



WHOSE HERITAGE MATTERS

mapping ■ making ■ mobilising
cultural heritage in Kisumu

A fieldwork report from the
Whose Heritage Matters project
July 2021



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This report focusses on *Whose Heritage Matters* in Kisumu, Kenya. If you are interested in learning more about the research in Cape Town, or accessing the final project overview, please visit the website or contact the editors.

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WHOSE HERITAGE MATTERS IN KISUMU

April 2019. The sun beat down on us, whilst we gathered on plastic chairs at the base of the rocks. We listened to the elder men narrate the history of Abindu, before showing us the carvings, caves and smallholdings that surround the site. Full of secrets, myths and legends, we left to continue our tour of sacred and cultural sites in Kisumu, fully intending to return.

The *Whose Heritage Matters* project was designed to understand whether, and if so how, cultural heritage could be mobilised to support more sustainable and just urban futures in Kisumu (Kenya) and Cape Town (South Africa).

Our goal was to co-produce the project with local partners through

- **mapping** tangible and intangible cultural heritage meanings and values
- enabling the **making** of cultural heritage through active interventions and
- **mobilising** knowledge and partnerships to support local community organisations and actors in navigating contested values and uses for cultural heritage.

The collaboration underpinning the project was supported by the Mistra Urban Futures network which enabled researchers in the UK, South Africa and Kenya, working on the intersections between culture, justice and the city, to form and test partnerships. Our action-oriented approach meant grounding the project in locally-produced understandings of critical challenges and opportunities to mobilise cultural heritage for sustainable futures.

This report tells the story of *Whose Heritage Matters* in Kisumu, Kenya.

Part 1 - LOCATING: We start by locating the project in the context of ongoing research and engagement by researchers at the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (JOOUST) within the cultural heritage landscape in Kisumu. This provides the rationale for the selection of sites of activity and partners. We describe the four cultural heritage sites where we focussed the work – Abindu, Dunga Beach, Kit Mikayi and Seme Kaila.

Part 2 - MAPPING: In Part 2 we map the diverse cultural heritage values held by different actors, and the policy and organisational terrain of cultural heritage in Kisumu. We discuss how plural values

for cultural heritage can produce tensions and contradictions, resulting in uneasy accommodations between cultural heritage and sustainability goals at the local level.

Part 3 - MAKING: Part 3 highlights the role of community-based organisations (CBOs) in an active process of heritagization – the making of cultural heritage through ongoing negotiations around values, uses and strategies. We highlight the importance of CBOs as nodes in co-production partnerships, in bridging between national, county and local interests, and in ensuring community ownership of and empowerment through cultural heritage activities.

Part 4 - MOBILISING: In Part 4 we document the impact of COVID-19 on those living and working around these cultural heritage sites. By mobilising community researchers, the project was able to visibilise the deep impact on the livelihoods of those who depended on the sites for their economic, social and cultural wellbeing. This documentation was undertaken to enable the CBOs to mobilise collectively and engage with decision-makers in the production of post-COVID strategies.

Part 5 - LAST WORDS: Part 5 summarises the key implications and reflects on the value and impact of the project in Kisumu and beyond.

Methods of mapping, making and mobilising

- A collaborative community workshop, using drawings to represent cultural heritage in Kisumu: 46 people from 11 organisations
- Site visits and bilateral discussions
- Interviews with policy officials, academics and community members, including focus groups
- Desk-based policy review and literature review
- Panel discussion with Elders at the Got Ramogi festival
- WhatsApp group for sharing experiences and challenges during COVID-19
- Community researcher interviews, with County Assembly, chiefs, clan heads, sub-chiefs, village elders, businessmen, clergy, residents
- Consultative discussions at the sites



Kisumu researchers with members of the Dunga Beach CBO



#1: LOCATING THE PROJECT



Kisumu City is located on the Winam Gulf, on the eastern shores of Lake Victoria, the world's largest freshwater lake. Kisumu is the primary lake port and Kenya's third largest city. 60% of the population reside on 5% of the land within the city, which has high levels of poverty, food insecurity and low employment, particularly for young people and women.

The physical layout of the city is shaped by its colonial origins, with a wealthy residential zone on the lake side of the city, whilst nearby the Manyatta and Nyalenda slums are intertwined with middle class dwellings. Outside the commercial centre, well-planned housing estates, built between the 1950s and 1980s, are now run down and surrounded by sprawling urban growth into the flood-prone lowlands of the Kano plains. Such areas suffer from high unemployment and lack essential facilities.

Kisumu boasts diverse cultural heritage resources that are uniquely and spatially distributed on the landscape, laced with scenic landforms that traverse the city and its environs. How such resources can be mobilised in support of wider development goals, including poverty reduction and economic growth, whilst protecting natural and cultural heritage, are key concerns. This is particularly important as local people around cultural and sacred sites have sought to secure their livelihoods through unsustainable practices – such as quarrying, deforestation or sand harvesting. Environmental challenges include indiscriminate bush and vegetation clearances for agriculture, and over-extraction of natural resources for fuel, medicine or building materials.

Researchers at JOOUST had been working to address these issues for some time. First, motivated by concern that low community awareness of the cultural value of the sites was leading to their degradation, researchers sought to develop eco-tourism strategies to mobilize resources and catalyze policy change (Omondi *et al.*, 2014; Jernsand and Kraff, 2015; Odede *et al.*, 2020). Tourism is the second major source of foreign exchange income in Kenya, in a context where fishing and agriculture, as the primary sources of income, are declining through climate change and diminishing fishing stocks.

Eco-tourism seeks to seize this opportunity through developing alternative sources of income for residents around cultural heritage sites, whilst recognising that the inter-relationships between poverty reduction, economic growth and wider sustainability

concerns are complex. Ecotourism seeks to protect the environment and ecology, whilst fostering community participation and ensuring that local people can benefit from tourism to reduce poverty and unemployment. It is an approach that enrolls local people in the conservation and management of cultural heritage, bringing benefit to local groups and paying attention to local heritage practices (Coombes *et al.*, 2014; Ndoro *et al.*, 2018). Local people have been keen to embrace ecotourism, recognising how such strategies can also address the basic needs of the community – through better road networks or supplies of water and power.

Second, researchers have recognised that the relationship between cultural heritage mobilisation, livelihoods and lives involves multiple actors, working across policy scales, sectors and fields (Perry *et al.*, 2019). Co-production has been embraced as an approach to develop the necessary partnerships to negotiate between different interests (Hemström *et al.*, 2021). Supporting community-based organisations is an essential pre-requisite for co-production, to ensure that local people have platforms to represent their knowledge, skills and interests.

The Whose Heritage Matters project offered an opportunity to build on this prior work, through better understanding conflicts that arise through competing cultural heritage values, and to support community-based organisations in developing their roles and plans. A central plank of the approach was to foster peer learning between four cultural heritage sites so they could learn from each other and build critical mass to represent collective interests.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a redesign of the project to document the impact on the sites and challenges arising, and provide active support. The pandemic further evidenced the value of the sites to those living and working around them, and exemplified tensions in mobilising cultural heritage as an alternative economic activity, particularly given the reliance on international visitors as a source of income.

Whose Heritage Matters aligned with a local strategy to develop viable, locally-managed cultural heritage sites to support community empowerment and poverty reduction through ecotourism, as an alternative to unsustainable economic practices.



Kisumu City

Dunga Beach on the shores of Lake Victoria

Cultural and sacred sites in Kisumu

Our work was located in four cultural and sacred sites in Kisumu, at different stages of development with respect to community-based management.

Abindu Caves

Abindu is located to the north of Kisumu city, and sits 5km above sea level within a hilly, ragged terrain which extends from Kajulu to Ojola as part of the Nandi escarpment. The huge rock formation is composed of 12 different rock shelters, used primarily for different religious or sacred purposes: for instance, one cave for St Teresa is seen as a source of fertility for those wishing to have children. Different rocks have engravings, such as an inscription, an African map and the ‘12 loaves of bread’. The caves date back over 500 years to the immigration of the Luo tribe, and are believed to have been previously occupied by a sub-tribe of the Kipsigis community, the Kibundu. Alongside the engraved rock art, the caves are the source of multiple community narratives and seen to have supernatural healing powers, resulting in visits from witchdoctors and herbalists. The caves were made more popular in 1970 when prophet, Abuor Adet, is said to have made revelations to Mama Grace Akech, including predicting the release of Nelson Mandela and that the first black American president would be of Luo blood. Springs are scattered around the site, which is surrounded by indigenous plants, such as the baobab tree, ‘siala’, ‘midat’ and ‘mboto’, and medicinal herbs, as well as wild animals such as leopards, hyenas, baboons and monkeys. Abindu was formally recognized in 2008 by the Department of Culture for Kisumu City.



‘Loaves of Bread’ at Abindu

Dunga Beach

Dunga Beach is a fishing and tourism destination, 5km from the central business district of Kisumu, a peninsular on the shores of Lake Victoria, dominated by rocky surfaces, wetlands, hills, cliffs and springs. Footpaths, murrum and tarmac-covered roads lead to mud-walled houses made of stones and soil, alongside permanent houses made of bricks and blocks with iron roofs. The site consists of residential, commercial and recreation buildings, with a board-walk leading to the lake shore, made of timber with a tin roof. The pier forms a docking area for fishing boats and tour boats, which stretch into Lake Victoria. The area is a fish-breeding ground, where hippos have also roamed freely, while the lake is used for kayaking and sport fishing. Dunga is recognized as a cultural heritage site by the national government, through the National Museums of Kenya, and by the Kisumu County Government since the devolution of cultural heritage responsibilities in 2010. Dunga Wetland is also marketed as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by Nature Kenya and Birdlife International. There are over 800 bird species, including threatened species such as Papyrus Gonolek, White-winged Warbler and the Papyrus Canary. The history of Dunga Beach dates back to 1901 with the arrival of Indian settlers who built the railway line, and settled at Dunga to promote fishing. It is a popular public beach in Kisumu central sub-county, with rich Luo history.



