories and stories of what happened, and therefore there are many versions of those stories. In conflict and post conflict cultures, history has often been used as a weapon. This starting point is a clue to understanding why

heritage work in a post conflict society is now seen as rehabilitating and peace building work. It is building peaceful political and social infrastructure par excellence and for the same reason, culture and memory institutions work can be complex and demanding, needing awareness and working methods.

Even when a museum wants to convey 'simple information', it is making choices. Choices of what is being left out, what is being highlighted, how the story is conveyed and what the context will be in which information is put in. In addition to dealing with information, history, archeology and war, stories and narratives tend to have a tragic or happy note. We need to tell both of tragic and happy stories. Happy times need nuanced stories and tragic stories need some hope and even happiness.

A filmmaker was once asked about the difference between a happy ending and a tragedy. His answer was that the difference is choosing when to end a story. Every individual and society is full of both tragedy and happiness. The choice of timing of when to start and when to end is one of the things museums busy themselves with. Museum work is built on continuity and discontinuity both within the past and present.

When a place is full of memories of destruction, a museum has a job of respecting the need to preserve, yet has the power and responsibility of setting memories and heritage in a time span. Putting things into context and putting a wider context is part of the collective healing process. Museum collections and displays can convey new national and/or unifying stories.





### Beginning of the program

CIE starts with preliminary steps in renovation activities. Several structural weaknesses in the roof of the museum have been corrected.

Technical and urgent renovations of the museum are completed.

**Planning a security survey** to implement security system. Drawing out of three additional projects: storage facilities, museum website, museum shop.



**“Another Afghan Story” Exhibition and Portrait Book** completed and on display at the Goethe Institute in Munich.

Planning a sustainable future for the museum and a travelling exhibition.



**29 April : Buddhist Heritage/Qandahar** exhibition.

Digitization of the collection, improving the archive. Developing an Educational programme for Afghan children.

Fundraising activities in vision of the next programme: online platform, publications.

**Abu Dhabi conference**

in December to discuss the role of national museums in conflict and post conflict countries.

**2006**

**2008**

**2010**

**2012**

**2014**

**2007**

Opening of the exposition **“Tashqurghan: An Afghan Urban Heritage Lost?”**

CIE helped building infrastructure for the museum, planning the exhibition, providing material to display, tools and showcases.



**2009**

Continuation of the upgrade of the interiors of the museum building. Planning a **Permanent Exhibition for the National Museum.**

Working on storage facilities, security upgrade, museum website.



**2011**

**Continuing renovation works** in order to upgrade and organize the exhibition spaces. Planning the Qandahar exhibition.



**2013**

**6 July: Opening of 1000 Cities of Bactria Exhibition**

Focusing on educational programmes to extend public awareness for cultural heritage



**NMA TIMELINE**



But what stories, whose, how and why? How does heritage strengthen or weaken different narratives? Museum professionals are often faced with these questions.

### **Methods**

In 2006, the CIE started work in Afghanistan with a 'classical' capacity building program. This was done by sharing our expert knowledge with the National Museum of Afghanistan, the NMA staff. The work helped rebuild the physical infrastructure, but during the course of the program the method developed into a reciprocal process of cooperation. The CIE is future leaning, reflecting on the now and looks for holistic approaches. Working on cultural projects to promote unity, means that the ongoing history of the contemporary Afghan individual and today's society are important. How does this understanding translate when working in a museum?

Before choosing subjects and narratives the museums needs a staff. Both staff and the cultural outcome need a strategy and vision. The first question we faced was choosing strategies, routes and methods. What methods and choices are fruitful in the context of the Afghan project? The project decided on two choices; one regarding the work method with the staff, and the other regarding the way the ideas of unity and diversity are conveyed in the museum work. Regarding staff training, the focus was on the new generation and the chosen method was training on the job. Local young professionals were trained through a 'hands-on' process, engaging them right from the beginning. This way their perspective was part of the work from

the beginning. At the same time the choice of young professional trainees and the method meant that the process was part of a sustainable base. The second decision had to deal with the best way to reflect on, and convey the subject of national unity and diversity. From different museum practices the choice has to take Afghanistan and its current reality into consideration. A milestone was achieved by the joint decision to work on exhibitions as test runs and tryouts for the New National Museum of Afghanistan.

By developing temporary exhibitions the rich and diverse history of Afghanistan can become accessible to the targeted audiences. So the process started with exhibition planning. During this process practical skills had tangible results. The exhibition process forced the curators and other staff to make decisions on content and form, to design a work strategy and develop a vision. It also made the staff plan for diverse audiences, taking their expectations into consideration yet caring for the need of unifying and shared heritage. These decisions and approaches offered a structural standard for the NMA.

### **Choosing subjects**

After laying these two work routes and with the NMA professionals and young students, the search for suitable subjects for exhibitions in the new museum began. Since the focus is balancing between unity and diversity, a 'suitable' subject is one which falls in the category of supporting one (or both) of the themes of unity and/or diversity. After the initial work, the subject for the first exhibition was chosen. The historic Bazaar of Tashqurghan in Kholm, an ancient







town famous for its covered market, (though the bazaar was destroyed during the Soviet invasion in the 1980's) offered a great subject to begin with. The town is in a district with a Dari Persian speaking Tajik majority, and among its minorities are Pashtuns, Uzbeks and Arabs. Preparing an exhibition about a Bazaar, which is still in living memory, brings to light a functioning and blooming micro Afghan culture.

The bazaar was a place where all parts of society, hierarchy, genders, ages and professions mingled and shared space and stories. It was a safe and functioning public space of local and regional economy where commodities were evaluated and exchanged. It was also a place where rules, stories, thoughts, feelings, values, arguments, negotiations and other intangible things were constantly re-established, questioned, and exchanged. Today, the Bazaar is a story full of other accounts depicting a prosperous life that once was, and could be. The Bazar exhibition renewed the symbol of the broader Afghan bazaar as living heritage. The exhibition proved that identifying elements of heritage do not only belong to distant history. The pride in contemporary and everyday life of the Bazar is a unifying symbol of all Afghans.

"Tashqurghan: An Afghan Urban Heritage Lost?" became a traveling photo exhibition which opened on the 25th of April, 2007, building a national narrative through a regional story. How was the process of building this exhibition conducted and achieved? A big part of the National Museum of Afghanistan's collection was either damaged by

war or lost. We needed to conserve the inventoried collection, restore, and retrieve the missing parts. After that we need to make the collection accessible for the public. As already mentioned, transferring ownership to the new local curators took place in training curators 'on-the-job'. The local curators had their own questions, questioning, and knowledge, which were all integrated in the process. A new generation of curators and conservators was born through this process. The new curators were able to test their own vision on the presentation of the developing national narrative in temporary exhibitions.

Applying and merging the knowledge gained from the theoretical workshops organized by various international partners. In addition to curating, the new professional group mended and restored broken and damaged artefacts and will be doing all the needed processes of work with the collection too. After the installation of the first temporary exhibition, the design, planning and building of exhibition became the core activity of the program at the NMA. The trained staff could now bring theory into practice and develop the design and planning of future exhibitions.

The CIE-program catered for the budgetary means, the coaching and the required and requested specialities. In addition to curators many other local professions were recreated at the museums, from carpenters, painters, craftsmen, security workers, to cleaners. The program focussed on ownership of the whole process: from concept, research, design, planning and implementation. The CIE, with our local partner AFIR Architects,

dealt with the managing issues. AFIR Architects is a professional Afghan studio involved as field partner in the Afghanistan program, dealing both in restoration and education activities.

Both staff and exhibitions need space. The staff needs a place to work in, and an exhibition needs space and place to be displayed in. The NMA museum building had been a stage of war and had lost many of its doors, windows and even part of its roof. The central hall and the exhibition rooms were renovated and upgraded. This all was the work of the hands of the local staff involved. The exhibition of the historic Bazaar created the perfect opportunity for upgrading the interior of the museum and improving the conditions of the needed exhibition rooms. It was a historical moment when the newly installed doors finally opened. The exhibition attracted numerous visitors.

The people at the door, turned from a handful of people, to museum audience. A delegation of community members from Tashqurghan was invited and was present at the opening ceremony. This allowed 'regional ownership' and respect connecting the capital to Tashqurghan. While the exhibition was in Kabul, it offered local communities a preview of the future regional museum in Tashqurghan. A new phase in history started, one of active building of culture, heritage and audience involvement. The exhibition work at the National Museum of Afghanistan balanced between uniting narratives and diverse stories. Another uniting story was the third exhibition. The exhibition '1000 Cities of Bactria'

was opened on the 6th of July in 2013. It presented archaeological artefacts and contextual narratives associated with Alexander the Great's empire during its rule of Bactria (present day north Afghanistan) during the Hellenistic period. Relating to the far history of Afghanistan, distance in time offers certain neutrality. The 'Bactria 1000 cities' narratives, rich history and exhibition can be offered to and 'owned' by every Afghan citizen. This also means that the local museum professionals can work on the project without the sensitivity which comes with regional, ethnic or other minority subjects. The project proposal and budget were worked on in an interdisciplinary and cross fieldwork method. They were developed by The NMA's local curator Mohammad Fahim Rahimi and young professional Khalid Dawari from AFIR Architects.

### **Exhibitions and Diversity**

Identity. There was an Afghanistan. Now there are tribes? The world today is going through a neo-ethnic renaissance where identity, and with it heritage, have become weapons in conflicts, wars or racist political movements. Western societies too have not been able to find a sustainable solution for the question of multiculturalism and its relation to political power, hierarchies and violence. The boundaries of nation, religion, ethnicity, region, language and other elements are subject to radical reinterpretation. Heritage and identity have become popular subjects on the political and cultural levels. They have moved from the margin to a core through which everything is sieved. Thus they became 'everyone's' subject and a political issue.







Every society, be it conflict, post conflict, new democracy or old democracy today, has to balance on at least three actions:

1. The appreciation of difference, diversity and individual development.
2. The strengthening of the unifying elements, narratives of national and collective identity or solidarity among groups who share geographical space.
3. The above-mentioned combined elements in a global context.

Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic society, and its historical status as a cultural crossroad has contributed significantly to its diverse ethnic makeup. In addition to that, the population is divided into a wide variety of ethno-linguistic groups. Heritage in Afghanistan is multi-layered, cross cultural, and international with lots of cross overs. All this, can be cause of conflict or richness and possibilities. In the past three decades, Afghanistan has lost a great amount of its irreplaceable material culture. In a fragmented and polarised society, heritage work can help rethink and negotiate identities.

