

## **RISKS TO INTANGIBLE VALUES IN SAFEGUARDING CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Mahnaz Ashrafi, PhD in Architecture

Vice director of Research Center for Conservation of Monuments and Cultural Relics/ ICHTO  
Research Institute

Manager of conservation and safeguards projects on The Historical Village of Maymand in the  
Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization

Tehran, Iran, Tel: 0098 21 9128203149, ashrafimahnaz [at] yahoo.com

Generally, preventive conservation involves study and work with the built form, building codes and regulations and with materials analysis. These are the quantifiable and tangible aspects of safeguarding heritage sites. These aspects define the traditional approach to preservation. However, preservation should also honour intangible values, which cannot be studied or evaluated with traditional tools and methods.

This research focuses on the risks of negligence of sense of place in the process of preservation. Following our research, we observed that when we ignore the sense of place, intervention in heritage sites often has negative impacts. Further, international charters suggest a need for considering diverse interpretations and senses of significance in each place.

Rehabilitation of heritage fabrics and complexes is often accompanied by offerings of new functions. During this process, we try to preserve the physical structure of urban or rural tissue prudently but the spirit of place may not be properly considered.

This paper demonstrates two categories of risk resulting from interventions: risk to 1) tangible, and 2) intangible values. The first category of risk consists of all changes in value associated with changes in materials and physical structure. The impacts of these changes are usually found directly and rapidly, so they are relatively straightforward to analyze and mitigate.

The second category of risk is not tangible but is sensible. This kind of risk threatens values associated with the sense of place even while materials and physical structures remain intact. In this case, it is the authenticity of space that is in danger. If interventions required for preservation of tangible features will allow inhabitants to retain the sense of place then this second category of risk, non tangible, is low and the operation will be successful. Therefore, in terms of preserving cultural heritage, it is critical to understand the significance of place and sense of place. This enables a conception of meaning of cultural heritage not only as representation of the past, but also as the medium in which present human experience of the place is constructed. It enables preservation of identity and sense of belonging. It nurtures relationship between the past lives of our ancestors and our present lives.

This paper presents case studies of interventions in Iran that have either changed or maintained the sense and spirit of place. This research leads to the conclusion that successful preservation of cultural heritage in rural and urban areas requires assessment and management of risks to intangible values as well as tangible values.

### **Keywords**

sense of place, preservation, Iran, Heritage, risk to intangible value