Boardwalk at Dunga Beach



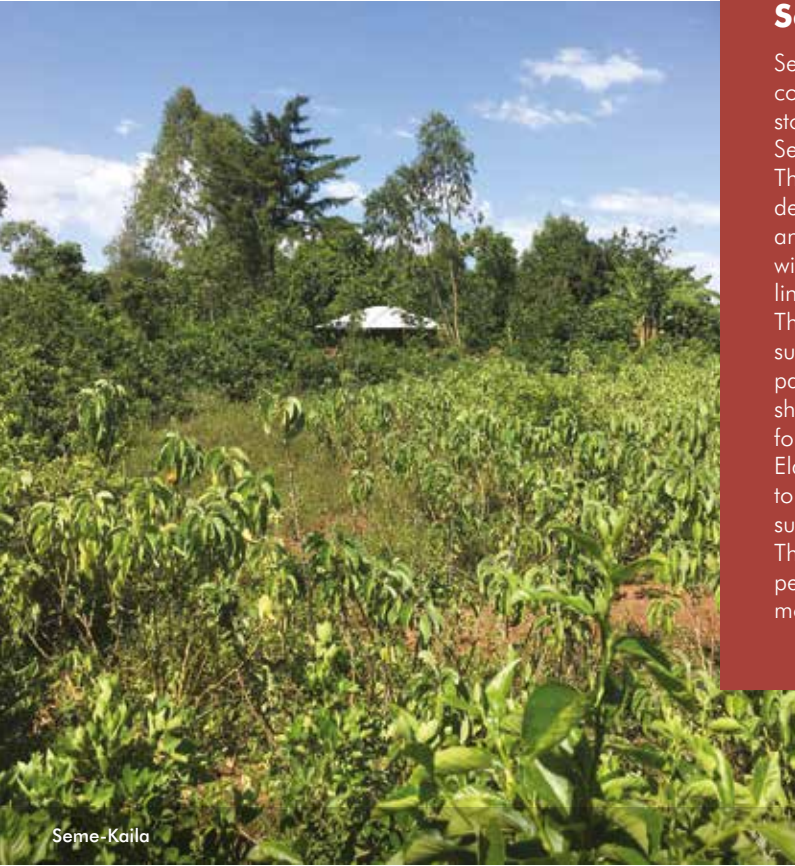
Birds at Dunga Beach

Kit Mikayi

Kit Mikayi is a rock formation of seven boulders, made of uniquely layered graphite stones, with underground bat-dwelling caves and a flat rock formation. 12km from Kisumu City, the 5-acre site is surrounded by rare medicinal trees, and, at its centre, there is a shrine used by religious groups. The site has an office space and a traditional hut, used as a cultural museum with traditional artifacts. Kit Mikayi – known as the ‘rock of the first wife’ – is shrouded in myth and legend, long recognized by Luo elders as a sacred site. There are different narratives surrounding the naming of the rocks: one story describes how Mikayi went up the hill weeping when her husband took a second wife; another suggests that Ngeso, an elderly man loved the stones and so named them after his first wife. It has been suggested that the rock formation reflects the Luo culture of polygamy with the stones depicting the huts of the first three wives. During dry spells, elders still converge at the entrance to the stones for mediation, where a snake ‘Nyangundi’ is said to have controlled access to the rock. Over time, the rocks have become known as a source of visions and a way of averting calamities, holding healing powers. Kit Mikayi was recognized as a National Monument in 2003 and designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2019.



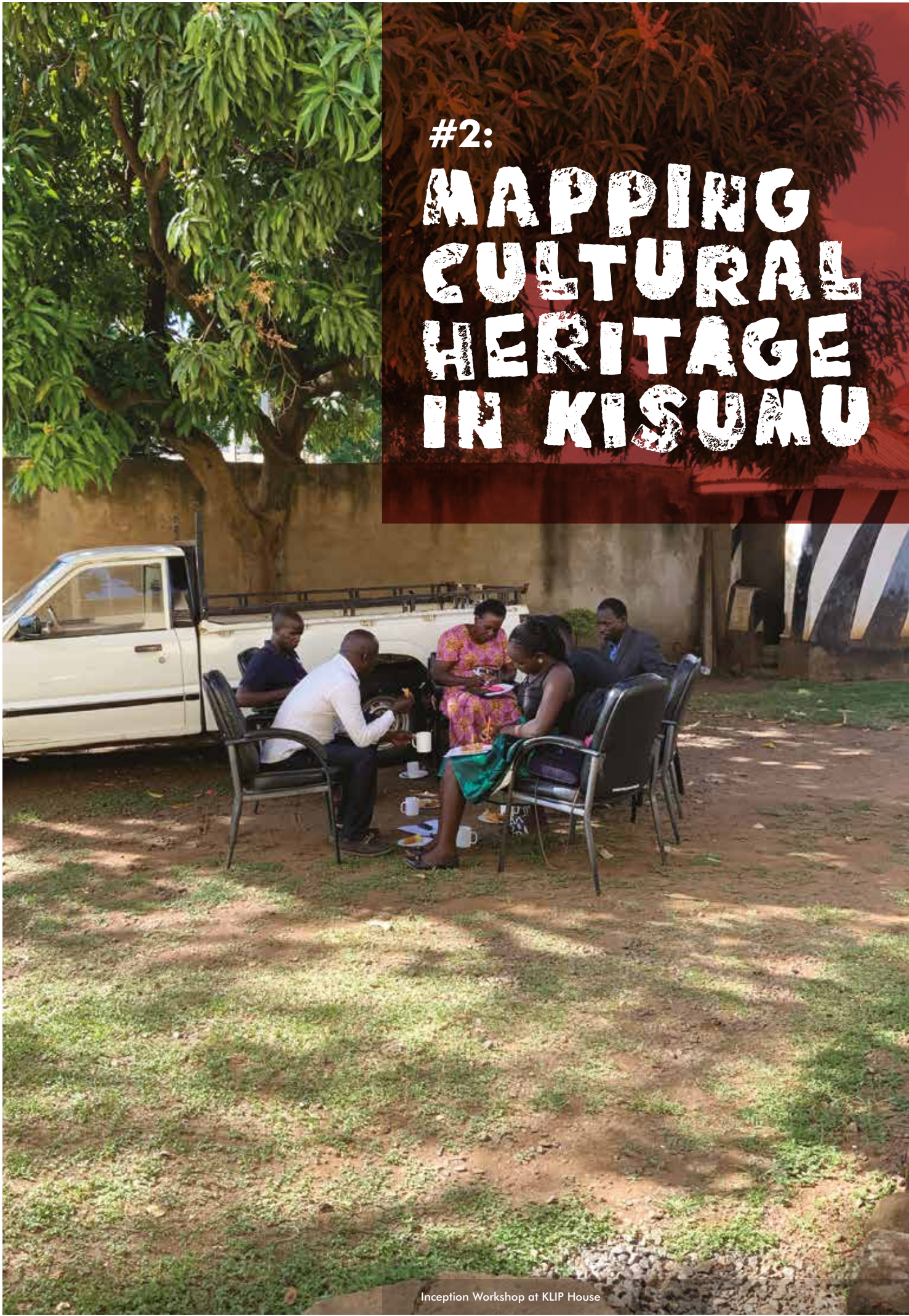
Kit Mikayi



Seme-Kaila

Seme-Kaila

Seme-Kaila is situated at Kaila sub-location in Seme sub-county of Kisumu County, Kenya. The site consists of six stone-walled enclosures that are situated on Got Kaila in Seme, 4km northwest of Holo market in Kisumu County. The protective hillforts were used by early Luo ancestors as defensive mechanisms against external human aggression and attack from wild animals. The settlement arrangement within the enclosures depicted Luo settlement cosmology lined along the walls of the prehistoric settlement structures. The enclosures are littered with archaeological artefacts, such as pottery and stone tools, and exhibit interior partitions and abutting structures. A sacred tree used as a shrine exists in one of the enclosures, where supernatural forces of the ancestral spirits and the gods are said to live. Elderly men, led by medicine men, lead in offering sacrifices to appease the gods and avert calamities and misfortunes such as drought and famine facing the local inhabitants. The enclosures are places of past human habitation where people lived a communal form of lifestyle for labour mobilization and security reasons.



#2:
**MAPPING
CULTURAL
HERITAGE
IN KISUMU**

April 2019. We crowded into a room, with over 45 participants from academic, cultural, tourism and community-based organisations, including youth, women’s and widows’ groups. During the three-hour workshop, the air buzzed with English and Luo, as we drew images of ‘what cultural heritage means’ before dividing into four mixed groups to discuss challenges and opportunities. We ended the session with a roundtable on expectations and hopes for the *Whose Heritage Matters* project.

For the majority of participants, cultural heritage was an integration of tangible and intangible properties, where culture is a way of life.

In our workshop, several participants drew tangible heritage, such as the specific sites of Abindu, Dunga Beach, Kit Mikayi or Seme Kaila, or traditional Luo homesteads.



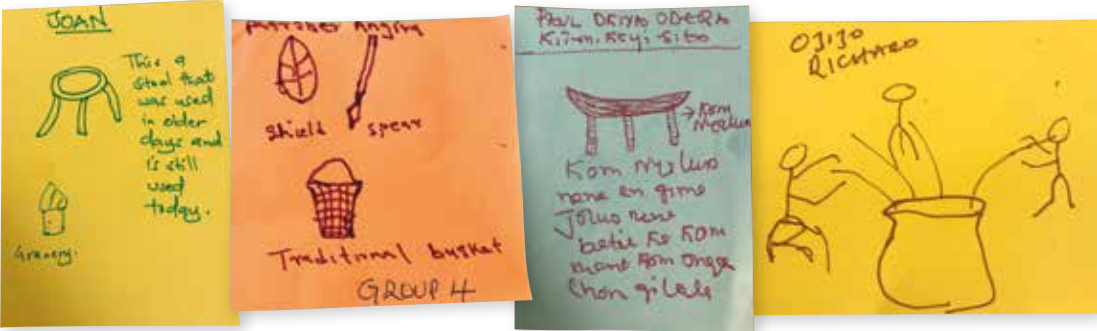
Margaret Kawala
Workshop April 2019



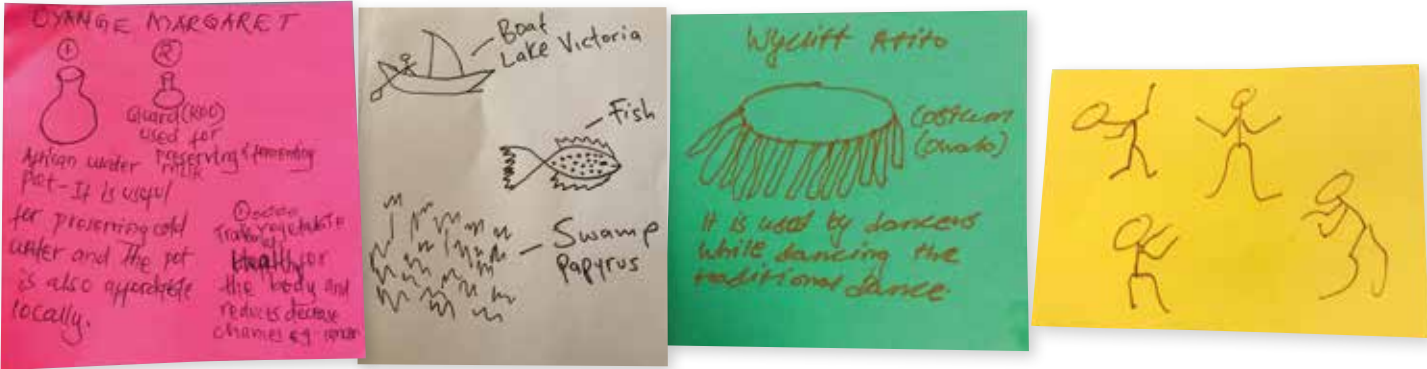
**Cultural heritage
is our way of life**
Workshop participant,
April 2019



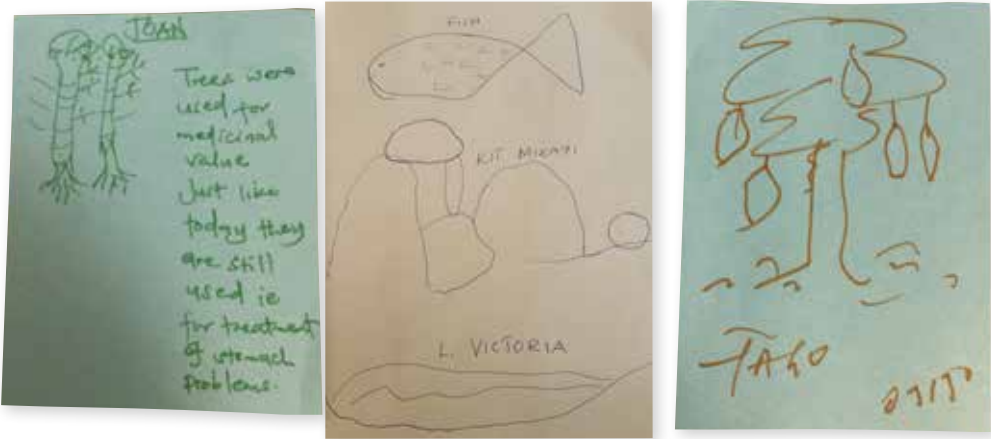
Others focussed on specific artefacts, such as Luo gourds and pots, shields and spears.