The second exhibition at the NMA was the 'Buddhist Heritage of Afghanistan'. The subject of the exhibition was chosen by the director of the NMA and the local curators. While the first exhibition of the Bazaar was about heritage that was destroyed by war but of which the intangible heritage elements are still alive. The Buddhas were from a more distant heritage which is still used in political power struggle. The successive exhibitions were exploring among other subjects, the theme of culture as peace broker and peace

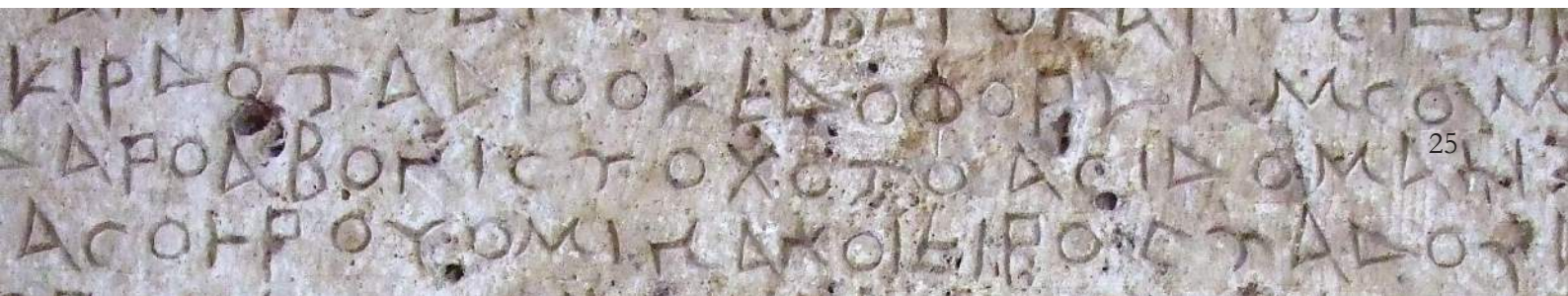
breaker. The Buddhist exhibition opened on the 29th of April 2012 and covered the Buddhist Heritage of Gandhara. The exhibition consisted of artefacts and archaeological remains found primarily in Buddhist monasteries around south of the Hindu Kush Mountains. By displaying these artefacts with accompanying texts, the museum introduced the historical life of Buddha and the influence of Buddhist history and culture in Afghanistan from local interest, belonging and appreciation. After this exhibition a series of exhibitions focussing on various regions was planned.

### **Education, unity and diversity**

The National Museum of Afghanistan can offer a platform for encounters and dialogue between different groups. But involving diverse audiences and combining margins of society, is extremely difficult in a geographically vast country struggling with security issues and mobility. When school children visited the museum with their teachers during the week, suddenly on the week-end many of them were coming with their families. Children were not only an audience target; they became the cultural institution's fantastic public relation builders, bringing in new audiences!

In a society where mass media and communication are not strong, and where the word 'culture' has been associated with war, having an audience which grows naturally is precious. Through educating children, children became themselves a route for larger education. Educating children in schools builds also a common ground of common knowledge, and new interpretations, building a ground for democracy.

The CIE has future plans to facilitate educational





## OMARA KHAN MASOUDI

### Director of the National Museum of Afghanistan

Dr. Masoudi was part of a secret group of cultural custodians who helped hide Afghanistan's most precious artefacts - including the famed Bactrian Gold - in a vault in the presidential palace, before the museum was looted during the civil war which engulfed Kabul in the 1990s. The building took a direct hit from a rocket in May 1993, setting the top floor ablaze. The windows were blown out and the doors were ripped off by looters, who stole roughly 70% percent of the museum's collection. What remained was badly damaged by floods from rain and snow. Then in 2001, Taliban thugs destroyed another 2,500 artefacts, mostly statues, claiming depictions of the human form were against Islam.

Afghanistan's National Museum located in Kabul stays open seven days a week. Though museums all over the world have a weekly day off, this National Museum cannot afford any holidays, says museum director Omara Khan Masoudi. It has already lost too much time. The years of war and conflict in Afghanistan when the National Museum stood between the frontlines of opposing sides poised to take control of Kabul city, forced the closure of the museum many times – sometimes for days and at other times for weeks, and even months at a time. One, maybe two generations of Afghans have grown up without knowledge of their history and culture, and now, there is no time to lose, says Masoudi: “We want the museum to be open everyday so that people can come.”

As the director of the National Museum, he saw the museum building come under shelling and rocket attacks and being looted. In 1996, when Taliban regime took control in Kabul, Masoudi and his liberal vision were no longer acceptable and he fled to Pakistan. When he returned, the museum was in ruins, its roof missing and most of its treasures looted or lying shattered in the midst of the debris. After the initial phase of emergency repairs the museum reopened to the public in 2002. That year there were only 2000 visitors. Since then donor help has helped to restore the museums and visitors have increased.

“We must have museums in different provinces, especially near the ancient sites. Everyone cannot travel to Kabul to visit this museum. People must have museums in their own provinces. If we have museums close to the sites of the excavation the local people can visit it and understand the importance of the artifacts. Once they understand the value they will safeguard it, they will prevent it from being stolen.”



programs. The institutional isolation of the museum needs to be lowered by opening its doors to school children, university students, and the community as a whole. Creating links between schools and the museum is crucial. The connection would eventually lead to field trips to the museum. The plan targets children and higher education. In 2014 a project targeting high school kids and students was brought to Kabul. The team had gained experience from the successful work on the educational programs 'Kholm for Kids' and 'Memory game for kids' in Kholm. In 2014 the team designed an educational program for the NMA in Kabul.

The children's education program in Kholm started with designing and printing a card game about different archaeological and historical sites in Afghanistan. The educational programs provided the students with an understanding of natural, cultural and religious heritage of Afghanistan. Twenty sets of games were produced, each set consisting of 49 cards, each representing a different site. The other is a card memory game with Afghani sites and cultural heritage, both sets were distributed at schools. The concept of 'Learning by Playing' was first explained in a short presentation by New AFIR to the head of Education in Kholm who decided that the 5th and 6th grade children will be most suitable for such programs as they should be able to read both Dari and English.

The educational program involved approximately 600 students and took place in the following schools: Abdul Rawofi Khulmy, Lisy zikory Khulm, Khowja Burhan, Ahmad shah

Massod and Kohna Khulm. The children reacted positively to the game. When seeing the BJN palace, some children started telling about their own trips and playing there, others expressed the desire to visit Tangi Khulm, Dari Wakhan or Bakhtary Camel, places introduced in the card game. Between 2009 -2014 the games reached over 500 teachers and more than 2000 local children, both boys and girls.

The NMA produces planned and well thought of material and content for its own use. In a poor country, this precious work and material can be used as part of the content of educational material and programs. When the museum is conscious of its unifying role, this work can be extended to teachers near and far offering quality narratives, investigated and researched information and even whole educational packages.

Together with our Afghan partners we developed a special education program for children, tailor made for the new Afghan generation. The new audience, both teachers and children, have expressed enthusiasm and promise of a larger audience. Since the beginning of the program in 2006 the seven year old first graders who took part in the educational activities, are now fifteen year old teenagers. The same girls and boys could be twenty three year old curators, group guides or educators in eight more years. With consistency, we could build a new group of professionals that has had a non-disturbed experience with a functional professional cultural institution from their first grade until their first profession. While war was led in the







name of culture, it can be freed of its burden giving a chance to a generation to redefine it and make it their own.

The National Museum of Afghanistan (NMA) is one of the most important symbols of the country's cultural heritage. By extending our programs for the younger generation, we would simultaneously reinforce the link between the museum and the future generation by opening career pathways involved in the future of their culture. For high school kids we developed various programs of bringing the school to the museum and the museum to school. We also targeted the teachers and organised courses for the educational staff. Among future educational plans for children is the creation of interactive games about the history and culture of Kabul, and children books on the history of the NMA and the city. Plans for higher education aim to further expand the training events for teachers and university students through workshops and conferences similar to ones we held at the the Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace (to which we will come later).

In addition to teachers, the aim is to cooperate with universities in order to incorporate more courses related to heritage, archaeology or/ and history into curriculums. Regarding higher education, one aim is the establishment of an accessible Master's course or an equivalent certifiable program. Preparing for that would start with the cooperation and linking with Afghan archaeology, history and heritage professors.

### **Publications and Unity**

Heritage is a currency of communication and it can be

used in many different forms. In addition to exhibitions and education, publications have the ability of mobility. Publications can reach new audiences with successful projects expanding the accessibility of cultural work.

A decision to produce a book dealing with cultural work, unity and diversity was made, and "Another Afghan Story" book was born. The book features portraits and personal stories of the staff working in the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul and on the Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace project.

Young and old, men and women, craftsman, director and gardener- all the Afghans involved had a history in the museum and personal involvement with at least one of the cultural heritage sites. In addition to telling personal stories, the museum, which brings individual stories together, tells of the fascinating diversity of culture and society on many levels. When seemingly separate socio-economical, ethnic and other groups tell their story, they are a story about working together, a story of being part of a bigger context, of connectedness and how together we make something out of nothing.





## BAGH-E JEHAN NAMA PALACE

**Kholm**

Originally built between 1890-1892 by Amir Abdur Rahman, the Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace was first restored and renovated in the beginning of the 1970s by Sultan Fayaz. The palace had a very large enclosed garden where the local community held social events. The plan was to turn the palace into a museum after the renovation in the 1970s. However, it is not only humans who bring destruction; sometimes nature can hinder cultural work. In 1976 an earthquake seriously damaged the palace, and the museum that was supposed to grow from a palace, had to be forgotten.

Following the earthquake, new periods brought human conflict and civil war. Serious damage and neglect turned both the palace and the palace garden into skeletons. Starting in 1980 the Soviets, then the Mujahedeen and the Taliban subsequently used the palace for other than museum function until 2001. The militant presence left a mark on this monument adding an extra dimension to the history of the palace. Thirty one years after the plan to transfer the palace into a museum, hope was not gone. In 2007 the original plans for a museum were picked up. The Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace community heritage program started planning a museum and gardens on the palace ruins with new history and heritage. And in 2011 a permanent exposition with objects from all of the country's ethnic groups, was opened.

“Bagh-e Jehan Nama was a good military target since the Russians were living inside. We wanted to attack and capture it. We made homemade bombs and threw them on the compound. We used a mixture of raisins, soap, oil, and acid mixed with fuel and we would light them and throw them in. Sometimes we would get rockets from Pakistan and fire them on the Bagh-e Jehan Nama. I knew they had a secret passage under the Bagh. They also used it as a jail for their prisoners.”

“After the Soviets were defeated I worked as an ordinary laborer, but things got difficult. Because the fighting started again, the roads were closed and there were no jobs. I didn't join the fighting then. I was not with any side.”

