ALTERNATE HORIZONS PLATFORM

Heritage and how it shapes our humanity

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Introduction

To date, 'heritage' does not have a standardised definition at the country level. This is because the nature of heritage differs considerably among people, between places, and over time as influenced by the nature and culture. Furthermore, our attachment to the culture is universal (Lowenthal 2005). Broadly speaking, heritage refers to what the current generation wishes to safeguard for future generations (Lowenthal 2005). Heritage includes the natural and cultural environment which encompasses landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments, biodiversity, collections, past and continuing cultural practices, knowledge, and living experiences (Ivanovic 2008). It is challenging to talk about heritage without referring to culture (Nkwanyana 2018). Culture is about the way of life of particular societies or communities, indigenous belief systems, practices, and customs (Baker et al. 2014).

Herein, heritage is discussed from the South African perspective. Due to its history, South Africa has a rich, diverse, and contested natural and cultural heritage. It offers an interesting example of the search for developing a multicultural society that balances universal principles with the culturally specific perspectives of historically disadvantaged groups. In this article, both natural and cultural heritage are discussed.

In international literature on the different frames of heritage conservation, South Africa is relatively under-represented compared to Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and America (Cocks et al. 2018). The growth in heritage as an industry is shown by the increase in the number of cultural heritage policy documents developed by the major international organizations such as the Council of Europe, the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM, a committee of ICOMOS), the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the

Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC), the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Monuments Fund (WMF). The development of these policy documents indicates that globally, people are aware of and acknowledge the importance of heritage.

Heritage conservation in South Africa

Following the South African democracy in 1994, new approaches to defining, documenting, and preserving heritage emerged, and heritage has become central to the efforts to redress past injustice and build human rights (Herwitz et al. 2015). Nature conservation policies in South Africa have become increasingly culturally oriented. Nature conservation in South Africa dates back to the late 1800s when the Sabi Sand Game Reserve was established. This was then merged with the Singwitsi Game Reserve to form the Kruger National Park (Carruthers 1993). The national parks and state-owned nature reserves aimed to conserve endangered animals and maintain the integrity of ecological systems. This further stimulated the need to conserve landscapes that were devoid of people, and to return disturbed landscapes to their 'original undisturbed form' (Fabricius et al. 2013).

Recently, Nkwanyana (2018) conducted a study on the significance of conserving heritage and indigenous knowledge in KwaZulu Natal province, South Africa. The study aimed to provide authentic products and experiences which are part of cultural heritage tourism and its impact on the rural communities. The Zululand District was selected as it is regarded as the heart of the Zulu kingdom – where many clans and tribes came together hundreds of years ago to form the great Zulu nation. The district is richly endowed with a rich history and a wealth of natural beauty and wildlife, and has a huge potential to attract both domestic and international tourists because of its wealth of cultural heritage. This area is arguably the backbone of the tourism experience in South Africa.

The Zululand District Municipality, as the heart of the Zulu Kingdom, includes large communities which are impoverished and disadvantaged and living in undeveloped settlements due mainly to the apartheid policy of the past. Findings of the Nkwanyana study indicated that the conservation of cultural heritage resources was perceived as significant by the majority of local communities. Interestingly, a significant number of young people indicated that the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in packaging tourism products and the participation in cultural activities were important ways of passing cultural heritage from generation to generation. The community recommended that indigenous knowledge should be the primary source of information when packaging authentic tourism products that have a potential of enriching the experiences of tourists (Nkwanyana 2018).

How does heritage shape our humanity/ubuntu?

UNESCO seeks to encourage the identification, protection, and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world, considered to be of outstanding value to humanity (UNESCO 1972). Ngogi Mahaye (2018) referred to 'humanity' as being a good community member, living and enjoying life rather than the acquisition of the material. Mahaye further stated that one's humanity cannot be separated from the humanity of those around him/her (2018). Similarly, according to Mkhize (1998), in the African view, a person is defined with reference to the community, and not solely in terms of the physical and psychological properties. The importance of the community in self-definition gave rise to sayings such as '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' (Nguni) or '*Motho ke motho ka batho*' (Sotho), which translate to, "It is through others that one attains selfhood'. UNESCO classifies ubuntu as 'intangible cultural heritage', and is defined as the 'practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, as well as objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith, as recognised by communities, groups, and individuals' (UNESCO 2003). Ubuntu is displayed through cultural dynamics, symbols, and performance practices, which include language idioms, music, and dance. These exist in Africa for the definition of life and the preservation of tangible and intangible knowledge systems (Chernoff 1979). The essence of Ubuntu in this regard is the recognition of the existence of others, and their impact on the lives of the individuals around them.

In South Africa, Ubuntu is important and highly recognised, for example, the National Heritage Council (NHC) South Africa, an agency of the Department of Arts and Culture has launched the annual Ubuntu initiative project which seeks to uphold the legacy of Tata Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela by carrying and emulating the values of Ubuntu to make a difference in our communities. The project promotes values that underpin Mandela's legacy. '*I am because you are, and you are because I am*' – which means no man is an island. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has renewed the essence of ubuntu among South Africans, as they stood together and contributed to the Solidarity Fund, aimed to assist the nation in responding to COVID-19 crisis. Further, the purchase of clothing and food parcels for needy families, and the personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline workers also showed the spirit of ubuntu among South African citizens. The popular phrase '*when days are dark, friends are few*' could not apply to South Africans during these difficult times, as they stood together, driven by the spirit of ubuntu.

In conclusion, to date, efforts have been put to protect, preserve, celebrate, and encourage the heritage in South Africa. Finally, humanity is highly recognised and encourages oneness and caring for those around us.

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