Practices such as fishing, basketry, food and dancing and associated clothing were depicted, along with representations of family life.



Natural heritage was portrayed through drawings of Lake Victoria, the surrounding papyrus swamp, wetlands or birds. Trees were drawn to represent the value of medicines for complaints such as stomach ache.



In a few cases colonial architecture (the port) or the spatial layout of the city (Kisumu City) were illustrated.



Plural values for cultural heritage



Following the workshop and associated site visits, we undertook a process of interviews and community consultations at each of the four sites. We discussed the diverse ways in which the sites contribute to the lives and livelihoods of residents, and different values and meanings of cultural heritage.

**Table 1: Valuing landscape as heritage: polyvalency at sacred and cultural sites in Kisumu County.**

	Abindu Caves	Dunga Beach	Kit Mikayi	Seme Kaila
Economic value	Abindu is less developed as a tourist destination. The CBO aims to develop Abindu as an international tourist hub, produce and commercialise clean water from Abindu spring, and generate income from new cultural ventures. Income is raised by the sale of local agricultural produce, such as mangoes, guavas, pawpaws, oranges and bananas. Fee charges are levied from both the local and international visitors to the site.	Aside from income from fishing, the site has become a tourist destination for local and international visitors, which generates employment and income through sales of cultural products, boat rides, entry fees and education fees.	Employment opportunities created for local people through cultural activities, including craft, art, dance, song and tour guiding, as well as the sale of cultural products. Domestic and international tourism is a key part of the economic value of the site.	Seme Kaila is not well developed as a tourism destination. The aim is to develop the fortified settlement enclosures as a tourist attraction for employment creation and income generation. Gate charges from domestic and foreign tourists are intended to support local livelihoods. Traditional homestead and local cultural products like pots, baskets, crafts and clothing will generate income through sale to visitors.
Spiritual value	The legends and myths surrounding Abindu caves have significant cultural value and promote cultural identity. Religious groups converge on the site for spiritual nourishment and cleansing. Traditional healers derive their supernatural powers from the site for healing purposes.	Offerings are made to appease spirits after a good harvest and during high fish season.	The landscape is associated with a range of myths and legends concerning the origins of the Seme people and ethnic groups in the Lake Victoria basin. Powerful religious and political leaders converge on this destination to enrich their lives.	Sacrifices have been offered to the ancestral spirits during misfortunes and calamities such as drought or sudden deaths to appease the gods. The ancestral spirits of the original inhabitants whose relatives still dwell in the vicinity are believed to provide protection to the present inhabitants around Seme-Kaila ruins.
Religious value	The rocks are a sacred site, used for ritual ceremonies and religious purposes. The rocks display biblical inscriptions, like the 'twelve loaves of bread', and some geographic features are said to represent the map of Africa and Kenya. Independent African Christian Church followers pray, meditate and fast as facets of their religious worship.	Baptisms and the scattering of ashes take place at the site, and sacrifices such as marking the birth of a child by cutting hair and throwing it in the water.	The rocks are used by religious groups, particularly the Legion Maria denomination. Sacred caves are the site of meditation, fasting and worship. Traditional diviners draw power from the site and engage in traditional healing and exorcism. Holy water at Kit Mikayi is used for such purification purposes.	Legio Maria religious sect followers often frequent the site to pray, worship and engage in spiritual cleansing since the rock tors around the enclosures are associated with supernatural forces and believed to be holy grounds.
Cultural value	The focus of activities is on the preservation of the tangible cultural heritage and its use for worship. There are plans to develop further cultural activities, and some cultural events have already taken place, such as a wrestling event in 2020 at a nearby hotel.	Fishing is valued as a cultural practice, involving around 70% of residents. There is an annual Sitatunga boat race, Fish Night Festival and fish competition. Arts and crafts include weaving, pottery and dancing by the Chiela dance troupe. The recreation centre forms a cultural museum to display artefacts.	A range of intangible cultural heritage practices take place at the site, including dancing, crafts, pageants, arts festivals and tour guiding. Traditional Luo artefacts are displayed in the museum and there is a Creative Arts Centre on the site which promotes talent, especially for young people, and sports.	The fortified settlement enclosures are traditional African architectural features. They exhibit interior partitions and abutting structures as well as enclosure extensions indicating population expansion. The settlement enclosures are manifestations of external aggressions during the migration and settlement into the Lake Victoria eastern shores in Kenya. Inside the enclosures are potsherds, house platforms and human burials which signify the internal spatial organization or the various activity areas.
Social value	The CBO provides financial relief, pays school fees and donates to support the community's economic welfare. The site provides a picnic space for those who want to enjoy a quiet environment away from the busy and bustling city life of Kisumu.	A range of welfare interventions are undertaken, including food donations, paying school fees and donating trees to local families. Around the site, family get-togethers, community relationship bonding and recreational activities take place.	The CBO helps the community through purchasing blankets for the elderly, and paying school fees and uniforms for poorer students, as well as helping orphans and widows. Bonding sessions for couples or families experiencing relationship difficulties take place. Recreational activities take place which are valued for breaks from working and family life.	Cultural and social activities take place around the sites, such as dancing and bee-keeping.
Medicinal value	The site attracts herbalists and local people who obtain traditional herbs to treat various human ailments: skin rashes, stomach ache, colds, diarrhoea etc.	Some of the traditional fish species like lung fish and omena have medicinal value in the treatment of skin disease and measles.	Traditional herbalists visit the site for medicinal plants used to treat and cure various conditions including infertility, stomach pain, skin conditions, diarrhoea, colds and vomiting.	The indigenous flora found along the walls of the enclosures are used by herbalists to treat various ailments like headache, diarrhoea, rashes, cold, stomach ache among others.
Environmental /geological value	The natural rock boulder landscape, covered by a dense thicket of indigenous trees, ranging from dials, oyieko, ochol, to baobab, provide a natural landscape, which provides a habitat for wild fauna.	The landscape provides a habitat for different bird species; Lake Victoria is rich in aquatic life, with traditional fish species and natural marine flora. The shores are also home to hippos and reptiles.	The natural indigenous vegetative cover, laced with the graphitic rocky landscapes and the intermittent rock tors of the Seme region, present an environment rarely found in other regions of Kenya.	The area is covered by gneiss rocks that have resisted physical weathering, producing unique beautiful rock tors and undulating natural landscapes of alternating values and hills or ridges. The hillforts' stone walls are made of locally available rocks of either basalt or gneiss.
Aesthetic value	The vantage point of the rocks provides high visibility of Kisumu City, along the shores of the Lake basin, the rock tors and the traditional vegetation in its natural habitat.	A scenic landscape is provided by the sunset viewing point, wetland papyrus reeds and flowers, cultural objects and waters of Lake Victoria.	A rocky landscape with indigenous plants, the rock tors of Seme, the caves and religious paintings, provide a scenic landscape of great natural beauty.	From the vantage point of the hills, visitors can behold the expansive waters of the fresh water of Lake Victoria in Kisumu City, Kenya.
Pedagogic, scientific and archaeological value	Local primary and secondary schools visit the site to learn about history, religious values and practices, as well as geology and environmental awareness. Scientists and researchers also come to the site to research local traditions, practices and cultures as well as indigenous plant species and fauna.	Educators and researchers visit the site for field trips and conduct research and surveys. Primary pupils and secondary school students are exposed to various practical experiences on different subjects.	Alongside school and college visits, scientific surveys and research studies, capacity building and training activities also take place at the site.	The site is of distinctive scientific and archaeological value. Scientists and researchers engage in research on traditional architecture, spatial planning and organization of settlement patterns, the local population, socio-cultural practices, values and beliefs, as well as indigenous plant species and fauna.

Mapping issues in policy and governance

We wanted to know how these plural values were reflected in the policy and governance of cultural heritage. Local researchers documented how the management of cultural heritage takes place in a multi-scale and multi-actor context. Policies have become entangled in the context of devolution since 2010. This results in a complex of actors – national, local, public, private and community-based – with different priorities and values for cultural heritage.



Africa is self-confident in its identity, heritage, culture and shared values and as a strong, united and influential partner on the global stage, making its contribution to peace, human progress and welfare (Point 7, Agenda 2063)



Cultural heritage in Kisumu is aligned with the African Union Agenda 2063, a strategic framework for delivering on Africa’s goal for inclusive and sustainable development, positioned as a commitment to pan-African goals of unity, self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity.

UNESCO has played a role in fostering holistic values, seeing cultural heritage as a combination of spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features characterising a society or a social group. However, specific national policies and regulations have also been influenced by European concepts around the protection of intellectual property, through a series of ordinances and acts from 1927-2000s, which were rooted in the protection of tangible heritage and prioritised an archaeological perspective.

National policies reflect these origins, through for instance, the National Museums and Heritage Act of 2006 and Kenyan National Policy on Culture and Heritage in 2010. It is through such policies that the National Museum of Kenya (NMK) draws its primary mandate as the custodian of cultural heritage and responsible agency for policy implementation.

Although national government adheres to UNESCO definitions of cultural heritage, Kenya Vision 2030 (the Kenyan government blueprint for development) suggests that cultural heritage is a lower priority than meeting basic needs such as housing, food, water and sanitation. Cultural heritage policies and practices in Kisumu are also shaped by the Kenyan Constitution (particularly articles 11, 40 and 69) and the frameworks set by the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, or the Kenyan Tourist Board.



There are three specific ways in which cultural heritage is framed in policy in Kisumu. First since devolution in 2010, county governments in Kenya have been mandated to ensure the integration of physical, social, environmental and spatial planning in their operations. Cultural heritage management has therefore been framed as a spatial planning issue, relating to land use. In Kisumu, cultural heritage sites are considered an integral part of the Physical and Land Use Planning Act of 2019 relating to the need for development control mechanisms, infrastructural and service consideration and environmental protections. The Kisumu County Integrated Development Plan (2019) also recognises the existence and need for preservation of cultural heritage sites.

Second, cultural heritage is framed as an economic opportunity. Within the development plan, cultural heritage and tourism are seen as key economic pillars for poverty alleviation, through revenue generation and employment creation in each place. This is why the primary responsibility for cultural heritage and management falls within the Department of Tourism, Culture and Arts, and Sports. Organisations such as the Lake Victoria Tourism Association (LVTA) and Western Kenya Tourism Circuit are key players.

Third, cultural heritage is seen as an opportunity to deliver on county commitments to increase public participation, enshrined for instance in the Urban Areas and Cities Act of 2011, as well as reduce gender inequality. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) introduced a rule that no more than two-thirds of members of elective or appointive bodies should be of the same gender.