***Ghulam RASOOL***

***Chief Foreman, Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace Project and Former Mujahedeen Fighter***









# Local, National, Global

“The use of old traditional materials rather than modern concrete is just not historically accurate but also practical for living conditions. Concrete for example retains water and increases the humidity inside the home, which can lead to rheumatism. The traditional organic materials dry the water and reduce humidity. I am very glad that AFIR bought cows to stamp the mud into the proper consistency for the Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace project.”

*Abdul Ahad Abbasi, Director of preservation and restoration of historical monuments at the Ministry of Culture, Afghanistan*

## National in relation to global

In addition to the theoretical, cultural and heritage work, the program has to deal simultaneously with practical, planning and managerial political matters. There is no exhibition without complicated construction plans and work. In (post) conflict areas this starts with demining and clearing the rubble. All this needs specific knowledge which does not come first thing to mind when thinking about cultural projects. Museums are buildings and institutions, secondly they are symbols and thirdly they are producers of new narratives and identities. How, then, does conservation and restoration of a museum building play into the unifying process? The fact that a museum building exists in the middle of rubble and distortion, is a sign of defiance towards destruction, hopelessness and nihilism. What it represents is as important as what it is. A restored and a functioning museum is an act of successful cultural defiance. Identifying with a functioning museum and its symbol strengthens a sense of belonging, and through that, a sense of equality. A well preserved

public space which is open, inclusive and welcoming to all is an active process of rebuilding a city, region and society. The museum becomes a physical example of constructive effort demonstrating what living together in a post war society can be at its best. The museum's function in this open-for-all safe space is a little dose of what it means to be dialogical and reciprocal. Museums themselves become an on-going process of culture and heritage and part of society's infrastructures. Working on these cultural projects and the museum building was most rewarding for the CIE. We had the privilege of working directly with the director and the staff of young Afghan professionals. This meant that we could facilitate their ideas and cater for their needs together with a network of trusted international partners. In March 2011 an American delegation announced that they were willing to invest in a new museum building. The existing museum would still be used in conjunction with the new museum building. A new building was a long-term wish of the Deputy Minister of Culture, Omar Sultan.





## REALISATION

## SUSTAINABILITY

### STRUCTURE AND SECURITY

1. Security and Structural Survey
2. Upgrade security organization
3. Upgrade of the Construction
4. Electronic Security systems
5. Landscaping
6. Architectural Upgrade interior
7. New wing

### COLLECTIONS

1. Collection policy
2. Depot provisions
3. Registration
4. Photography
5. Conservation
6. Object Selection
7. Object acquisition
8. Library and archives

### EXHIBITIONS

1. Exhibition planning
2. Technical aspects permanent exhibition
3. Museum Furnishing
4. Objects Information display
5. Catalogue
6. New media in exhibition

### MANAGEMENT AND FINANCES

1. Human resources
2. Fundraising
3. Museum Management
4. Museum Finances

### COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES

1. Museum shop
2. Collection as asset
3. Donations

### PUBLIC TAWARENESS

1. Website
2. Audience Development
3. Education
4. Temporary exhibition and events
5. Promotion Materials
6. Publications
7. Media

## TRAINING

With the new building coming up, together with our local partners, we decided that our plan would focus on continuing to train staff members ‘on-the-job’ in collection management and security while training curators in creating temporary exhibitions. The aim is to establish a strong know-how platform for and by museum staff members. Once the new museum building is finalized, the new local expert group can utilize and pass this expertise on.

### **Structures and Sustainability**

The Bazaar exhibition at the NMA benchmarked the way for a more structural approach in the rehabilitation process. It also set an example for national and international cultural cooperation. The experiences of re-installing exhibitions and the first upgraded permanent galleries lead the way to a more comprehensive approach for the development of the museum. At an expert meeting that the CIE organised in conjunction with the Goethe Institute in Munich in 2010, the NMA staff presented their vision of further development cooperation with partners and donors. And so in 2010 the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture and the CIE joined together to make the future of the museum more sustainable by broadening the international professional network and its partnerships. Together we drew up a plan of six steps. It was based on already existing mission and vision documents found throughout the international community. The plan acted as a starting point for the exploration of developing museums in the Afghan context. The six steps include security and safety, exhibitions

and unity, management, generating income, education, and conservation and restoration. The plan was meant to be a catalyst for thinking and dialogue between partners. Its aim was to develop a sense of sensitivity for the problems of institutes such as the NMA encounter in post-conflict and highly politicized cultural times.

The six step plan is an excellent illustration of the complexity involved when working with many stakeholders. The plan’s described areas are obvious elements of any museum development processes. The cultural sector worldwide deals with the fragile and difficult balance between budgets, responsibilities and ambitions. Cultural entrepreneurship has become a buzzword. Since this is not the core business of cultural institutions as keepers of collections, for many institutions this struggle leads to frustration. There are also ethical issues and discussions about how far cultural work can use collections before work becomes a simple ‘Disneyfication’ of heritage.

While work at the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul developed, it became clear how the national level is influenced by the international standards and guidelines. The National Museum of Afghanistan tries to apply to the international standards, however, many problems arise from the national infrastructure that ultimately hinders work. At the same time we are becoming more conscious of the Euro-centricity of ideas in heritage management. But the important question is how to merge the ‘universal standard’ with the local (national) context. Many of the subjects in the six step plan are not as straightforward as









they may seem to Western institutions. The collection management is a good example. In the 'West' we are used to a system where the keeping of the collection is the shared responsibility of the director, curator and conservator. These three professionals decide who is allowed to work with the collection and what items can be put on show or lent out for an exhibition. In Afghanistan (but also in other countries outside the Western sphere) the 'key holder' is responsible for the access to various collections. The 'key holder' is installed by the government and the function is inherited, therefore this person is not necessarily an expert of collection management. If the key-holder/s are not available, the storerooms cannot be opened. In December 2014 the key-holder system was substituted with a 'curator system'.

Another example is the subject of developing strategies to generate income. In western cultural institutions generating income has become second nature after state subsidies started shrinking. Like other museums, the NMA needs a plan to increase its income with commercial activities and revenues. The NMA's first step has been phenomenal. The exhibition 'Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures' has been on world tour since 2006 and exhibited in dozens museums worldwide. But the millions earned from this blockbuster are not so far channelled to the NMA museum itself. This fact touches on a bigger issue that makes cooperation between an international NGO and the national level difficult, and that is bureaucracy. The international community has big budgets available for the development of Afghanistan but in reality the

process of transferring money to the institutes that should take full ownership, is itself very complicated. At the moment work is often subcontracted outside state bureaucracy. The CIE too had to work with a local private partner in order to proceed with the program. For the longer run this would stay an obstacle for development and cooperation work. Another element is especially important in conflict areas. The cultural program conducted surveys on the security and structure of the museum building. Based on these, it jointly created the right conditions for a new permanent exhibition. Many renovations were installed, such as the placing of a new emergency roof, the improvement of the entrance, adding new floors, preparing exhibition areas and securing the windows, roof and depots etc. At this stage the structure and security of the museum complex needed upgrading. In addition to the structure of the building, the training of staff started and a trained security and safety management team was established. But how do you secure the contents of the museum?

Although the international community makes a substantial effort to prevent illicit trade by placing databases of stolen artefacts online, this has not been sufficient. International illegal art dealers can use the same internet to market and trade with some of the most precious artefacts. The general public is not aware of the implications of illicit trade and most of the (also western) customs officers are not trained for this highly specialized field of work. The NMA plays a national role through education programs and raising awareness of the destruction of irreplaceable cultural







resources. There are positive stories though, in 2009 at London's Heathrow airport some smuggled Afghan antiquity objects were intercepted. The personnel at Heathrow did their job well and the cooperation with the Afghan authority returned the objects to the museum. Yet the situation is so dire that you can find precious museum objects on Ebay. Part of the overall aim of the CIE project was to help search and retrieve looted objects that used to be part of the museum's collection. The job cannot be done with airport personnel only but also calls on international cultural structures and their staff as well.

The protection of heritage sites is a double-edged sword. By designating sites to global or even world heritage status, international projects bring both the need for management plans and a greater influx of tourism. However, the greater the publicity of invaluable antiquities on sites means a greater risk of looters on site. In the case of Afghanistan, organizations may provide heritage and museum training, but the Afghan government at the moment, lacks sufficient capacity to guard sites from looting and destruction. Such issues are crucial if we want to discuss sustainable projects.

### **National in Relation to Local**

Heritage (tangible and intangible) is "everywhere" and means different things for different people. From the perspective of unity and diversity, aiming to reach out to communities in different regions is crucial. The local perspective is as important for the development of a national heritage policy as is understanding the international context of heritage management practices. Acknowledging the importance of diversity and locality are crucial to the process of nation-building and creation of a stable civil society. An inclusive approach is essential for sustainable heritage management, and excludes thoughts 'about you or without you'. Within the framework of guidelines, rules and regulations it provides space for all stakeholders in the program. In other projects in Africa, the CIE implemented a system

### **Women Professionals**

**"We had 11 galleries, each devoted to a different tribe. We had displays divided into themes. Ethnic groups, religious minorities like the Hindus; the culture and customs of each was on display. I bought most of the artifacts in the bazaar, but I was helped by the members of the tribes and religious groups who would show me how the objects were used and had to be displayed."**

**Fauzia Hamraz Safi is the director of the ethnographic department in the National Museum. The feisty 47-year old woman has spent 32 years working with the National Museum, and with the ethnographic department since it was set up in 1983. At that time, she recalls, the display of the ethnographic department itself was larger than the display in the entire National Museum today.**

**In those days the ethnographic department was in Chaman e Huzuri next to the Ghazi stadium in Kabul.**

*Ms. Fauzia Hamraz Safi ,  
Director of the Ethnographic Department,  
National Museum of Afghanistan*





## MOHAMMAD FAHIM

### Curator Paleolithic Period at National Museum of Afghanistan

When he was growing up Mohammed Fahim's father would tell him stories. "He would talk about the ancient sites and their history. He would talk about the customs and how they are celebrated." It was only through the stories of his father, a policeman, that his country's past became alive to Fahim. A child of the years of conflict, Fahim was born in 1982 when the country was in the throes of the war against the Soviets. By the time he was old enough to see things, the war was in full spate, and traveling around quite unsafe. In 1992 Fahim's family moved out of Kabul, a city that was a seat of power and craved as a prize by competing sides, being destroyed in the violence unleashed to gain control over it. The family lived on its patch of agricultural land in his village in the Logar province, farming to make ends meet, and Fahim had to join the village school. It was only in 2004, after completing his studies in the Kabul University that Fahim came to the museum for the first time and was pleasantly surprised.

