

# RE... TRACING HISTORY

While some of the traces of the past are publicly recognised and acknowledged, others are not. (RE-)TRACING HISTORY sought to develop innovative methods to include those unknown, overlooked and ignored traces of the past in contemporary heritage practice. How can these traces be used to enrich public debate and defuse tensions? In three action-based research projects, collaborative teams of researchers, (grassroots) cultural organisations and general public investigated how oral history, dance performance and virtual dialogue could be applied to make unacknowledged traces of the past tangible, palpable and negotiable in the public domain.

## New Methodologies for Making the Past Tangible, Palpable and Negotiable

### Action framework

This action framework summarises the project's lessons learned and offers suggestions to those seeking to integrate unknown, overlooked and ignored traces of the past in their own work.

#### STORIES IN MOTION

STORIES IN MOTION co-created guidelines for making community oral histories in the Netherlands discoverable, accessible and reusable for multiple purposes.

#### FEELING THE TRACES

FEELING THE TRACES OF THE COLONIAL PAST explored how the embodied experiences of watching and participating in dance can help people develop direct, felt insights into affects and emotions attached to the Dutch colonial and slavery past.

#### A VIRTUAL AGORA

A VIRTUAL AGORA in the form of a 'Tolerance-Carousel' was developed in association with the Utrecht 900- 'Gekomen om te blijven' project to (re-)negotiate moral traces (such as justice, virtue or freedom) of the city of Utrecht's past.

### Suggestions for action

Collecting community oral histories for reuse can empower grassroots organisations. STORIES IN MOTION shows the decision not to archive and store community oral histories in a public archive or scientific repository is equally valid.

#### WE RECOMMEND THAT:

- public archives and repositories collaborate on equal grounds with community archives to make their collections more inclusive and at the same time make community archives more autonomous;
- community oral history archives consider reuse of their oral history collections independently with open-source web applications as a way to maintain the distinct, grassroots character of their heritage.

Dance and embodied exploration can facilitate powerful affective responses to complex social issues such as the ongoing repercussions of colonialism and slavery, as exemplified by the FEELING THE TRACES project.

#### WE RECOMMEND THAT:

- heritage sites commission professional dance-based performance and participation packages;
- heritage & educational providers engage in training to support the development of embodied experiences.

Storytelling and film voice can facilitate powerful affective responses to challenging social issues such as freedom of religion, freedom of migration, and freedom of sexuality, as exemplified by the VIRTUAL AGORA project.

#### WE RECOMMEND THAT:

- heritage sites commission storytelling and film voice performance and participation packages;
- heritage & educational providers engage in training to support the development of living history civic engagement events.

# Lessons learned

To co-create is to challenge, to unsettle. In co-creative processes, in particular those where established institutions and grassroots interact, perspectives can differ.

In **STORIES IN MOTION**, perspectives on how oral history should be conducted differed to such an extent that the need for shared guidelines was at times questioned.

In **FEELING THE TRACES**, the differences in perspectives that emerged in the collaborative processes heightened our awareness of how important it is to make space for these differences and listen to each other.

It makes a difference where traces are collected or negotiated, and where affects and emotions about those traces are evoked.

When the interviewers from the community oral history project discussed their work in the setting of the archive or university campus, it contributed to their awareness as custodians of the past and agents in history.

When the performance *Radiant Shadow* was experienced in the hall of Castle Cannenburch, the colonial atmosphere greatly contributed to its effect and affects. The guided embodied activities released some of the (hi)stories embedded in the historically pertinent location, enabling participants to engage with them and with their feelings and emotions about them.

Marginalised perspectives should take centre stage in collaborative projects.

Community archives are often sought out as partners by academics and established heritage institutions as a means to decolonize the archive and include the historically disenfranchised. This was also the case in **STORIES IN MOTION**, where we learnt that power dynamics in collaborative projects should be explicitly addressed.

People from under-represented and marginalised communities should be at the forefront of the design and realisation of projects. This is fundamental in expanding the conversation, ensuring a shift in perspectives regarding knowledge, respect and validation.

In the **VIRTUAL AGORA** the co-creation process showed that shared interests are particularly important in facilitating civic engagement events.

Experiencing the Tolerance-Carousel during the Impact Night in the University Hall, the historic setting of the signing of the Union of Utrecht Treaty which has freedom of religion as one of the amendments, greatly contributed to its effect and affects. Tolerance was chosen as a historically dynamic value orientation towards difference that is supposed to help diverse audiences to connect the past and the present and to value three kinds of freedom: 1. freedom of religion; 2. freedom of migration; 3. freedom of sexuality. The combination of storytelling and film voice enabled participants to engage actively with the voting and statement tool on their mobile phones.

The collective anonymity enabled different grades of 'radical' voices in the **VIRTUAL AGORA/Tolerance-Carousel**.



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# Tangible Palpable Negotiable

For more information on (Re-)Tracing History, the Action Framework and the projects go to [www.reinwardt.ahk.nl/en/re-tracing-history](https://www.reinwardt.ahk.nl/en/re-tracing-history) (EN) or [www.reinwardt.ahk.nl/re-tracing-history](https://www.reinwardt.ahk.nl/re-tracing-history) (NL).