Kisumu’s Tourism and Heritage plan is shaped by and seeks to reconcile these different imperatives. Yet where ‘cultural heritage’ governance lands is less than clear in a multi-actor space influenced by plural and sometimes disconnected interests. Cultural heritage is about tangible heritage management, influenced by organisations such as NMK; it is a route to economic development, infrastructural and transport improvements; and it is a pathway to community participation. Community-based organisations, as we shall see in Part 3, inherit these multiple expectations, and are also seen as the answer to addressing any tensions that arise.



The County Government of Kisumu has formally recognized the Lake Region Tourist Circuit as a key node in the cultural, heritage and community strategies of the region. However, in the context of the policy landscape

set out above, our pre-pandemic workshop and interviews (2019) revealed a number of key themes on what and how cultural heritage matters for Kisumu, and how it is managed.

There is a void...there is something lacking

Representative, Western Tourism Circuit Association

Whilst Kisumu City has a Tourism and Heritage Plan, interviewees shared a sense that there is no clear or coordinated policy framework for cultural heritage at the local level. This is seen as problematic given that the primary agenda and funding allocations

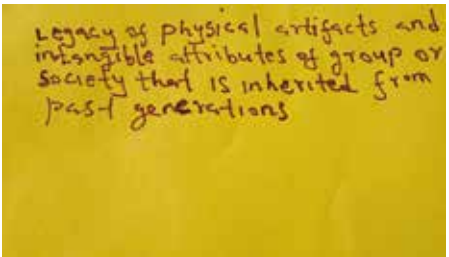
are set by the county. There is concern that the diversity of values for cultural heritage is not well-recognised. As a result, cultural and tourism organisations largely work within the national framework.

We had our culture from the dawn of history. It has stayed with us, but what has happened is the values have eroded: they are so dynamic now

Luo Elder

The workshop and interviews with community leaders, particularly the Luo Elders, revealed a strong narrative around preservation and protection of the past. A dominant view about cultural heritage emerged at the workshop which saw cultural heritage as settled and fixed, to be transferred and communicated to future generations in order to preserve and conserve it. Young people were often positioned as needing education to preserve cultural heritage as defined and set down by elders. Elders articulated concern that tourism, and modern education, would lead to westernisation and an erosion

of traditional values. For them, cultural heritage needs to be managed so that the 'laws, rights and rules laid by our ancestors could guide the community.'



Culture is quite dynamic and culture keeps on changing...the culture that we got with our forefathers, so that it's not forgotten...how do we merge it...with new cultures coming up?

Representative, Department of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sports

Other participants recognised these views, but saw cultural heritage as fluid and changing. A modernising view recognised the need to preserve and protect, but focussed instead on a dual strategy of adapting to the

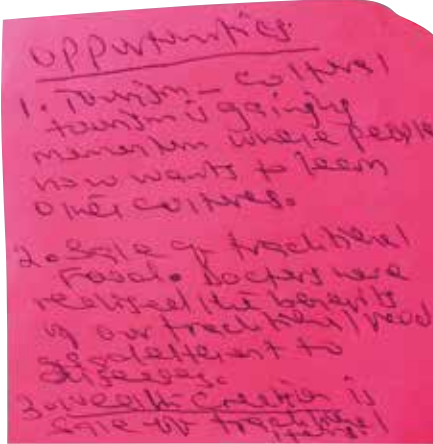
future in order to conserve the past. Here cultural heritage is seen as constantly made and re-made in complex landscapes and according to different policy rationales.

Tourism is the most significant activity linked to cultural heritage

Tour Guide, Dunga Beach

Whilst our workshop suggested that culture is seen as a way of life, set of beliefs and is constituted through an entanglement of tangible and intangible properties, cultural heritage has been mobilised as part of a tourism strategy designed to increase income from visitors. In an unwitting foretelling of the impacts of the pandemic (see Part 4), one interviewee noted that for civil servants and elected officials, 'if tourism is delinked from the sites, they cease to be valuable or meaningful'. Modernisation has also been seen as a way to make sites more attractive to local and international visitors, through branding, marketing and effective site management. There is concern that county tourism strategies are skewed towards the coast and Mount Kenya.

Community-based organisations were keen to get themselves 'on the map.'



Culture helps in development. Because the revenue that is collected or generated from cultural or heritage sites has really helped in infrastructure development like roads and water, establishment of educational centres and even playgrounds for children

Tour Guide, Dunga Beach

The valuing of cultural heritage as an opportunity for income generation through tourism has also been part of a wider infrastructural development strategy. For local people, promotion of the sites as tourist destinations leads to multiplier effects – such as getting roads, water or electricity – or stimulating demand for goods, services and a market for agricultural products.





🍌🍌 The purpose is to enable local communities to realise the values of these heritage properties by earning a living from them, and at the same time helping us to achieve the goal of conservation 🍌🍌

Representative, Western Tourism Association

Income generation, in the context of deep-seated poverty, is an essential value of cultural heritage. For many, keeping revenue generated by tourism in the hands of local people achieves the twin goals of poverty reduction and heritage conservation, especially in light of unsustainable economic practices. Whilst we found a strong

consensus on community-based heritage management, interviewees noted how the increasing economic value of the sites had led to conflicts over land ownership between different actors in the policy space, especially when cultural heritage is seen as a way to generate international funding, for instance, from UNESCO.

🍌🍌 In the county government, they do not come from here, so they won't know anything about those sites...the local community, they're the owners of the knowledge. They are the ones who take the driver seat 🍌🍌

Representative, Department of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sports

A secondary motivation for local management of cultural heritage relates to the need to recognise the knowledge and expertise held by residents around the sites.

Effective management means recognising who is expert in aligning cultural heritage to meet local needs and manage tensions.

🍌🍌 We need to have a bottom-up policy where people on the ground, people managing the facilities are involved so they set the agenda, what they want to use the heritage for and then they call for assistance from the county government and the other officials to help them manage those facilities 🍌🍌

Lecturer, JOOUST

A third motivation for community-ownership is linked to wider goals about public participation. Interviewees were broadly supportive of a 'bottom-up policy', which

places control in the hands of community-based organisations, who then mobilise others to support their aims.



Tensions and contestations

If there are multiple values for cultural heritage, and actors involved in legislating what and whose heritage matters, tensions and contestations can arise.

The interviews revealed value differences between:

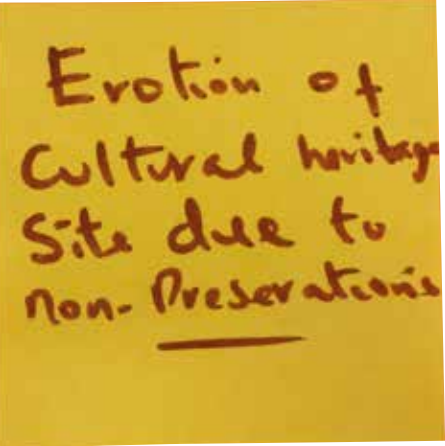
- preservation and modernisation
- elders and young people
- national, county and community-based organisations and
- community-based organisations, resident users and visitors to the sites.

Our data shows that these differences produce tensions which come to the fore when questions of livelihoods, lives, land, liveability and legislation intersect.

Recognition of cultural heritage sites as tourism opportunities has led to a prioritization of their economic value over

other values, such as the use and practice of traditional medicine. The environmental conservation of the sites is undermined when visitor numbers lead to environmental degradation and increased waste, where there are no marked disposal areas. Efforts to maintain and improve access has also led to the loss of grasses and trees.

At Dunga Beach, hotel development has encroached on riparian land and displaced wildlife, leading also to increased fatalities from crocodile attacks and hippo bites. In different sites, deliberate untended wildness, reflecting a non-interventionist relationship between nature and culture, has given way to narratives of 'neglect', leading to a focus on tidiness and cleanliness by site managers.





Candle wax residue at Kit Mikayi

At Kit Mikayi tensions persist between religious groups using the site and tourists, in terms of cultural dress and behavior. Whilst tourism brings much needed income, a sense of local cultural erosion is felt.

At the same time, the burning of candles by religious groups has left wax scarring on the rocks which managers are concerned can diminish the aesthetic value of the site.

Conflicts between different religious groups can also be common and between modern understandings of Christianity, for instance, or local use of the sites by traditional healers and spiritualists.

Within the sites, there are active efforts to support marginalised groups, such as young people or widows. However, myths and legends are guarded by elder men and access to sites is sometimes limited. The role

of women is often reserved for dancing and performing, whilst young people have been positioned as cleaners of the sites.

A key area of conflict is over land ownership. The formal recognition and designation of sites as cultural heritage – what is called gazetting – instates a national stake in the sites, even where land is locally owned. In some sites, such as Seme Kaila, individual land owners have been selling rocks for building and construction purposes leading to site erosion. Local people, such as landowners, may attach more value to activities that generate high monetary return to the detriment of the sites. International recognition, for instance, at Kit Mikayi, further exacerbates tensions through increasing the potential economic values of land and sites.



Stones for sale at Seme Kaila



Who is the owner? For example, you go to Kit Mikayi. Who is the owner of that? Is it the management that is constituted to work there? Or is it the people who are living around? So, those have been points of contention around Kit Mikayi



Representative, Department of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sports

Community-based organisations are positioned as central in resolving these issues. Local management is a key strategy for the making of heritage in everyday life, where cultural heritage is made and remade,

negotiated and contested. Part 3 therefore now focusses on how these organisations are structured, and managed and how they are implicated in mediating questions of whose heritage matters.