When young visitors come to the museum Fahim is one of those who takes them around and explains the provenance and context of the objects they see and this is not always an easy task. Growing up under rigid ideological religious regimes, many of the youth have been taught to reject pre-Islamic cultures as well as customs and habits of different tribes and regions. Many are children of migrants who have grown up ignorant of their ancient past, having had no opportunities in refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran to connect with their own history and culture.

"When I show them the objects, the idols for example, I try to explain that these are not against Islam. They are not meant to be seen as objects of worship. They are unique pieces of our ancient past- and each one tells a story. The role of the museum is very important in identification of Afghans with their history. I try to be patient with all the visitors and answer all their questions. I tell them that they can ask me anything they want and if I do not know the answer I will try and find out," says Fahim with the gravitas and seriousness of his 29 years.

"When I joined the National Museum I was aware I will not have too much money. But I was interested in this subject. I like ancient things. I like history. I am interested in old things... I have one goal personally. That the young people should know about the rich history and culture of this country. Then they can preserve it from looting and destruction. The role of the museum is very important the identification of Afghans with their history."



of ‘open definition’ and ‘community legacy sites’ giving a platform to the local community to determine the value of their heritage and share their vision on heritage management. In the Afghanistan project, for example in Kholm, decisions regarding the program were made locally. Young professionals like Khalid Dawari from our local partner AFIR were part of the running of the program; together with local professionals they involved schools and teachers for the educational program. This way community engagement was a starting point. The second step was building a trusted network to support young professionals in making exhibitions and educational programs.

The Afghan Ministry of Culture and Communication wants to stimulate ‘National Museums in the Regions’. Mr. Roelof Munneke, an anthropologist who had visited and studied Tashkurgan (now Kholm) already in the 1970’s, was the initiator of the program linked to his work. Based on Mr. Munneke’s documentation, a first survey and community meeting were held. The local community showed great enthusiasm for the revitalization of the bazaar. However, a feasibility study indicated that a full reconstruction would be too ambitious as a first community project. Although the reconstruction plan was not abandoned, it seemed more realistic to start on a smaller scale.

In consultation with both the ministry and the community, the focus for the area changed. Instead of rebuilding the bazaar the BJN – The Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace became the focus of the program in Kholm. And so with its partners the CIE started working on

and developing the program in Kholm. The consultation of the community brought surprising approaches and ideas. Through frequent meetings the local community was involved in the planning of the establishment of the BJN palace as a regional museum. The ‘open definition’ method showed that the preference of the community was first to restore the open space around the palace to the gardens they once were.

While landscaping would normally be the last phase of a renovation and restoration project, here it was proposed to be the starting point. Central in the discussions was the way the program could contribute to the growth of the community. The primary focus was not so much the conservation of the historical palace, but the cultural function this site could fulfill. The overall ambition was that conservation, restoration and the opening of the museum would also contribute to the economic development of Kholm. The site work was perceived as an economic and business opportunity, a heritage site and social meeting point. Locally the renovation of the gardens meant re-creating a living heritage site that functioned as a community center where people could meet for picnics and spend their leisure time.

Realizing that the Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace had a great potential of becoming a tourist attraction, allowed for revitalization the rehabilitation of both the palace and its gardens. When finances were tight it was crucial to see how different interests could be combined. On the national level, the government of Afghanistan already had plans to create a series of









regional museums. Afghanistan is geographically a vast country and not everyone can or has to travel to Kabul. Turning the palace into a museum fit this approach. The plan was first to build a Cultural Community Centre whilst laying the foundations for a regional museum. From the perspective of visitors and users, the location was close to the place where the highway from Kabul to Mazar-e-Sharif enters the northern plains. Travelling in either direction to and from Mazar-e-Sharif, opens the view at of the impressive Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace complex.

After structural improvement of the grounds, the walled garden (approximately 328 m. x 378 m) around the palace will turn into an attractive picnic spot for travellers and the local population. From a regional perspective, a museum covering the history and culture of the northern plains of Kholm can act as a site museum of the historic urban centre of Tashqurghan as it existed in the 1980s. The historic urban plan was suggested by representatives of the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture.

### **Local Approach and Capacity Building**

The gardens and surroundings were occupied by abandoned tanks and forgotten mine fields. War remnants around a palace acts as a reminder of how international conflicts leave marks in the landscape and on the local community. The CIE organized the de-mining and the removal of the four tanks from the garden, and did the overall planning of the program. Expectations of local communities are often raised by international delegations without concrete follow-up. As proof

of our commitment, after the clearing work and planning, the CIE established a field office, a concrete work spot and reminder of the ongoing work.

The destroyed palace needed specific professional expertise and our local partner AFIR Architects undertook the restoration work. An experienced Afghan structural engineer did a first survey and a photographic survey. After which Afir studio measured and prepared the site and the buildings. Restoration of the palace took place on site using local building techniques and reviving traditional crafts. The project itself is developed in close interaction and cooperation with experts from the Department for the Preservation and Restoration of Historical Monuments of the Ministry of Information and Culture, and the Director of Museums of Afghanistan, Dr. Masoudi. Capacity building is the keyword in the Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace project.

All the renovation concerning the repair work of the palace and the garden walls are characterised by the high level of craftsmanship and historical awareness. The building material is produced specifically for the palace or regionally purchased. Local solutions and responses to challenges of restoration are very important for a sustainable future of the building. The role of culture was further recognized for its socio- economic and educational impacts as well as for its potential to ensure sustainability and numerous job opportunities for the local communities. For all renovation projects, programs are developed so that young and local craftsmen in the region are stimulated in their craft.







**CIE starts planning** renovation activities of the BJJN Palace together with a project for the bazaar in Tashqurghan.

**2006**

**Open Definition Process:** planning together with all stakeholders about the development for the Palace complex and the Garden.  
Continuation of renovation works. Site office is established in Kholm.

**2008**



**Kholm for Kids Educational Program** is put into action: program for school children available in Dari.

Continuation of structural activities, palace walls and gardens.

**2010**



**Heritage for Teachers Educational Program** is executed to train local teachers in giving heritage lessons to their students.

A booklet was created with an overview of remarkable Afghan monuments.

**2012**

Fundraising activities in vision of the next programme: online platform, publications.

**Abu Dhabi conference** in December to discuss the role of national museums in conflict and post conflict countries.

**2014**

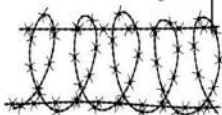
**2007**

**Renovation activities** are planned for 2007 but eventually postponed to 2008 due to changes in project management and **security issues in Afghanistan**



**2009**

**Structural renovation** of palace and clearing of Palace gardens, **demining** and removing Russian tanks. Earthquake strikes the vicinity of Kholm, no physical harm was done to the BJJN team and the palace Early developments of an education plan.



**2011**

Plans for **transforming palace into ethnographic regional museum** put into place. Renovation work continues Kholm for Kids educational program continues.



**2013**

**Heritage for Kids** is further developed by promoting a memory game that consists of a pack of cards with images of monument.



**BJJN TIMELINE**

“Afghani people are dying to picnic! The garden of the museum is beautiful. People come and spend the day there, often on Fridays. And of course there is also the community element, they are welcome there, they can talk, and use the building. Sitting there, talking to each other, visiting the exhibition, is for me very very important. And the museum...I can see now that the curators are doing their job, not less professional than in the European museums. This teaches you one more thing, that if people have peace and a chance, they are going to work toward their goal. Phase two of our project is not finished yet; my goal is that it must be accomplished.”

*Mr. Omar Sultan, Former Deputy Minister of Culture Afghanistan*

The renovation project involves many professions and fields of knowledge. While alleviating local unemployment through construction work, the program integrated local masters teaching motivated young people the skills of carpentry, masonry, ornamental plastering, natural stone floor making, brick making, lime mixing and gardening, etc. Through these capacity building tasks people gain knowledge of the place and the history of the region they live in.

With the upcoming ethnographic museum in the former palace, this would be the first cultural centre that developed into a regional museum. The museum will be a unique combination of heritage, community involvement and architecture. It was clear that a participatory strategy is vital for the Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace project. In addition to local communities we organised two workshops in Kabul to define the project and many other stakeholders contributed to its development. Back in Kholm, master masons and gardeners were consulted for the right approach of work. Many other informal meetings were organised for the local stakeholders. Key issues such as reno-

vation of the palace and its future functions where discussed. Meetings were also arranged with the head of the Police department, the National Security representative, and the representatives of the regional and local Ministry of Information and Culture.

Providing new information and perspectives needs stages where they are integrated and digested by the whole team. Then the next stage of other involvement can be taken again. This approach needs to be conducted so that the meetings and their open minded approach are not simply seen as a placebo effect but truly integrated, as much as possible in the whole program. This program and similar programs that the CIE organizes and runs in Africa and Asia show the need for an open approach to actively involve local communities in the design of project set-ups. Communities are often confronted with experts from outside who determine which heritage sites are valuable and dictate the way they should be conserved. The guidelines for heritage management are presented as ‘universal law’ developed by (inter)national organizations leaning heavily on western perspectives.







Local communities might get some employment from the activity and some pride for being host of an important (global) heritage site. There might also be some hope for future tourist revenues, but this approach does not bring the sense of ownership needed for sustainable protection and management.

### **Local / National**

Beauty and culture in the context of a long war are essentially a dissociation with fear and political rivalry. The aspects of unity and diversity do not exist only in the intellectual and educational level. In post war societies the simple feeling of security or safety are a rarity as leisure and comfort have disappeared entirely from public life. With a population still financially struggling, a restored palace or gardens function as open public meeting spaces that are cared for, secured and protected. Public culture and heritage institutes bring the leisure and comfort back into public space. They can be seen as cultural safe havens offering new space to reconnect identity, intellect, a sense of aesthetics and beauty. They can also offer 'neutral' and safe meeting places for different ethnicities, ages and groups.

Public spaces in Afghanistan have some distinct features where the interiors and exteriors 'spill' into one another. The dialogue and fluidity between 'inside' and 'outside' can be seen for example in the tiling that continues from the interior to the exterior. Another example is where palaces, whose large entrances spill into surrounding garden grounds for social use, or where picnicking is seen as an essential and integral part of family gatherings.

The BJN palace garden has started to attract families and other public. Landscape design and a replanting plan for the gardens were locally designed. The planning and designing was done by the program's local partner together with the elders of the local community. Fortunately the previous palace gardener still remembers what the garden looked like before 1980 and is contributing to the restoration.

