The Inca in the Plaza: Contesting Change in the World Heritage Historic Center of Cuzco, Peru

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Historic urban centers constitute approximately one-third of the cultural properties on UNESCO’s World Heritage List. These are inhabited places and thus subject to change. Whereas this is recognized by ICOMOS’ “tolerance for change” paradigm, change in heritage properties is not everywhere embraced by the official management sector. A case in point is Cuzco, Peru where the recent installation of an Inca king atop a Belle Époque fountain in the middle of the premier public space of the city has prompted a major dispute between the Municipality (which erected the statue) and the Ministry of Culture (which seeks its removal). Beyond local political antagonisms and ambiguity in the national legal code for heritage management are intertwined issues of place, authenticity, identity, memory, visual integrity, community stakeholdership, colonial legacies and different value systems. This talk uses the controversy over “the Inca in the plaza” as a platform to discuss management of the present past in living historic urban landscapes.