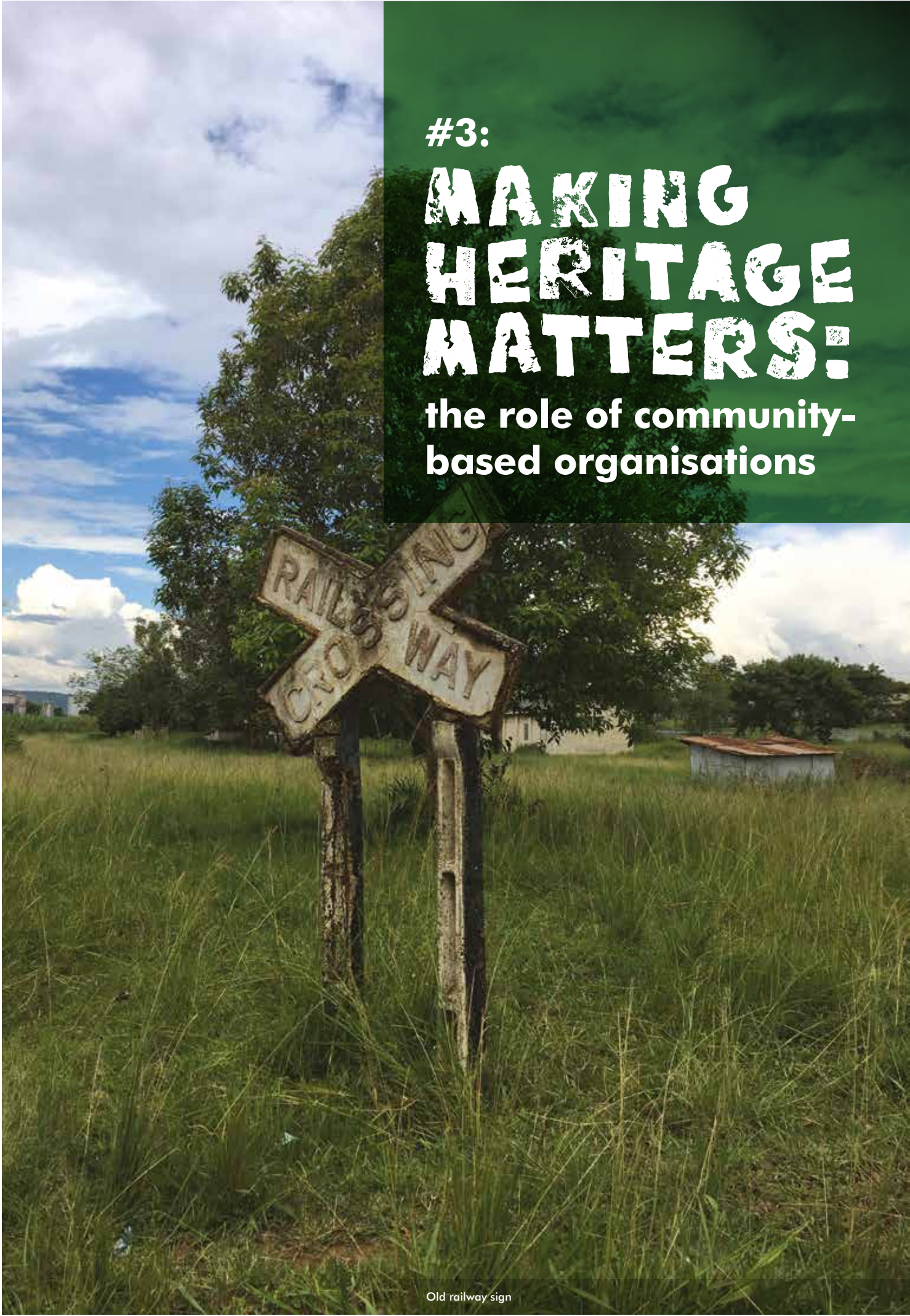


Take for example Kit Mikayi, they are the ones managing Kit Mikayi. The issues of land, they have a land committee dealing with the issues of land, so they find the solutions by themselves. They have been given the property as theirs. They own the heritage and they manage it. That is a way of going around this conflict, because if the Museums of Kenya would take our employees, drive them out, it only heightens the conflict. But when they're the ones managing it themselves, they realise that their fears are not real, are not valid



Representative, Department of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sports

#3: MAKING HERITAGE MATTERS: the role of community- based organisations



Old railway sign



Our research revealed how community-based organisations (CBOs) are a critical part of heritagization strategies from below, which seek to ensure that local communities – rather than distant agencies or developers – benefit from the recognition of landscapes as heritage. They can also protect local people from land dispossession and appropriation. Whilst they are not disinterested arbiters of value conflicts around the sites, the role of CBOs in community mobilisation, income generation and advocacy is widely recognised. *Whose Heritage Matters* community researchers gathered and shared data to document the roles that CBOs were playing before the COVID-19 pandemic.

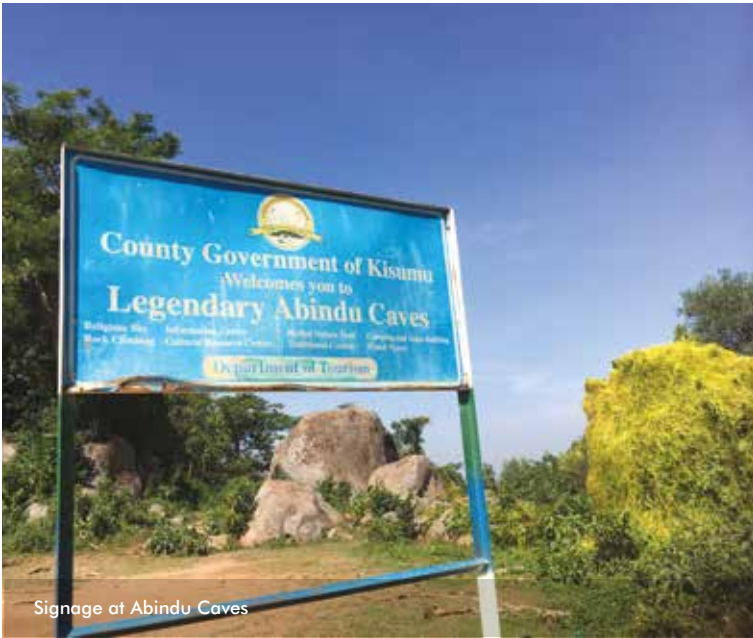
Local community governance of the sites is the result of, and implicated in, the official designation of sites as heritage, and the tensions and conflicts that result.

Forming community-based organisations

Community management is well-established at Dunga Beach, where a Beach Management Unit was founded in 1997 by an act of parliament calling for the formation of such units along the lakes and oceans in Kenya. The community-based organisation, DECCTA (Dunga Ecotourism and Environment Community Tourism Association), was not created until after formal recognition of the site as heritage in 2003.

In Kit Mikayi the first management group was Kit Mikayi Cooperative Society, formed in 2009 by bringing together 7 local landowners and their families. The National Museums of Kenya subsequently intervened to create a CBO in 2014, with a Board of Management, to ensure that the proceeds from the site could be received by and deployed for the community. Kit Mikayi is seen as a pilot for community management by the Western Tourism Circuit Association.

Abindu was considered a hiding den for criminals, with high levels of crime at the site. The process of forming the CBO, initiated in 2009, was a direct response to these threats and the desire to protect tourists and worshippers from theft, following the advice of Kisumu municipality.



Signage at Abindu Caves

Seme Kaila is the least well-established CBO. In April 2019 the first commitment to establish a CBO at Seme Kaila was made during a site visit from *Whose Heritage Matters*. With help from the project, the CBO constituted formally as an organisation later that year. The key aim of the CBO was to develop a planning strategy and learn from the other sites.

Governance and funding



Inside Kit Mikayi Cultural Centre

The legal status of the sites provides an authority and recognition both within and outside the community. Each CBO is registered through the relevant departments and ministries (for youth, sports and gender, or social services) and has a similar structure, comprising a series of committees overseen by a Board of Management (BOM).

The CBOs operate as member organizations, with key roles such as Chair, Secretary and Treasurer and a range of sub-committees for different activities, including environment, welfare, ICTs, resource mobilization and conflict resolution (Dunga) or land, culture and training and human resource and finance (Kit Mikayi).

These structures allow for differential levels of involvement. In Kit Mikayi, the membership organization enables different groups, some of which were previously excluded from decision-making, to have representation and voice in the CBO, such

as Kangeso traditional dancers, the Kadol widows group which sells traditional food, a co-op and a youth group that maintains the site. In Dunga, fishermen, tour operators, school leavers, professionals and artists are involved in the CBO, whilst in several sites, different groups support income-generating activities, like banking, welfare and savings.

The CBOs receive funding from grants, loans and external funds. County Development Funds at Dunga and Kit Mikayi have supported public participation, cultural activities and infrastructure. Dunga Beach receives funds for the promotion of fishing activities, whilst in Kit Mikayi, the County is expected to pay for a Community Cultural Resource Center including reception, offices, meeting rooms, exhibition area, waiting area and store. The County also contributed funding for the inauguration of Kit Mikayi as a World Heritage site. An access road was built in 2018 to Kit Mikayi as a result of government intervention.

Large scale infrastructure developments, such as tarmacking the main road connecting Dunga village to Kisumu City, have increased access to local markets to sell fish and crafts, and better signage has also been supported at county level, whilst national government funds have enabled the construction of a tarmac shed for fishmongers (Dunga), and building a public toilet and the (partial) fencing of the site at Abindu.

The sites are also financed by member contributions, gate and entry charges, as well as income-generating activities such as boat rides and tour-guiding, dancing and selling of cultural products and refreshments. There are charges for religious groups who want to make videos at the sites. The CBO structure enables local people to make decisions on how to generate and spend these funds, as well as on membership, site management, the preservation of different use values at the sites and marketing and branding activities.

This places them at the heart of heritagization processes, especially where localized conflicts arise (between different religious groups) or rationalities compete (between tourism, economic development and environmental conservation).



Making heritage

The CBOs, first and foremost, provide a mechanism for community participation in local management of the sites. Decisions can be made about future priorities and grassroots infrastructural developments, such as roads and power supplies around Abindu.

A key function of the CBOs is the marketing and promotion of the sites, through radio, online, word of mouth and social media, as well as providing site branding and signage.

Kit Mikayi’s trajectory to World Heritage status was in part enabled by a series of coalition-building activities, such as enrolling political support through visits from members from the County Assembly and Parliamentary Department for Culture and Heritage. This mobilisation has continued as part of the strategy of positioning Kit Mikayi on the cultural map.



Although many members of the CBOs are aware of the pitfalls of culture-led tourism, interviews suggest that it has also led to the transformation of ‘abandoned heritage places, into living cultural places’. The external recognition of the sites has raised local awareness of their importance through visibilizing multiple values for different communities and therefore garnered grassroots support.

Critically, CBOs support the local capture of income-generation and employment opportunities, through small businesses like selling sodas, *uji*, *maragwe* and cultural objects within the sites. This provides the means through which different values can be guarded at the sites, such as social welfare, education and training.

Example of visits and activities mobilised by Kit Mikayi CBO to enhance heritage status:

- Inauguration of the Board by Governor and Senior officers from NMK, Nairobi and Western Region offices
- Former Minister for Sports and Culture Hon. Echesa Wekesa and Director General of the National Museums of Kenya
- Committee of Members of Parliament of Culture and Heritage with Area Member of Parliament
- Minister for Tourism, Hon Balala and all parastatal Heads from his Ministry
- The Alumni of Alliance Boys (Former School Mates of The Governor)
- The Alex Chamwada KTN TV Show
- The Foods of Kenya KTN Show
- The Visit by Members of County Assembly of Muranga
- Musical Documentary by Asian Community
- Inscription of Kit Mikayi in Bogota, Columbia by UNESCO
- Creating awareness by Miss Kit Mikayi 2019/2020 through a roadshow by Miss Imelda Ochar
- Miss Kitmikayi Photoshoot and the Launch of Creative Art Centre
- Registration of Kit Mikayi with the CBO of all Community Tourism Sites Within Kisumu County
- Visit by popular Tour Operators from Nairobi - Sponsored by we-Western
- Documentary by French Radio. All the Activities were highlighted on the TV, Radio, Digital and Print Media improving publicity and visibility of the Tourism site.

Information shared by Kit Mikayi.

As detailed in Table 1 (pages 14-15), the sites all engage in outreach and charitable income redistribution, through payment of school fees or the provision of food. Educational and environmental awareness programs, such as enforced waste management, the naming and tagging of trees and wetland conservation (Dunga), are supported, along with cultural activities such as boat racing, festivals, pageants and creative arts exhibitions.

Formal organization of the sites is enabled by additional training in governance, management and leadership for committee members. National Museums of Kenya have provided training on how to manage and safeguard sites, whilst researchers have supported the acquisition of technical skills on tour guiding, governance and tourism management, for instance.

Where management works well, the CBOs and BOMs play key roles in resolving tensions, for instance, at Abindu where competition between religious groups over the use of space, especially the caves, has led to fights between adherents of different sects.