### **Summer Picnics**

**"After the palace came back into the possession of the government department of culture we first cleaned the palace and prepared some trees. But the real work started after AFIR came here. They started the restoration and have done good work. We are all happy with AFIR. People come to visit from Kabul, from Mazar. On holidays they come to picnic during the summer."**  
**"The palace should be a museum. 36 years before they wanted to bring the national museum here, but when there was an earthquake everything was destroyed and they dropped the idea. I remember the earthquake. The earthquake came like a wave. As it receded the walls broke and the ceiling cracked. All the people from here, from Mazar – the rich people came to help us with clothes, shoes and other household needs of the people. But no one came to help repair the palace. No one came even to put one brick on top of another."**

*Fazl Ahmed, 78 years, third generation gardener, Baghe Jehan Nama Palace*





## ANNE FEENSTRA

Principal AFIR Architects and Planners, Kabul and Kholm

Working in Afghanistan has many challenges, some seemingly mundane, some with more serious consequences. Just before the restoration project in the National Museum could begin, Feenstra cut his toe on the broken steps, necessitating several stitches, something that could have been quite tricky in Afghanistan where good medical care is still difficult. Now Feenstra can take pride in the fact that the smooth stone floors, new stairs, the new balustrade, the windows letting in light have made the museum a place that is easy to visit, safe to walk around in and one which can take a large number of visitors at the same time, something that is especially valuable for encouraging visits by groups of schoolchildren.

While the ongoing conflict imposes a number of restrictions on freedom of movement and requires imaginative solutions to complex problems, Feenstra, on principles refuses to work in the areas where the intensity of the conflict would require travelling in armoured vehicles or with armed guards or living in barricaded houses. The rule of thumb principle is simple: “We don’t work in areas where we cannot work with the people”. With two design teams in Afghanistan, Feenstra has had an unusual variety of projects – the visitors’ centre for the first two national parks, maternity waiting homes for pregnant Afghan women, the Bagh-e Jehan Nama in Kholm in North Afghanistan, work on the interior of the National Museum in Kabul along with other modern functional buildings. If Feenstra defies stereotyping, he reciprocates by refusing to stereotype the places and culture of a complex and difficult country. The Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace project is an example of Feenstra’s endeavour to combine historical preservation with a new function. Through an “open definition process” AFIR invited Afghans and internationals to discuss a sustainable solution. The process continued in Kholm, the location of the project, with the local community.

“We realized there was no way we could fix the palace without doing anything about the garden. The garden had to be addressed. Instead of imposing something and saying ‘this is good for you’ there was much more of a dialogue in the beginning of the project and we have managed to continue that. It is a lot of work, a lot of talking and even more listening but I believe over the past two years local people have taken ownership of the project which makes it sustainable.”



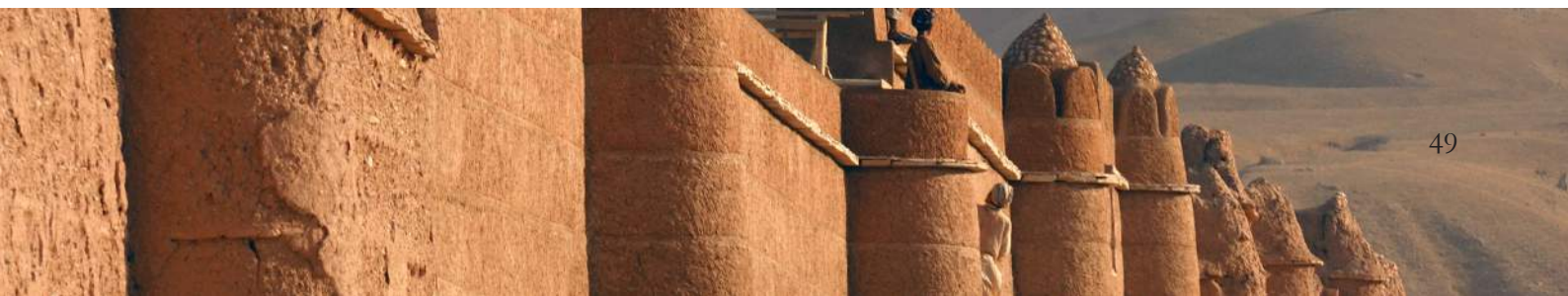
“Of course we have economic difficulties. I would like to ask the whole world to help us build provincial museums, because Afghanistan is not just Kabul and we have to respect other provinces. We need such museums all around Afghanistan. All Afghans have a right to see their own antiquities and heritage. That will make them feel more important, more respected.”

*Mr. Omar Sultan, Former Deputy Minister of Culture Afghanistan*

Next to this, a plan to improve the irrigation facilities was made. Irrigation is a very technical project that requires skilled engineers whose knowledge can be of use for the livelihood and other improvements in land and town planning. In the autumn of 2009, the first fruit and nut trees were planted in the gardens and in April 2010 many more trees made the garden their home. Today up to almost 80 different native tree species bloom in the spacious and lush gardens. All this can be seen by the traffic going to and from the busy Mazar-e-Sharif, turning it into a cultural landscape. Locals needed a safe open place to meet. Now they have hundreds of trees, lots of shade, birds, fruits, bees and new seed, all of which offers a welcoming meeting grounds.

The gardens make other extended plans possible. A functioning garden can be used for teaching natural and environmental studies. It can also be a setting for sketching and drawing courses. The setting can be used for old local game boards such as chess and pebble games and as a setting for arithmetic studies using the garden and natural elements to enhance children's interest. Since the gardens are used by locals and travellers from Mazar-e-Sharif, there are rich and diverse

heritages passing through. Story telling can be encouraged and enhanced in the gardens. After the first stage of planning and renovation, each local participant in the program has accumulated a consciousness and awareness of the process of rehabilitating such a place and what it means. This roots the place in the community and the community in the palace and gardens. The palace and its gardens have already an infrastructure with ready users.







# Looking Back and Moving Forward

“The Institute of Archeology and the Kabul museum were of the richest in the world with their collection. When you went to the museum, you could have seen our prehistory from 50,000BC and multicultural layers until today. I believe that with guns, you cannot force anybody to do anything. But if you give awareness, like the museum in Bamyán or Kabul, that awareness can change everything.”

*Mr. Omar Sultan, Former Deputy Minister of Culture Afghanistan*

## Reflections on Cooperation

Heritage work in Afghanistan has presented the CIE and its partners with invaluable insights and lessons on the process of rehabilitation projects in (post)conflict regions. Since its start in 2006, the Program for Culture and Development fostered local and regional development strategies showing the important role of culture in conflict and post-conflict processes. Instead of being an impediment to peace building, cultural heritage helps rebuild infrastructures and new unifying identities.

Cultural heritage work can contribute substantially to a sense of belonging, social cohesion, tolerance and economic development. International development work is not a simple field or work. Unforeseen obstacles and certain weaknesses in projects often delay the already slow process of rehabilitation. In order to evaluate the efficiency of the capacity building and cultural development of our work, we highlight the benefits and disadvantages of different aspects in the case of Afghanistan.

Let's start with funding structures. Numerous stakeholders - namely IGOs and foreign NGOs - donated the needed funds and resources for the preservation and promotion of Afghanistan's cultural sector. While the goal is to mitigate political risks and care for the heritage of Afghanistan, government and heritage organizations are not without fault. When looking for patterns in the contemporary timeline we can see a very visible one related to this theme.

One of the CIE's biggest challenges was the efficient transfer of financial aid from donor to receiver. Organizations, like the CIE have been working closely with local subcontractors who are responsible for the realization of all the activities and the spending of aid money. The position of subcontractors in the financial aid in programs has strengthened its role. This has often happened at the expense of other stakeholders such as the government, curators, and directors of institutes. Subsequently, this allowed the subcontractors to become a parallel structure to that of the government and other institutes. This situation is unbalanced







and needs change and substitute. One of the solutions we came up with is the creation of an organization made of local heritage professionals which can operate independent of state institutions. We will discuss this soon. A second crucial element is communication. Despite the plurality of organizations involved, information concerning the success of projects and their subsequent continuation with locals is often not reported back to the project coordinators. Even when projects end, not all the information regarding their success and flaws is reported back to the participants. This makes the learning experience more difficult, and causes repetitions of mistakes and problematic methods.

Then there is the question of life-span. The status of many projects initiated by international organizations is left at a standstill once the funding has run out. International organizations may provide heritage and museum training, but at least for now, the Afghan government lacks sufficient capacity to continue projects and guard sites from looting and destruction once a project ends. This ultimately sheds light on the problems surrounding local ownership and “following up” once projects have been completed.

All these examples mean that communication should be enhanced on all levels. In addition to communicating with the funders and international participants, it is important to communicate in trusted networks between professionals and the local community. International organizations are under different kinds of pressure. They often commit to large scale projects which are realised in

too short periods without consulting the local ownership.

Capacity building projects often end up with unidirectional transfer of methods. In addition to that people involved in a project might have contradicting starting points and expectations. In a conflict and post-conflict situation being inclusive is crucial. We cannot only preach about democracy, equality, and reciprocity; our work methods have to endure all the difficulties that come with implanting such values. Aware of this problem the CIE aims to include local communities at all possible stages of the process. We have adopted the position of facilitator rather than “owner” of the development project.

When capacity building is an aim, it is important to replace the top-down approach. The process means involving different stakeholders, from national government to local chiefs and craftsmen in different relevant fields and finding concrete ways of making this both fruitful and possible. On the positive side of the projects, the successful participation of different countries worked towards the creation of an alliance with Afghanistan. This can eventually act as motivation and justification for certain projects. These connections can bring a greater flow of tourism both from local Afghans and eventually international visitors.

In addition to being inclusive, the program’s approach was process-oriented, sensible to time, place, and circumstances. However after eight years since starting the programs we can see that the outcome might be threatened. The threat comes from a variety and







**Afghanistan gains independence from Britain** and under King Amanullah, social modernization and political reformations are initiated

**1921**

The first archaeological activities led by **DAFA** take place on the Ai Khanum excavation site. Objects from this area eventually became part of the travelling exhibition on the **"Bactrian Gold"**.

**1964-65**



**The Soviets invade** the Tajbeg Palace and assassinate President Hafizullah Amin. Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 begins and factional war among Afghans continues. Many monuments are damaged.

**1979-89**



Kabul is reduced to rubble. **The Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage (SPACH)** is formed. Several restoration projects are put forward

**1994**



The Taliban destroy an unspecified number of "offending" objects at the Kabul Museum, historical sites in Ghazni, and the **Bamiyan Buddhas** with high explosives.

**2001**

**Treasures from the Kabul Museum** are exhibited at the National Gallery in Washington, beginning a four-city national tour of the U.S. AKDN pledges an additional \$100 million at the **International Conference in Support of Afghanistan** held in Paris for rehabilitation of the Babur

**2008**



Republic of Korea commits \$5.4 m to UNESCO to build a **museum and cultural centre at the foot of the Bamiyan Buddhas**. AKTC is in the process of restoring Noh Gumbad mosque and the Stor Palace.

