Heritage Under Threat position paper (v. 04072016)

The 'heritage under threat' research cluster gathers scholars from different disciplines based at the Universities of Leiden, TU Delft and Erasmus University Rotterdam (LDE Alliance). Collectively, the group reflects the diversity of approaches to heritage under threat from disciplines including archaeology, law, anthropology, history, languages, geo-engineering and geophysics.

The idea that heritage is under threat is certainly not new: many initiatives worldwide are dealing with the issue – both within and outside academia – especially since the recent conflict and accompanying destruction in the Middle East. Heritage can be politicized and is prone to be claimed or destroyed by groups. However, not all destruction or threat is intentional or preventable, and indeed, heritage is also under threat due to environmental and other factors.

As a group we believe that through creative thinking and dialogue across disciplines, we can contribute to research and policy on heritage under threat by adopting an original approach to the topic through the use of new techniques and social media. For example, the use of data, imagery and audiovisual material is increasingly important for the recording of sites and objects, and is proving invaluable in post-conflict situations. While physical destruction may not be preventable, we can at least 'save' data and images, and everyone in theory can participate in this process. In this way the democratic element of heritage is also emphasised.

This need not be limited to heritage in conflict situations, but can equally be applied to intangible heritage, to indigenous peoples' heritage, coastal and maritime heritage, archives and historical documents, oral history and even in legal cases. In sum, images, both of the outside part but also of the internal structure play an important role in recording, tracing, documenting and preserving heritage, and the multidisciplinary uses of imagery in heritage under threat is something we as a group will be exploring further.