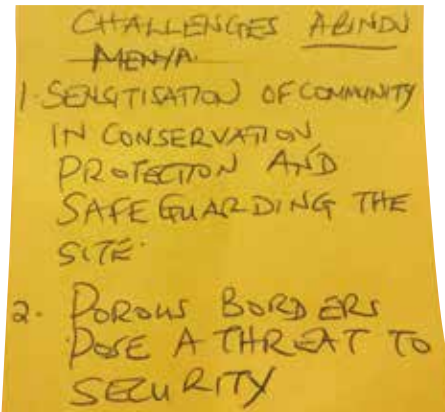
Importantly, the CBOs also strengthen the political power of the community in protecting local rights and interests against reported efforts to take over management and income-generating potential of the sites by organizations such as the National Museums of Kenya or County Government. The formal recognition afforded the sites, alongside legal registration under local control of the CBOs and BOMs, enables greater local resistance to such encroachments and opposition to development initiatives by local villagers, such as the building of beach hotels in Dunga.

The CBOs provide mechanisms to hold government to account for promises made, such as a borehole or energy provision to install solar offered, but not yet delivered, to Kit Mikayi. They therefore constitute a platform from which to argue for the upgrading of the sites.

In Abindu, reports suggest that the CBO provides a route to challenge larger tourism organizations, where it is reported that some tour firms have used the site to obtain funds as a means to supplement their own incomes, whilst never implementing – or even visiting – the sites.

In Abindu and Kit Mikayi, different communities from sub-locations across Kisumu also collaborate through the CBO which enhances cohesion and a sense of community while creating checks and balances against emergent land ownership disputes.

Other challenges the CBOs seek to address include waste management, a lack of signage, education training and raising community awareness. They provide ways of dealing with local issues and threats, such as flooding at Dunga, or as we shall see, pandemic management.





At the same time, the CBOs are not disinterested arbiters between competing heritage values. Rather, they are active in processes of validating whose and what heritage matters. Despite concern for eco-tourism, environmental conservation can be relegated to secondary importance in face of opportunities to attract tourists and generate local employment and incomes.

Funding is limited, which leads to trade-offs between different uses and values of the sites. The interests of CBOs may conflict with other groups using the sites: for instance in Kit Mikayi, tensions have arisen between management and religious groups over the payment of gate fees by worshippers, or the practices of the different religious groups in blocking entrances to caves and degrading the site through candle waste.

The question of land remains hotly contested. In Kit Mikayi, landowning families traditionally held power through the Kit Mikayi Co-operative Society prior to the subsequent 'imposition' of a CBO by National Museums of Kenya. This has left some landowners feeling that they were not adequately compensated for their land and increased demands to reclaim site management. The CBO also bridges between communities

at East and Central Seme sub-locations whose land co-constitutes the site, and some Central Seme residents have reported feeling excluded from site management via a BOM that privileges East Seme communities. The BOM managed to purchase land from two community members through revenue generated by gate collection to strengthen community land ownership. Sorting out such land issues has taken over six years at Kit Mikayi. Similarly at Seme Kaila individual ownership of enclosures has been a challenge to conservation efforts, resulting in a desire to bring land into communal ownership.

As the landscapes have become more visible and recognized, so land price values have increased. Most of these landscapes do not have secure land tenure, title deeds are often missing and who owns land can be contested. This has led to a rise in individual ownership claims over plots of land and concerns that the CBOs support existing landowners who retain income amongst themselves rather than investing in the conservation of the sites. Where individual landowners are dominant in the CBOs, activities with immediate economic return may be prioritized, such as charcoal burning, deforestation and quarrying with impacts on the local environment.

Demonstrating traditional skills at Kit Mikayi

CBO structures give form to such contestations and potentially provide routes for dealing with arising issues – for instance, with committees dedicated to conflict resolution (Dunga) and land disputes (Kit Mikayi). However, the effectiveness of such arrangements depends on the constitution and operation of memberships themselves. The CBOs may decide their own membership (Dunga), be constituted through representation from the committees, with additional members elected during Chief's public meetings (Kit Mikayi) or be elected under the supervision of the County Director of Tourism (Abindu).

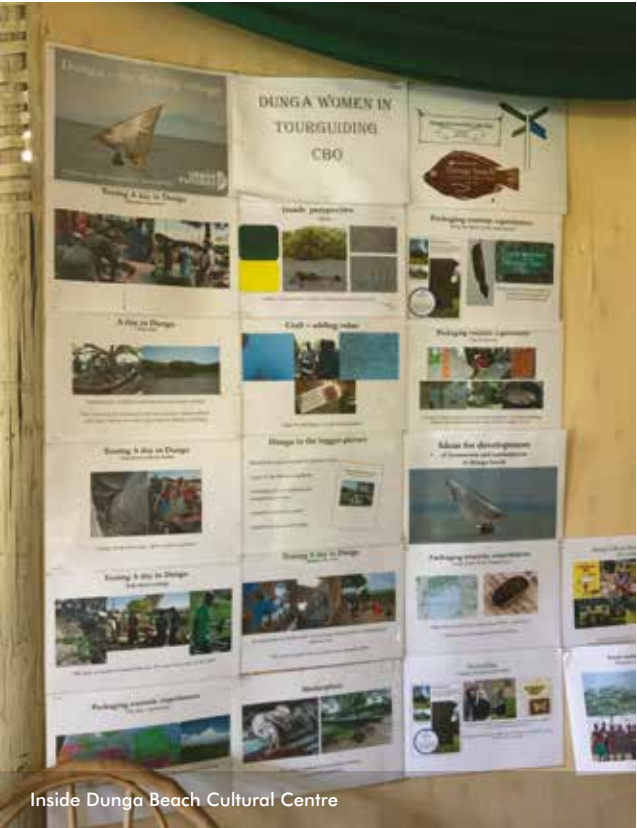
Such processes are always and inevitably political and subject to social and cultural influence. It was, for instance, considered a defining feature of progress to greater gender equality when a female leader was in position at Kit Mikayi, and widows groups at Dunga and Kit Mikayi have raised the standing and income of traditionally marginalized women. However, the emergence of educated women leaders to control and manage CBOs has also been resisted by other groups. Cultural heritage practices, like officiating in sacrifices, engaging in rituals at sacred shrines or narrating sacred stories or myths have been a preserve of senior male elders, and women are not able to inherit land. Women are often viewed as migrants to a landscape when they arrive as a result of marriage. Often, site management remains a domain for men, young people are relegated to cleaning duties at the sites, whilst women dance, cook and craft.

Conflicts over leadership stem also from the tenuous position that committee members can hold within the site. Reports from Abindu suggest that members of the CBO do not respect the offices held by executive members, as they are drawn from the community. This lack of respect is seen to result in greater leadership wrangles where officials are not seen as experts, either in or for their communities. The intermediary function of the CBO in safeguarding plural values and interests is also challenged by conflicts with the BOM. On the one hand, the dual-pronged structure is seen as complex and hindering decision-making and implementation. On the other hand, BOMs



Scenic rocky landscape at one of Kisumu's sacred and cultural sites

have been accused of political interference. In the case of Kit Mikayi, the legal status of the BOM is drawn from the National Museums of Kenya, and officials are seen as 'outsiders' without the appropriate skills, and divorced from day-to-day management, positioning authority and power beyond the purview of the CBO.



Inside Dunga Beach Cultural Centre



#4: MOBILISING IN A TIME OF COVID-19

March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe. International and domestic travel was banned or severely curtailed. Markets, gatherings, crowds dispersed. Tourism ground to a halt. We redesigned the project and reallocated budgets to support community researchers who documented the impacts and implications of the pandemic on lives and livelihoods at the sites, and the roles of community-based management.

Kenya confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in Nairobi on 13th March 2020, following the outbreak of the disease in Wuhan, China in December 2019. On 15 March 2020, the government announced several directives to curb the spread of COVID-19. These included the restriction of travel from any country with any case of COVID-19. Kenyan citizens were exempt, as well as foreigners with valid residence permits (provided quarantine procedures were followed). All schools and higher learning institutions were ordered closed, government workers directed to work from home and private businesses encouraged to follow suit. The government further instituted a daily curfew from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. except for key workers and essential service providers. Clubs, restaurants and non-essential businesses were closed, international borders shut and flights suspended, and lockdowns were announced in key hotspots.

COVID-19 policies included social distancing, a ban on public gatherings and fewer passengers in public vehicles (Nanyingi, 2020). Some of these measures were eased from July 2020, including the resumption of local air travel and the opening of places of worship, however, the nation-wide curfew was extended (Maombo, 2020). A second wave of the virus started again from April 2021, with tightening night curfews, limited carrying capacity on public vehicles, bans on worship and other forms of social gathering likely to draw any crowd. In June 2021 Kisumu was leading in COVID-19 infections in Kenya. Western Kenya region accounted for 60% of coronavirus infection in the whole country.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the *Whose Heritage Matters* project to an initial standstill. Our original plans for mapping and mobilising were not possible to deliver remotely or under conditions of lockdown.

The local research team in Kisumu established a WhatsApp group and paid for data bundles to bring representatives of the four sites together to share knowledge and experiences.

The project was then redesigned around questions relevant to the sites and aimed to:

- map the impacts of COVID-19 during the different phases of the pandemic
- document cultural heritage ventures and initiatives
- establish challenges brought about by COVID-19
- identify mitigation strategies and longer term post-COVID survival measures.

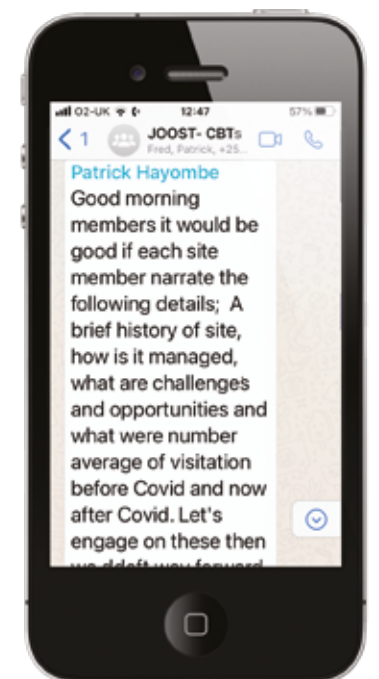
Documenting is a form of mobilisation. It firstly served the goal of enabling ownership of the project by the community researchers and increasing their stake in the forward planning process. It secondly enabled the values of the sites to the lives and livelihoods of residents to be sharply revealed. This documentation forms an evidence base which complements the data we have set out in Parts 1, 2 and 3 of this report. It shows what happens when infrastructures, partnerships and practices that support daily living around the sites are placed under extreme threat. Given the remarkable similarities in data from the four sites, we report on common themes and issues below.

The project also established a second grouping of 19 cultural heritage sites in Kisumu County, including Abindu, Dunga Beach, Kit Mikayi and Seme Kaila. This group – the Lake Victoria Sites Association – enabled peer learning and platform-building to better represent collective interests.

Methods' notes

Two phases of data collection in October to November 2020 and May to June 2021

- Undertaken by paid community researchers trained by JOOUST with virtual supervision from university researchers
- Oral interviews using common guides, observations and photography
- WhatsApp group data collection
- Community-building supported via payment of registration fees
- Consultative dialogues with site representatives and forward planning



WhatsApp Group



Cultural values under threat

At Dunga Beach, 3500 visitors had been recorded in January 2020 alone. From March 2020 the visitor book lay practically unsigned. Community researchers documented how the first wave of COVID-19 had a profound impact on the different values that had previously been associated with the cultural heritage sites. By April-June 2021, some local tourists had started to return, but international visitors stayed away. The initial impacts were largely economic, due to the massive loss of income and employment opportunities brought about by the collapse of cultural heritage activities; six months later, these impacts had worsened, coupled with decreasing social cohesion and diminishing possibilities for political and community-organising.