**2013**

**1931**

Collections from the Bagh-i-Bala palace are transferred to the museum in Kabul and University of Kabul is founded



**1974**

**The National Archives** is established. In addition, several provincial museums are being established during this period. The Darul Aman Palace is restored to house the Defense Ministry

**1992-93**

**Babur Gardens in Kabul are damaged** and become site of looting and planted mines. A rocket hits the NMA in Kabul during a battle between rival Mujahidin groups. Looting of the museum begins soon after.



**1996**

UNESCO leads aid efforts in Afghanistan



**2002**

**Tokyo Conference** on Afghanistan's Recovery and Reconstruction takes place. UNESCO is officially requested by the Minister of Foreign affairs to play a coordinating role in all international and bilateral activities aimed at safe guarding Afghanistan's heritage.

**2011**

**The Babur Gardens** are restored due to UNCHS Habitat and Aga Khan Trust. The grounds become a new tourist attraction and recreational gardens for the residents.



AFGHAN TIMELINE

high sequence of international cooperation programs focussing on culture and development, and the continuously unstable political situation in Afghanistan.

This results in a threat of the possibility of neglect of cultural spaces without an effort to maintain them or their diminishment without a future plan. We have already debated the importance of involving local communities on a larger scale. In order to secure the base that has been laid and develop the work that has been started, sustainability is built by increasing local and community-based programs in the future.

Therefore the continuation of the Culture and Development Program means drastically increasing the cultural and educational activities in museum exhibitions and training programs related to heritage and leisure activities in the museum gardens. The program would broaden the horizons of the young Afghans, strengthen self-esteem, and help the young generation discover a feeling of belonging to their culture and community. A sense of belonging enhances social cohesion and tolerance, ultimately helping society transfer to times of peace. In addition to that, these programs in the NMA and BJN with the work of local professionals and communities enhance the base for economic development.

## Heritage

**Why should culture be a focus of attention for Afghans and internationals when there are so many competing needs, some as basic as food, shelter and water?**

**Abdul Ahad Abassi, the Director of Preservation and Restoration of Historical Monuments at the Ministry of Information and Culture:**

**“We should not forget history. If we just wait until security has been completely restored before we do anything, we will lose these historical buildings.**

**You know thousands of schools were burnt down during the war. Now you can build them again. If you destroy old buildings, you can rebuild them, but you cannot put history back into them.” “If you involve the local community in the restoration works as they (the CIE/ AFIR) have done, in this project they will clean it, protect it and preserve it.**

**If you just close the doors and carry out the project, people will not be interested. We make this for the people. This is for the local community.”**

*Abdul Ahad Abassi, Director of Preservation and Restoration of Historical Monuments at the Ministry of Information and Culture*







## Contemporary Timeline

Cultural intrusions have been a fact in Afghanistan for at least 4000 years and continue through the present day. Each side affecting the other, for better or worse, through material and immaterial heritage. Each shaping the values and meaning of the other. When does intrusion turn into culture? And when does culture (work) turn into intrusion?

If we take a happening from the history of Afghanistan such as: “In the middle of the 3rd century BC, a Hellenistic state was declared in Bactria and eventually the control of the Seleucids and Mauryans was overthrown in western and southern Afghanistan.” This information in real time would have belonged to tragic news of war, occupation, unrest, uprooting and unhappiness. In today’s context, we put it on the cultural rich timeline and history. All the different invasions and occupations have become part of the culturally rich civilization. Also on the local level, what belonged to pain, destruction and occupation, merges into the local culture, some way or another and turns into a part of the local heritage.

We try to explore a different perspective of the present with a new timeline. In addition to settler colonialism and war, we added a new timeline of cultural work, heritage- and development work. Here cultural and heritage work have been translated into a cultural timeline. Although its accuracy and coverage are not exact, it is a trial to see international cultural work in 3 contexts: 1. part of time and history 2. as two cultures from different geographical places are involved together 3. as specific projects with certain aims and outcomes.

**1880:** Afghanistan emerges as a nation state with its foreign affairs handled by Britain.

**1921-29:** Afghanistan gains independence from Britain and under King Amanullah, social modernization and political reformations are initiated.

**1929:** King Amanullah is expelled and Nadir Khan takes the throne.

**1964:** The first archaeological activities led by DAFA take place on the Ai Khanum excavation site. Objects from this area eventually became part of the travelling exhibition on the “Bactrian Gold”.

**1965:** Kabul Museum is renamed to the National Museum of Afghanistan.

**1973:** The National Archives is established. In addition, several provincial museums are being established during this period. The Darul Aman Palace is restored to house the Defense Ministry.

**1974:** UNESCO names Herat a World Cultural Heritage site.

**1979:** The Soviets invade the Tajbeg Palace and assassinate President Hafizullah Amin.

**1983:** At Herat, the last remaining minaret of the college of Queen Gohar Shad, was destroyed by fire.

**1989-90’s:** Soviet withdrawal from

Afghanistan begins and factional war among Afghans continues.

**1992:** Babur Gardens in Kabul are damaged and become site of looting and planted mines. This includes the Queen's Palace and Mosque of Shah Jehan.

**1993:** A rocket hits the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul during a battle between rival Mujahidin groups.

**1993-1996:** An estimated 70% of the National Museum's collections disappear.

**1994:** Kabul is reduced to rubble. The Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage (SPACH) is formed.

**1996:** UNESCO leads aid efforts in Afghanistan.

**1998:** Already damaged from the Civil War, the Buddhist pillar, the Minaret of Chakari is later blown up.

**2000:** Mullah Omar, the Taliban's spiritual leader, orders the department of religious police to determine the appropriateness, according to Shariah Law, of the National Museums holdings.

**2002:** Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan's Recovery and Reconstruction takes place.

**2003:** Expert meetings between UNESCO and other cultural heritage institutions on the state of the Bamiyan Buddhas and the potential

projects.

**2004:** A locked vault in the treasury in Kabul is opened and in it the Bactrian Gold from Tillya Teppe and other treasures from the National Museum are found intact.

**2005:** Apparently funds are donated for the restoration of the Bagh-e-Bala Palace however, nothing has occurred yet.

**2006:** Treasures from the Kabul Museum are exhibited at the Musee Guimet in Paris.

**2010:** DAFA begins excavation of Mes Aynak.

**2011:** The Babur Gardens are restored due to UNCHS Habitat and Aga Khan Trust. The grounds become a new tourist attraction and recreational gardens for the residents.

**2012:** The Aga Khan Trust open the restored mausoleum of Timur Shah in Kabul.

**2013:** Republic of Korea commits 5.4 million US dollars to UNESCO to build a museum and cultural centre at the foot of the Bamiyan Buddhas.

**2014:** Chinese mining company turns back on the Mes Aynak mine deal leaving the archaeological site still untouched.





## SUSANNE ANNEN

### Senior Advisor to Afghanistan Ministry of Information and Culture

“In 2006, when the Musée Guimet in Paris organized the exhibition on the “Bactrian Treasures”, Germany decided to request as well for the show, to put it on display in the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany, where I am employed as an exhibition director.

I was asked, if I could imagine coming to Kabul to work as an advisor for the MOIC with the focus on the National Museum and I loved the idea. I arrived in Kabul in 2010 contracted at the Ministry of Information and Culture as an advisor to the ministry. My work at the MOIC was focused on the National Museum of Afghanistan. And luckily it happened to me that my office was located at the National Museum where I worked all the past years very closely with Dr. Masoudi and his staff. Dr. Masoudi who dedicated his life to the National Museum and the protection of the cultural heritage of Afghanistan is not only a very experienced expert in the field of cultural preservation; he as well became a godfather to me. Without his help and the support of the staff of the National Museum as well as the cooperation of the international community of people working in it would not have been possible for me to work in this country. This is an outstanding exhibition and the most impressive show I have ever put on display.”

Susanne went to Kabul in 2010 as an integrated expert sent by the International Centre for Migration and Development (CIM) in Frankfurt am Main. As an exhibition director, she had previously overseen the travelling exhibition “Hidden Treasures from the National Museum Kabul”. Through this role, she gained years of experience working with the Afghan Ministry of Culture before the Minister asked for her help in reconstructing the Afghan museums, which were in need of trained experts who had experience with the structured implementation of projects. She acts as the Culture Minister’s right-hand woman – as well as his interface with foundations, embassies’ cultural affairs officers, and directors of exhibition projects. She exchanges ideas with them about current projects, the use of funds, areas of need and project proposals.

She conceptualizes and organizes exhibitions, collections and excavations together with architects, archaeologists, art historians and exhibitors.

The Minister of Culture and the Director of the National Museum make decisions in close consultation with her and often ask her advice.

Her projects have included an exhibition at the National Museum of objects recently found at Mes Aynak, a site roughly 40 kilometres southeast of Kabul where ancient Buddhist temples and monasteries are being excavated.



## New Perspectives

We had to walk the walk and talk the talk - the program has been applauded for its hands-on approach and methods. But a program like this is also a big talk shop. Being inclusive also means working on making time and space for communication. We at the CIE see heritage as a broad social phenomena and product of dialogue. Platforms for reflection, negotiations and dialogue with all relevant stakeholders had to be planned, negotiated and organised in many different places and on many levels.

Every project in whatever field or country sends a message to a certain audience. International cultural work sends a message about what the 'international western community' regards as important, what is not, who decides and how. Local projects are international messages. In intense work, programs and field work demand fast answers and ready suggestions. This is why heritage and cultural work need open definition stages where there is time, space and platforms to deal with multi-complex questions. This work and planning has to be integrated into the frame of the main work plan. The resources, time management and involvement have to be taken into consideration.

At the CIE we invest on three levels, local, national and international. The first is in local meetings at the sites of the projects. Both the National Museum of Afghanistan and the BJN have a work culture where space and time for dialogue is specifically made. Stimulating dialogue between Afghans and their heritage institutions is also important. The aim is to understand our local partners and try to make certain that every

partner is truly heard. We also meet with our local partners outside the work context to discuss difficult issues and allow innovative brainstorming and dealing with misunderstandings and conflicting issues.

At the same time we needed to both collect and process new knowledge and reflect on our professional position and work. With our international stakeholders we arranged a set of formal and informal meetings. In 2007 the CIE organised a first international expert meeting in Amsterdam and various smaller meetings in Kabul, New Delhi and Abu Dhabi. In 2014 a conference in Abu Dhabi in conjunction with New York University Abu Dhabi was the outcome of a longer process, (which will be elaborated on below). The seminars and conferences looked for comprehensive ways of working with cultural programs, their strengths and weaknesses. They looked for ways to shift towards working productively by cooperation instead of dictation as well as for methods to better the coordination between the distant and powerful and rest of the stakeholders. On a more general level, both theory and practice in the heritage field face a rapidly changing world. Even the validity of heritage theories and the work in heritage as we know them, come under fire and questioning.

