

Finding the Balance

Preserving Culture While Transforming Society



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The loss of cultural heritage is often viewed as a necessary consequence of economic and social development. Most countries try to balance economic development with cultural heritage preservation. The pace of modernization in developing countries, however, puts this balance in favor of economic interests. The loss of cultural heritage can be devastating. As developed countries have learned all too well, once heritage is lost it is difficult, if not impossible, to retrieve. The consequences of losing heritage are not simply the loss of old buildings or traditional songs. Heritage is the anchor that holds groups together, and its loss can lead to alienation, a sense of defeat, and loss of goodwill.

In this lecture, I will explore these issues through the lens of one country: Mongolia. Rich in mineral resources, Mongolia is relying on the development of these resources to fuel economic growth. A land of nomads will soon be a land of miners. Culture will be transformed. Mongolians greatest fear is that Mongolia will become a land where traditional Mongols no longer live.

In 2010, the Mongolian International Heritage Team was awarded a contract by Oyu Tolgoi LLC, a large Mongolian mining venture, to design a cultural heritage plan (CHP) for the South Gobi. The plan covers tangible resources - the things of the past such as archaeological sites, paleontological remains, and historical monasteries - and intangible resources - traditions encoded in songs, poems, and dances that are created anew each time. The CHP, however is



less about preserving places and things than it is about establishing a process by which Mongolians determine who they are to become by ensuring that they know who they were. Mostly, the CHP is about people and empowering local communities to identify those aspects of culture that are important to them and finding ways to preserve them.

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Location: ESRI Conference Center, 380 New York St., Redlands, CA 92373

Reservations: Seating is limited, so register now or call 909-748-8011 to ensure your reservation

Questions: You can email your questions to redlandsforum@esri.com or contact the ESRI event coordinator at 909-793-2853, ext. 2138.