Overnight the activities around which lives and livelihoods revolved ground to a halt. The stay-at-home orders, curfews and social distancing meant there were no fish festivals, no dances, no dance or climbing competitions, no museums, no boat racing, no entertainment and no cultural activities, such as storytelling or singing. The nascent cultural scene at the sites was decimated. At Abindu, the lack of subscription fees meant that local football clubs could not be supported. At Seme Kaila, creative artists, dance troupes and tour guides left the sites in search of alternative income. As there was no market for local crafts, making ceased, with a decline in production following a decline in demand. By May-June 2021 even the few cultural activities that sites had been able to continue were again shut down, as all gatherings – from dancing, singing, crafts and sacrifices or school visits – were banned.



Cultural goods for sale at Kit Mikayi
Credit: Kit Mikayi

Creative artisans depend on the platforms they get from cultural events

Kit Mikayi Respondent

Artists have suffered a major blow since most of the visitors purchasing the items are not available

Abindu Respondent

Lack of tourists at the site has made the artists, dance troupes and craft-men to lose interest in undertaking cultural activities at the site

Seme Kaila Respondent

Storytelling was one of the affected cultural activities since social distance was not observable during such activity

Seme Kaila Respondent

Site management faced tribal or clan clashes as people would fight over leadership positions at the site

Kit Mikayi Respondent

The economic impact of the pandemic has been profound. With no or low visitor numbers, and curtailment of free movement making transport to the sites more expensive, revenue from gate, parking or service fees collapsed. Income-generating activities such as boat rides, tour guiding or the sale of cultural artifacts, herbal medicine and local foods ceased. Jobs were also lost in allied hospitality industries. Members' contributions to CBOs declined, leaving little or no operating costs for CBOs: salaries and bills for electricity or water remained unpaid. Some sites experienced a loss in donor income, whilst others struggled as arrears were accumulated on unpaid loans.

Unemployment, poverty and hunger rocketed. Young people were already turning to alternative income opportunities such as farming or transport instead of tour guiding. By May-June 2021 even more tour operators had been forced to close, such as Milimani Beach Resort, Hill Camp Hotel, Kiboko Bay, Red Gate Hotel and Park View Hotel. The loss of income at sites such as Dunga Beach meant that there were no funds to maintain basic equipment and boats and nets could not be repaired. Even though some local visitors had returned between late 2020 and June 2021, they had little income to purchase products, whilst artists were not able to purchase materials for making.

People continued to leave the sites to look for employment elsewhere; whilst even those young people that had secured other jobs found their income under threat, as revenues from *matutu* riding or *boda boda* declined. Young people and women were particularly impacted with the loss of independent incomes.

Community researchers reported a rise in petty crimes around the sites, like the theft of food, cultural artifacts or mobile phones,

and an increase in house burglaries. Several respondents attributed the rise in petty crime directly to the lack of activities available for young people, as well as to meeting basic needs. Increases in sexual abuse and a rise in gender-based violence were also reported. Social support mechanisms were also affected; donors were reported to have stopped paying for student fees, whilst associations like Abindu Welfare were not able to support groups.

The data collection in May-June 2021 suggested that social cohesion had deteriorated with an increase in tribalism and family 'wrangles' as most lost jobs and had to stay at home. Clashes were evident over the leadership of CBOs. In the case of Kit Mikayi – and in light of the designation of the site as World Heritage - what has been described as a 'coup d'état' took place in 2020 in which the female leader was effectively removed and replaced by different male-dominated leadership.

Government restrictions on social gatherings made social group meetings aimed at collective bargaining power illegal, with social-economic networking activities such as table banking or *chama* being against COVID-19 containment measures. Social cohesion around the sites was further weakened through the absence of public meetings, poor information sharing or training events. The stigma attached to associating with anyone who had contracted COVID-19, even if recovered, exacerbated lower levels of community association even when regulations permitted.

Many people reported increasing depression and poor mental health, with the impact on young people particularly worrying. This was compounded by restrictions inhibiting spiritual activities, such as cleansing, or visiting traditional herbalists and diviners, leading some to report a lack of hope and demoralisation. Little prayer, fasting, meditation or collecting of holy water was permitted at the sites.

We were not allowed by the government to visit the Abindu shrine and it affected us spiritually

Abindu Respondent

A key concern was around the impact of COVID-19 on traditional Luo burial practices, where important rites and practices were outlawed, such as feasting and viewing the body. By June 2021, this was producing high levels of trauma for local

communities, leading to a loss of faith, feelings of abandonment by government and depression. There were reports that burial practices had been covertly resumed in some cases, leading to an upsurge in positive coronavirus cases.

Many people feel they are disrupted from practicing their culture

Seme Kaila Respondent

Baptism in lake waters at Dunga, or weddings at Kit Mikayi, could also not take place. Places of worship were closed, with no night prayers; only a few activities moved online through platforms such as Zoom, Youtube, KENET or Googlemeet. Community researchers recorded anecdotes that some religious leaders were engaging in other practices like selling alcohol. The closure of churches has also produced resentment, as politicians have still held rallies, attracting crowds. By June 2021, the researchers documented a continued loss in religious observation: some people believed that if government could close churches, this showed that God did not own them in the first place.

Access to the sites for many herbalists was restricted, although there were also reports of illicit access being gained to continue practising. At some sites, a shift to treatment from trained medical personnel was reported as ritual healings could not be performed.



Community researchers at Kit Mikayi
Credit: Kit Mikayi

Traditional healers or traditional herbalists have not been affected much by the pandemic based on the fact that the practitioners operate individually and are able to sneak into the forest and harvest the tree roots

Abindu Respondent



Lake Victoria. Credit: Tim May

The impact on the environmental and aesthetic value of the cultural heritage sites has also been debated. On the one hand, an increase in consumption of locally available foods has been reported, farmed locally and using traditional preservation methods.

Young people have been involved in planting local vegetables at Abindu such as blackshade, *mchicha* and *manage* which are traditional nutritious vegetables seen to cure ailments and diseases. However, in search of farming land for alternative incomes, land clearing for cultivation has increased right up to the site boundary, raising concerns about land grabbing.

At Dunga Beach, the first community research reports evidenced less pollution and positive impacts on conservation efforts at the site. Similarly at Abindu, researchers reported a reduction in external intruders to the site and an overall improvement in the preservation of the caves. Across the sites, vegetative regeneration was enabled, with less human-centred destruction of habitats and littering.

On the other hand, there was site-wide concern that waste collection and hygiene was not being maintained. Water hyacinth at Dunga Beach is starting to take root, inhibiting the ease of access for fishing boats. By June 2021, greater vegetation growth had led to increased numbers of crocodiles, hippos and snakes roaming around the beach, attacking people. A lack of funds to buy protective equipment such as gloves meant that vegetation could not be cleared away. When heavy rains arrived, the Dunga Boardwalk, a central plank in the ecotourism venture, started to rot. At the time of writing, government funds have been promised for its repair.

In some sites, the pandemic enabled some time-out to undertake renovations to the sites and tree planting. However, elsewhere, increased vegetation has been a mixed blessing, as the sites have become less well tended and unkempt, and quality has degraded. Local people have resorted to unsustainable practices such as burning charcoal, which interferes with vegetative cover and pollutes air and soil.

Anthills have molded on the site and spiders made webs all over

Seme Kaila Respondent



Shaping mitigation responses

Our community consultations focussed on how the pandemic affected the roles of CBOs and what short- and long-term strategies could be put in place. Here we highlight five key issues which have shaped the ability of CBOs to mobilise for response and recovery.

1. CBOs need to ensure COVID-compliance for site re-opening

Community-based organisations have played a key role in local public health and promoting adherence to COVID-19 protocols. Irrespective of their cultural mission, the CBOs have provided critical local support functions in the pandemic response, from providing handwashing tanks, performing temperature tests, sharing health education posters and sensitising the local community about how to curb the spread of the virus. It has been seen as critical to demonstrate strong COVID-19 protocol compliance as a foundation for any

safe re-opening to visitors. However, by June 2021, CBOs reported not having the funds to get equipment to stay COVID-19 secure. Whilst the community researchers reported a good overall awareness of COVID-19 at the sites, there were exceptions. Some people were concerned to use sanitiser because of its alcoholic smell; others believed that COVID-19 was a ‘whiteman’s disease’, a biological weapon, political tactic, or government propaganda to get funding from donors.



I personally wasn’t aware that COVID-19 was real, I later got to know it truly exists and I was even caught up with fear when I visited the hospitals and realized how people were dying of COVID-19. As an administrator, it is my role to ensure people take necessary precautions to help curb the spread of COVID-19

Seme Kaila Respondent



2. The ability to organise has been severely compromised by physical distancing and low technological provision

Views from respondents differed on how well the CBOs have been able to operate during the pandemic so far. Some CBOs carried out virtual meetings, or outdoor socially-distanced ones. In other cases, the CBO was considerably weakened or did not meet: for instance, given its infancy as an organisation, coordination at Seme Kaila was more difficult to achieve as the site had not started functioning properly before COVID-19. Kit Mikayi, on the other hand, was able to leverage some support and continue with

some activities during the period (see p.39). CBO members followed protocols to stay home, and elders played a more limited role in the management of the sites given their increased vulnerability. One challenge has been a lack of protective equipment for workers. However, the biggest challenge was in communicating without physical meetings or appropriate provision of or skills in digital technologies. The project’s WhatsApp group and provision of phone credit was important in this respect.



Office bearers who are away from the site have made it difficult for the site activities to continue

Seme Kaila Respondent



3. The loss of organising and leveraging power has multiple effects and diminishes partnership building

The consequences of this loss in organising power have become more evident over the course of the pandemic. Within the community, there have been no official public or political meetings, or spaces for consultation from government. The ‘political class’ has stopped coming to visit the site and this has made it more challenging for less mature CBOs to get on government’s radar or make new relationships.



Site consultation discussion on response and recovery
Credit: JOOUST



Site consultation discussion on response and recovery
Credit: JOOUST

Overall, sites reported a reduced level of networking between CBO management officials and the county, national and international community. Even for a site such as Kit Mikayi, with its recent World Heritage status, managing the partnership with UNESCO has been difficult. Respondents reported missing the exchange of ideas with partners and visitors, and had to cancel international conferences and workshops which foster partnership.