In times of financial recession, dealing with conflict and post conflict zones through heritage work, has become complex. Instead of prototyping the same recipe projects over and over again, and later wondering why they don't get implemented at scale, perhaps we should resolve that development work needs to ask new questions and look for new ways of working and









thinking. We don't have a ready package of answers but we can open up questions and propositions for dialogue and research.

Let's open up some things that need reflection: What is 'development cooperation' in our present day? What does 'develop' mean and what does it relate to? Are we referring to the proposition that if we discuss and plan world-changing ideas, then our work gains importance? How much is it about 'our' good feeling of even trying? How much of a project is made in order to mainly rebrand donor countries? And how much cynicism is embedded in the process all along? Is that the reason most projects are a short fleeting moment left in project reports? Is there a gap in the field between theory and practice? What needs to change for heritage and development cooperation to better fit today's realities? How do we react to setbacks when our work is seen as a peace breaker or community disrupter? And how about when the majority does not support our work? Whose heritage do we protect? Who are 'we' when we protect? And who does this 'we' exclude?

The discourse of heritage is a very powerful domain, and domains of power need to be checked often. Our work deals with, and is in itself about cultural exclusion and inclusion. While reconstructing pasts, we build stages of a certain understanding of 'evolution', 'progress' and 'human kind', all in a specific way. When we work with far away countries and with 'others', it is important to rethink our own positions, prepositions, deep assumptions and power. Afghanistan is

often represented as a carrier of old civilization, but contemporary being a-cultural. The current Afghan population is often not seen as directly connected with that rich heritage. Separating people from their histories and heritage is colonial. Do we see the present cultures of Afghanistan as static and ahistorical? Are the communities we are working with seen as slow in 'progress'? How do we define 'progress'? Are the 'humanity' and 'civilization' we are concerned with in our work, 'western'? How can Western museum concepts and non-Western concepts of curation and museum work be in a successful dialogue?

The historical Afghan culture and its treasures are exhibited in museums outside the country, and outside the reach of the Afghans themselves. In addition to the concrete collections, Afghan culture and heritage has been seen as material and subject to ponder on and use for academia and the international community. In a context where we see a glorious past to work with for 'us', and a chaotic present, it seems that 'we' have to save the Afghan culture and heritage for and from the Afghans themselves! Though this is a crude and generalising observation, it is not totally without truth.

This approach is colonial, while we are people with respect and good intentions. When we, the outside world think of the present Afghanistan and think only of violence and war, we too have stripped the living Afghan's entitlement to culture. Although it is human to err, it is not professional to pay a blind eye to the clear dichotomy embedded in the







‘we’ in the heritage and cultural international work. In today’s so called ‘developed world’, a new generation is already living some stage of cultural de-acceleration. We need to ask ourselves honestly, what is our explicit definition and recipe for civilization. The world as we know it has rapidly changed, and so heritage and cultural work don’t have a clear definition of basic starting points. We assume that ‘we’ who work hard on preserving world and local heritage, are all on the same page; thus assuming that we share the same theories, values, work methods and aims. But do we? What are the recipes for disaster and who decides what is success and how? Is the project we work on, pointless or the most important step in the country’s path on peace and prosperity?

### **CIE Think Tank**

Many questions need more time than a conference or meeting. We designed platforms for reflecting on our work at the CIE. The CIE started a think tank of CIE staff, experts, students and professionals who meet at the our office in Leiden. The goal of the Think Tank (TT) is to allow open-ended processes and deal with new questions that come out in the real world. It aims to look for unseen possibilities, find new ways of seeing and rethinking how we as individuals, as an organization and as part of the heritage professional field can be part of a renewed and better heritage work field.

Regarding our work methods, some of the questions we ask are: Who are we loyal to? What, how and why are we doing what we are doing? How do we need to work in order to achieve our aims? What is the added value our project brings? What is the possible harm and what about the risks? Who and how do all these things have an effect on? What part of culture is important? What makes some culture, expression or project internationally or historically important? Regarding our Afghan work colleagues some of the questions are: How do the Afghans see their present and future? How do they see us?

### **About a boy**

Let me tell you a story of a little boy. I was in Afghanistan in 2003. I met a very well dressed, about 7 or 8 year old boy, in nice tidy jeans. And he called me ‘Mister American’. He spoke to me English. It was Eid, and you know that during Eid you give gifts. I had a 20 dollar bill with me and I gave it to him. And he said: “Nonono Mister American”. I said: “Why? It is Eid, it is a tradition to give a gift. I want to give this to you.”

And he said: “I will accept this but you have to come with me.” I took him in my car and he toured me all over Kabul. He said “This place was destroyed by such a warlord and this one by such a warlord”, and he was very knowledgeable. I listened to him and at the end of the tour I said: “Ok, now you can take the money.” He said: “No, I want you to buy me something.” I thought he wanted a toy or something. Finally he took me to a bookstore, and he actually took out a dictionary, it was Darian / English. And that is what he wished. I bought him a better one and I asked him, why a dictionary? Why not a toy? And he said, “Do you know what? I want to be just like you when I grow up. And I want to be the president of Afghanistan.” I really hugged him and kissed him. That was the beautiful Afghan way of thinking of a 7 or 8 year old. He wants to be educated and one day a president of Afghanistan. That really encouraged me, gave me a lot of energy. I said I am going to keep the memory of this boy! So these are the stories that make your life completely different. Yes I miss my own family, but I help a lot of other ones.”

*Mr. Omar Sultan  
Former Deputy Minister of Culture  
Afghanistan*





# The Unpredictable Past: National Museums and Stable Civil Societies

December 15-16, 2014

Saadiyat Campus- Conference Center



Whose interests are being made facts on the ground? What does this short period of this project mean in the bigger sense? What does it mean to the Afghans who worked with us?

Regarding more specific work, we dealt with the question of museums in today's world. The past is becoming an increasingly institutionalized and contested field, and this shows in museum and cultural work. In recent discourse, the universality of heritage, or the communal ownership of the past, has been questioned. So in 2013-14 the CIE Think Tank started a series of expert meetings and seminars on national museums. The first meetings focused on Western national museums and collections and the role of western museums in the Dutch context. Among other things we asked: What does it mean to be a national museum? How are national museum collections formed? What is the importance of national collections to identity? And what does it mean for museum consumers (visitors) to be exposed to national collections?

The second seminar explored the theme: 'National Museums in Colonial and Postcolonial Environments- Transforming Museum Narratives in an Age of Change'. The seminar explored if comparative approaches of museum narratives can trace a general theoretical framework for understanding the role of 'national museums'. Then how these insights can stimulate the interaction between national museums, and support international museum development projects.

The TT meetings, the two seminars, in addition to the Afghan and other CIE work were used and built upon

when planning the next conference. The CIE with the New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) Institute, arranged a conference "The Unpredictable Past –National Museums: National Museums and Stable Civil Societies" in December 2014 in Abu Dhabi. The conference consisted of a two-day workshop, bringing together up to 60 regional and international travelling participants (including graduate students), and local attendees. It provided a platform for discussing the historical, political and social character of national museums. The focus was on the role and potential of national museums within a. young emerging nations, b. postcolonial and c. post-conflict countries.

The young nations of the Gulf region offer examples of developing national museums, providing insightful case studies. As a special case study of the role museums can play in a post-conflict country, the CIE and its Afghan partners presented the results of their Culture and Development program. This offered a place to debate museum theories regarding the role of National Museums in a more globalized world. Other themes where the role of cultural heritage and museums in rebuilding or reaffirming social values, creativity and different expressions.

The conference had five themes:

### **National museums, national pride or negotiated identity**

National museums traditionally play a key role in the development of national narratives and are subsequently central to the creation of national identities. This makes them creators of meaning and collective







belongings as well as keepers of a nation's cultural heritage. Rooted in the ideals of the European Enlightenment the national museum became over the centuries also an element in nation-building, placing them at the center of national consciousness. Some of the questions asked: Why do countries need to have a national museum? What are the justifications to give these institutions authority over the formation of collections and collective memories? Is this an issue of national pride or has it always been a negotiated identity? What is the role that National Museums have in developing national narratives and creating national identities? Can a museum be both a creator and subject of social change?

### **National museums in a shifting context**

In the 19th century the concept of a national museum became central in building states and molding a national identity, particularly serving as a powerful cultural tool during the era of European colonial expansion. In museums, both in Europe and their colonies, material heritage of the 'other' was utilized to reinforce the narrative of the superiority of the colonizers and, therefore, to legitimize imperial conquest and to justify oppression of the colonized and the exploitation of power.

Post-colonial and post-conflict countries are, in the light of this legacy, engaged in the search for new pathways to navigate their past and explore their heritage, independent of or within the frameworks of grand narratives. Some of the museums established by the former rulers have been turned into new

national museums, conveying new national stories, while many others have been closed down altogether for embodying a past that the new states want to leave behind. Conscious of other narratives across the world and their own past narratives, nations and cultures began to re-situate the place of their state narrative within the global cultural hierarchy. The conference explored the challenges that National Museums face during periods of transition. How far have museums moved beyond cultural essentialism and have they succeeded in providing a platform for a diversity of groups? How do National Museums negotiate national values, as instruments to negotiate identity, diversity and social change? And is there a role for international communities and experts in the development of a new National Museum?

### **National Museums in the Middle East**

Recently within the Arabian Peninsula, many states have undertaken various high-profile initiatives to build or restore their national museums. The immense scale and rapid pace of this new museum development tends to obscure, however, the historical presence of museums in the region and the centrality of national museums in the Middle East as, *inter alia*, instruments of colonialism, post colonialism, citizenship, development, conflict and peace. The conference examined this "new" museum development in the Arab Gulf States in the context of the broader history of national museums in the surrounding region. It also explored the possible lessons that could be learned from the successes and failures of the national museums built in the







20th century ‘Middle East’. And how, in the Arab Gulf and in the ‘Middle East’, are people rethinking museums and museum practices, and producing fresh alternatives to reflect today’s populations? The construction of national museums in the Arab Gulf States and the emergent developments were reflected upon from historical, transnational and regional perspectives.

Examining the museum development in the Arab Gulf States within the context of the museum traditions in the surrounding regions as well as broader histories of National Museums further afield. How is the Arab Gulf museum sector providing fresh new alternatives and examples to the rest of the world? Do these National Museums represent a historical, transnational and/or regional perspective of the Arab Gulf and Middle Eastern nations? Who are the target audiences for these National Museums, and how do their narratives translate to national and international audiences? What role can bigger museum brands play in these regions e.g. Guggenheim and the Louvre, and what function do/ will they have in Middle Eastern society? Are these really National Museums or are they International or ‘World’ Museums.

### **National museums as places for dialogue and engagement**

National museums can no longer focus solely on the history and heritage of their own people. In a newly globalized world they are expected to build bridges with other countries and cultures. Recent museological discourse argues for a fundamental shift from the singular authority of museums and unidirectional knowledge transfer, to a sharing of authority and experience-based engagement with a wider audience. How are museums balancing these different ambitions, roles and pathways, in order to remain relevant in a contemporary world? Can new museum models facilitate more inclusive and collaborative cultural spaces, providing a much more diverse understanding of culture and cultural heritage? How can museums in national and international settings successfully incorporate a diversity of cultures and

### **National Identity Card**

**“When you come to Afghanistan everyone has a national identity card stating their ethnic group, and the international community never tried even to say that ethnic groups shouldn’t be important for national identity cards. Nobody ever questions that.**

**They talk about their ethnic groups, they speak different languages, and they tell different stories about their history. Different ethnic groups don’t even have a common history. The main thing their national identity can be created around is cultural heritage. No matter where Afghanis live, they are proud of all the heritage in their country. They are proud of the Buddhas of Bamiyan, it touches them that the site was destroyed and at the same time they have the same strong feeling about Islamic culture.”**

Sarah Noshadi, Culture Specialist, UNESCO  
Kabul





past and fulfil a role as places for dialogue and engagement? Can museums be national in the making, yet international or global in the reading? The discussions revolved around the social role of museums and how they participate in the peace building processes of a diverse world. How can museums manage, balance and improve upon their multiple roles as educators, tourist attractions, social agents and stewards of a nation's/ the world's cultural heritage? How can museums in national and international settings seek to incorporate a diversity of cultures and pasts, to be places for dialogue and engagement? The conference connected and processed knowledge obtained on local, national and international platforms.

### **The Afghanistan experience**

Focusing on the theme of 'National Museums as Peace Builders', the CIE-Centre shared its experience in Afghanistan. Representatives from UNESCO and the National Museum of Kabul shared their perspective.

### **Future steps**

There is growing recognition that traditional attitudes towards heritage management based on an expert-driven model alone do not provide appropriate nor sustainable solutions. The exploration of alternative approaches towards heritage practice is becoming increasingly necessary. Heritage plays a much larger role in society than simply the preservation and conservation of historical sites. And heritage work is more conscious that it has multiple stakeholders who deserve equal say. The past cannot be changed and all we have

is the future, and futures need planning. In addition to the layers discussed earlier of museums and cultural work, the future program has two main focuses. The first is to support the National Museum of Afghanistan to build capacity, structured systems and a vision for a national cultural policy. The second is to establish a meaningful cultural network for the NMA and ways of maintaining it. This work demands an open and respectful approach from NGOs and international workers, making space for alternative perspectives on heritage management. The CIE has been working with different mentoring networks in different countries. Looking for future sustainable methods which can support local work in different countries and programs, the CIE developed three major steps. In order to prosper, local networks need to develop alongside two key players, that of communities and then of professionals. To do this the CIE designed a supporting network 'The Heritage Mentoring Network'. This expert led network will provide support and mentoring in heritage work. The Heritage Mentoring Network is a platform connecting professionals, diverse projects, communities, individuals, students and practitioners.

The mentoring network would explore multi-vocal approaches for cooperation and heritage management and locally driven initiative. This will strengthen the merging new local professionals, raise awareness, support and build training programs, help conduct research and further network building. Alongside the training initiatives a supportive Online Heritage Platform was created. The online platform will serve as the backbone of the mentoring activities and com-







munications between various countries and sites, allowing users to select and control the assistance they need and exchange knowledge and knowhow. The platform would integrate new contributions, shares and connections. The main goal of this platform is to encourage the exchange of knowledge, raise awareness about current projects, act as an archive for past heritage activities, obtain support for new ventures, stimulate inspiration and provide training and education. The unique value of the platform is that it will be user-driven. The online platform will have different international locations and projects. The CIE will begin with a pilot working with a selection of communities who have been involved with projects over a number of years and are at different stages of cooperation and implementation. South Africa, Tanzania, Ilha de Mozambique and Sri Lanka will act as our pilot missions. Each cultural program site will be treated individually, collaborating closely with the local communities in order to tailor the program to their needs. One of the highlights of the Afghanistan project will be establishing a local NGO. With the support of the Online Heritage Platform the local NGO will be involved in a reciprocal learning environment, enabling the NGO members to select information, share experiences, and undertake their own networking.

The CIE will help establish and mentor this NGO, but will tread with light footsteps, to allow it to grow naturally and independently the way they desire and in line with their own needs. The locally established NGO will be responsible for running projects side by side

with the Afghan government. Keeping professional distance while working closely with Afghan contractors, museums and other organizations. It will work with local professionals on heritage awareness, educational programs, rehabilitation and development projects. This would strengthen the community livelihood through student oriented educational programs. These processes would promote respect for laws and treaties and protect Afghanistan's cultural property. Safety would allow the development of tourism, socio-economic prosperity and benefit the heritage sector. Communication in this process is again crucial between professionals and nonprofessionals in order to create relevant cultural programs engaging local communities.

The initial team of the NGO would consist of three employees dealing with Public Relations and fundraising, heritage management and project coordination and administration. Training workshops and study programs will be organised, helping the new team acquire the necessary skills for running a non-profit NGO. The necessary skills will include the ability to speak fluent English, communication and fundraising abilities, as well as research and IT competence. The training period is foreseen to take up to three years. The relevant training could be offered through an equivalent of a Masters course and workshops at regional universities such as the University College London in Qatar and New York University Abu Dhabi. The NGO would become truly professional in both the international heritage community as well as







its invaluable ties to their Afghan roots.

The CIE's intention is to provide the NGO with a preparatory track record by using its international status as support for its founding staff members. This already existing network of international partners and stakeholders will assist primarily with fundraising and staff training. Parallel to the training programs, the NGO will be assigned to continue the longstanding Program for Culture and Development. Its first two main projects will be the immediate continuation of the on going, joint rehabilitation projects with CIE at the National Museum of Afghanistan and Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace. At both of these sites the NGO team will be in charge of proposing new exhibitions as well as community oriented educational activities.

One of CIE's greatest strengths is our international heritage network, and we seek to place this network at our partners' use through the new Online Heritage Platform. This would connect all partners, stakeholders and communities together, allowing them to forge their own connections and network independently through the platform. This will ensure that this heritage work remains sustainable in the future. It will act as a supporting tool to local communities, international partners, heritage practitioners, young professionals and new NGOs.

The platform will have the capacity to function as a dynamic and interactive resource centre, which is not only focused on information sharing and heritage networking, but can also take on a role providing online education and training activities as well as fundraise and raise awareness. With the help of our

local partners in South Africa, an NGO has already been established (ACHA- African Centre for Heritage Activities). In Tanzania our work with Zanzibar's communities has almost reached this stage following a number of years working actively in the area. Ilha de Mozambique's activities are progressing very well too. Sri Lanka has been a partner country since the 1990's and has developed a firm local infrastructure for the participation in a network of young professionals and researchers. Last but not least also The Netherlands should contribute with a team on an equivalent basis.

The 'Online Heritage Platform' can be implemented in all of these countries to support the on-site activities and initiatives relating to the local NGOs. From the experiences of these pilot communities we can later define best practices, strengths, weaknesses, and need for improvement. In combination with Heritage Impact Assessments and Needs Analyses we can further expand the Heritage Mentoring Network. Thus creating an environment for conducting research, documenting, story-collecting and sharing cultural practices. The environment would also be a place to share experiences, insights, advice, best practices and connections.







# Conclusion

Rather than investing in buildings, collections or practices, we are focusing our investments in the people. Mentorship and coaching programs support an infrastructure. At the CIE developing professionals is investing in the future of heritage for a far longer time. Building trusted networks is the way for connectivity and genuine cooperation.”

As the Director of the National Museum, Dr Masoudi said: “Preserving the past is an element of shaping our future”. The CIE, with our Afghan colleagues, have taken many macro and micro steps across three stages of the project: building sustainable infrastructures, creating ongoing processes with content, and allowing physical and other spaces for cultural heritage ‘progresses’. The processes and new content facilitate both united and diverse Afghan heritages. Going through the Afghan heritage program, we have looked for different perspectives dealing with the question “Is culture and heritage work important in a post conflict society? And if so, what are the methods needed in such work in (post)-conflict societies?” Building a unifying identity while making space for diversity is crucial especially after three decades of war where identities were used as weapons. Museums preserve, reshape, redefine and present memories. New narratives and understandings can work as a catalyst of a ripping past and the result can make space for new identities and dialogues. Facilitating the production of new narratives is at the core of educating youngsters born during wartime. The CIE and our local partners at the National Museum of Afghanistan chose conveying stories about unity and diversity through exhibitions, building a dignified future where each

individual’s memories as well as their shared and separate identities are seen as vital. Culture is a process, not a project and heritage is a work in progress and not a ‘thing’. The CIE sees its work as a process with local topics and themes. This was a starting point in all projects and the work at the Bagh-e Jehan Nama Palace and gardens was a great example where local decisions turned into local ownership of a program. Heritage and culture work, when done dialogically and with an open mind, is one of the pillars of facilitating the rebuilding of war torn cultures. For sustainable cultural work we made conscious decisions and choice of methods. Amongst others, we focused on education and the new generation, and chose ‘hands-on’ training for the job. The program worked on enhancing inclusivity, local ownership and sustainability. What we need now is nurturing this fragile infrastructure and support the young professionals of Afghanistan to maintain their capacity while choosing their own pathways for developing culture in their country. Afghanistan has known too well a dehumanizing war of mere survival. The same Afghanistan is no stranger to beauty and multilayered cultures. Culture and heritage work can revive the meaning of life, bringing out the dignity and living heritage of today’s and tomorrow’s Afghanistan.





# Colophon

Concept and editing: CIE - Centre for International Heritage Activities

Interviews: Umayya Abu Hanna and Aunohita Mojumdar

All photographs: Dilip Banerjee and the CIE archive

Funding: the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Design: Ilaria Cassini

With assistance of: Biljana Volchevska, Olivia De Dreuzy

A special word of thanks to our Afghan partners, the Ministry of Information and Culture of Afghanistan, the National Museum in Kabul, the local trusted mentor and coach Susanne Annen and our local partner New AFIR Architects Kabul and Kholm, without whom this publication would not have been possible.

© Published by the Centre for International Heritage Activities, Leiden 2014

Print: 500

ISBN/EAN: 978-90-79062-00-3

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## **CIE-Centre for International Heritage Activities**

The CIE is an independent, non-profit organization for international knowledge exchange about the heritage of the European expansion and international heritage cooperation.