The absence of chief baraza during the pandemic, which has been a place for communal deliberations on cultural issues, has brought uncertainties

Seme Kaila Respondent



Partners or collaborators like the county government, National Museums of Kenya, and NEMA are no longer working with Dunga due to COVID-19 restrictions. Furthermore, there is very limited communication from them which limits cultural heritage ventures and initiatives alongside their support. Even research organizations like KLIP, universities and other donor institutions no longer hold meetings with Dunga officials

Dunga Beach Respondent





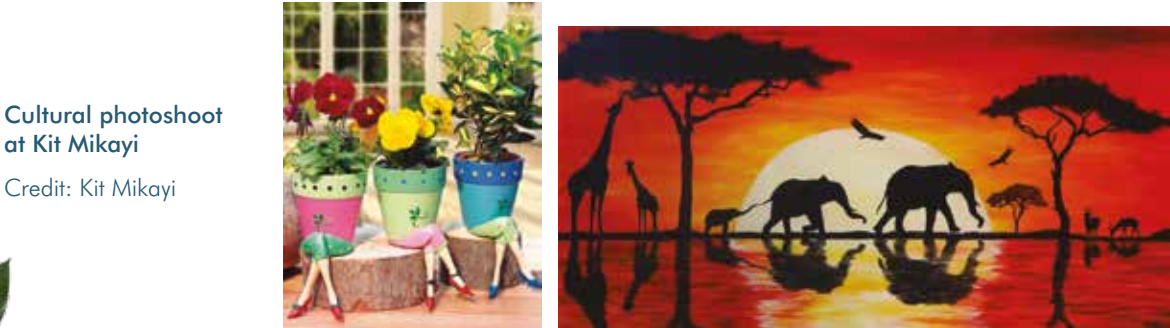
4. There have been variable and diminishing levels of support throughout the pandemic

The first phase of community research reported on some help provided through, for instance, national government weekly relief funds, the provision of face masks, sanitisers, soaps and water jerricans by the county government and additional measures, such as VAT reductions, cancellation of business license fees and a transaction waiver fee for M-PESA (a mobile phone-based money transfer, payments and micro-financing service). Abindu researchers reported assistance from national government to help youth employment through social works Kazi Mtaani. At Dunga Beach, the construction of a health centre was reported in 2020, by Kisumu County, whilst a latrine was provided at Abindu. Kit Mikayi received some marketing help, and were able to host a virtual arts exhibition at the site. Other organisations, such as SHOFCO, Coca Cola and Plan International have supplied hand

sanitizers, face masks and water containers. Sites maintained contact with a few partners such as East Seme CBO and One Acre Fund (Kit Mikayi), the White Villa and Lake Basin Economic Block (Abindu) or Kenya Wildlife Services (Dunga beach). The *Whose Heritage Matters* project, and JOOUST, were also seen as sources of support during the pandemic, in terms of finances, community organising and the documentation that constitutes this report. Overall however, sites reported a gradual dropping of support as the pandemic progressed. Site consultations revealed concerns about the handling of the pandemic, with little or no public participation, a lack of funding, allegations of the misuse of funds by officials and anger at politicians ‘not following their own rules’. This abandonment led to feelings of being ignored by the political class except when they are campaigning.

In focus: Kit Mikayi

Kit Mikayi successfully undertook a number of activities during COVID-19 to engage young people and continue to promote the site. These activities included a cultural photoshoot, the launch of the Kit Mikayi Youth Creative Arts Centre, a Miss Kit Mikayi competition and activities with people living with disability. In December 2020 during a Visual Arts Exhibition, the UNESCO Inscription was presented to the community.



Cultural photoshoot at Kit Mikayi
Credit: Kit Mikayi



 The political class no longer paid attention to the budgeting, implementation and development of plans or objectives regarding cultural heritage, for instance, making roads that lead to the site passable to attract more tourists

Abindu Respondent

5. Short-term mitigation has focussed on COVID-resilience and planning for normality; longer-term, the assumptions of ‘ecotourism’ are being questioned

The short-term priority for the sites, as noted above, was to identify mitigation strategies to ensure COVID-19 protocols at the site were adhered to. CBOs sought to supplement income and find alternative ways to support lives and livelihoods. Some cultural activities were able to be promoted online as social media and websites were used, especially in Kit Mikayi, to promote the sites. With the support of *Whose Heritage Matters*, a new Lake Victoria Sites Association was set up to help build collective power and support the CBOs to articulate their interests. Other strategies deployed by the CBOs included diversifying products and activities as well as supporting young people to set up their own businesses. Through seeking alternatives, the assumptions underpinning an ecotourism approach reliant only on international visitors have become increasingly apparent.



Community consultations in each site provided an opportunity to discuss these challenges, in the context of national initiatives to support local tourism, such as Tembea Tujenge Kenya: ‘Kenya for Kenyans’.



Recovery strategies

The consultative discussions highlighted common priorities for the future, as well as site-specific forward plans. The CBOs proposed measures to restore the sites, to resume previous trajectories but also to diversify and re-think the future in a post-pandemic context.

Common priorities identified across the sites

■ Restore

- Improve access to the sites
- Repair sites through clean-up operations and maintenance
- Obtain relief and restoration funds

■ Resume

- Train young people and encourage entrepreneurship
- Attract visitors back to the site by reducing charges for local tourists
- Leverage and rebuild partnerships with different governmental and non-governmental organisations
- Craft and cultural activities such as basket, pottery and boat making
- Market and promote sites, and strengthen networks

■ Rethink

- Reduce dependence on foreign tourists by promoting local visitors
- Increase small businesses and invest in small-scale farming, such as vegetable growing, to avoid monopolies
- Explore alternative income and resource mobilisation opportunities
- Promote digital literacy, such as M-PESA, for bill payments
- Adopt more digital technologies, including laptops, websites and blogs
- Engage in digital marketing and branding



Planning for the Future at Kit Mikayi. Credit: Kit Mikayi

Site-specific forward planning

■ Abindu Caves

- Improve the road to the site
- Build offices and cultural resource centre
- Secure accommodation and refreshments at the site
- Secure infrastructure, such as electricity, water, toilets
- Develop physical site, through fencing and signage
- Market and brand the site
- Develop digital infrastructure – internet connection
- Dig bore hole for development of underground spring water for sale to public
- Purchase church for site expansion

■ Dunga

- Build independence for fishermen, through boat ownership and modernisation i.e. modern fibre boats
- Reduce over-reliance on fishing through diversification
- Extend the boardwalk into the lake and install a roof
- Certification for tour guides
- Stop poor or illegal fishing methods
- Enforce laws preventing unsustainable economic practices like sand harvesting and quarrying of rocks
- Develop site strategic development plan including social hall, tree planting, floating house structures, nature walks and trails, parking, land for expansion of primary school

■ Kit Mikayi

- Construct accommodation facilities
- Build recreational centre
- Support strong cooperative society
- Create partnership with larger tourism association like LVTA
- Develop water reservoir for adequate water availability throughout the day
- Maintain fence
- Improve roads, drainage, water supply, toilets

■ Seme Kaila

- Install site signage and fencing to secure the site
- Establish cultural centre to share the history of the site
- Learn from other sites to develop community-based ecotourism approach



Boats at Dunga

Recommendations

By documenting the impacts of the pandemic, community researchers have confirmed the critical function that ecotourism and cultural activities play in the lives and livelihoods of residents around these cultural heritage sites – and the deep-seated and traumatic effects that result when activities, partnerships and associated incomes cease.

Policy briefs developed collaboratively with members of the CBOs across the four sites highlighted recommendations for county

and national governments, and other local, national and international partners:

1. Short-term relief and strategic investment

Immediate relief and support is needed for those living and working around the sites, to meet basic needs and restore livelihoods. Mitigating the impacts documented in this report is a key task for these cultural heritage

communities. Strategic investment is then needed in core funding for CBO operational costs, as well as repairing and renewing the sites post-COVID-19.

2. An integrated cultural heritage and development policy and implementation plan

A clear and integrated cultural heritage and development policy and implementation plan would enable the sites to better align different interests and manage tensions that result from competing cultural heritage values. Policies should better reflect the multiple values at the sites, including the desire to preserve tangible and intangible properties

of cultural heritage, and support the CBOs in balanced, sustainable and just local management. The principle of protecting and promoting communal rights, and the rights of communities to organise and participate in cultural activities, should be foundational pillars of any policy and plan.

3. Institutional strengthening of community-based organisations

The need for community-based organisations is clear, in supporting local ownership and management of cultural heritage sites, and ensuring that any economic benefits can be shared and distributed for greater community benefit. CBOs need to be centred in official strategies for cultural heritage within Kisumu and their role as 'nodes' in co-production partnerships recognised.

This requires supporting members in conflict resolution, good governance and equitable representation, for instance, through training and skills development. Mechanisms and structures for peer learning and the representation of collective interests, such as those initiated through *Whose Heritage Matters*, should be supported.

4. Site-specific integrated ecotourism development plans

Each site requires a tailored integrated development plan which builds on the values identified in and for the sites. This means mapping positive and negative inter-relationships between different priorities. This report is an important part of the evidence base for such a plan. An integrated development plan would include

infrastructure upgrading, such as roads, electricity, fencing and cultural centres, but also the identification and piloting of alternative economic initiatives to eliminate unsustainable practices. It would include a consideration of roles played by different groups and best practice on tackling gender and inter-generational inequalities.

5. Strong co-production partnerships to mobilise resources and leverage assets

Cultural heritage management is messy and reflects the wickedness of complex urban issues; the relationship between cultural heritage and social, economic and environmental justice is not linear nor simple. Co-production partnerships are needed to

negotiate and navigate this messiness, at the heart of a nexus of heritage values, interested parties and different kinds of expertise. When these partnerships work well, resources and assets can be leveraged tactically to support lives and livelihoods at the sites.



#5: LAST WORDS

Whose Heritage Matters aimed to understand whether, and if so how, cultural heritage could be mobilised to support more sustainable and just urban futures.

In Kisumu, the project built on a commitment to ecotourism and focussed on four cultural heritage sites: Abindu, Dunga Beach, Kit Mikayi and Seme Kaila.

Mapping, making and mobilising activities revealed a plurality of values for cultural heritage, in a complex policy and governance landscape, resulting in tensions and contradictions in the meaning and use of cultural heritage.

CBOs are critical actors in local management of cultural heritage sites and safeguard different values. They are not disinterested and can experience internal conflict, however, their strength is in valuing local knowledge and expertise and ensuring that benefits of ecotourism can be widely spread. They are of strategic importance in empowering local communities to take ownership over lives, land, labour and livelihoods at the sites.

The impacts of the pandemic have been profound and pose an ongoing threat to the existence of the sites. Without visitors, cultural activities and production ground to a halt, along with income and revenue generation. Whilst some positive environmental impacts were initially reported, the sites have deteriorated over time. Social fragmentation and conflict has increased whilst opportunities for social and political organising have decreased. COVID-19 has provided a window into the intertwining of the sites in multiple ways with people's everyday lives.

The Kisumu experience suggests that a strategy of ecotourism, with strong CBOs, can help but not guarantee more sustainable and just urban futures. An ongoing negotiation of different values and uses for cultural heritage is required, through an active process of heritagization.

Whose Heritage Matters had to adapt and redesign the project in light of the pandemic. We wanted to offer help to the sites at a time of great need. Initially, we supported the constitution of Seme Kaila CBO and helped visibilise the different values at the sites. During the pandemic, we have supported group learning between sites and collective representation – for instance through the development of the Lake Victoria Site Association where local research leaders provided ideas, support and funds for registration. Community researchers were paid and bought phone bundles. Outdoor meetings, where possible, supported community organising and socialisation. The local research team of JOOUST researchers were seen as role models by site leaders.

Importantly, by documenting cultural heritage values and landscapes before and during COVID-19, this report constitutes an important evidence base and foundation for forward planning. We will continue to work with CBOs to engage with policy-makers and stakeholders at different scales to share this research.



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This report tells the story of the *Whose Heritage Matters* project in Kisumu, Kenya.

It documents how cultural landscapes and sacred sites integrate diverse and plural values for cultural heritage.

Local management matters in managing tensions and resolving challenges in the search for more sustainable and just urban futures.

This means putting community-based organisations at the heart of heritagization strategies from below.

