

## Heritage and how it shapes our humanity

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### Introduction

There are several different understandings of heritage. Heritage is what one generation leaves to another, which can assume the form of spiritual or material artefacts or tangible and intangible heritage (Karadeniz 2020; Lenzerini 2011). For Mapesa (n.d.), heritage is something inherited from the past or passed on from one generation to another. According to the World Heritage Convention, heritage includes monuments, groups, buildings and sites. From a broader perspective, it can refer to urban centres, archaeological sites, industrial heritage, cultural landscapes and heritage routes (UNESCO 2013; Mitchell, Rössler & Tricaud 2009).

Heritage can present itself in three specific forms: natural, cultural and industrial. The natural form consists of landscapes, the cultural refers to physical artefacts, and the industrial refers to the history of technology and industry. Heritage can also be grouped in several different ways, and these include educational, aesthetic, artistic and economic value, spanning an ever-increasing method of evaluation. While some are tangible, such as landscapes, buildings and sites, others may exist in the form of values, politics, customs, memories, culture and even entrepreneurial significance (Nilson & Thorell 2018). The significant role that heritage plays and the consequences of not preserving one's heritage have been and should be a concern for all. This article looks at some factors that hinder heritage preservation.

### Relevance of our heritage

The importance of heritage in every society cannot be underestimated. Changes occur frequently in our different cultures as modernisation creeps through societies. The historical fibre of nations acts as a pivot upon which societies are built. The level of connection among societies is well established when attention is paid to the need to preserve our heritage (UNESCO 2013).

The role that cultural heritage plays in humanity has also received mention in the learning objectives for the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) goals formulated by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Von Schorlemer 2020). ESD's objectives aim to assist learners in making informed and educated decisions that empower them while also being responsible for environmental integrity. They are meant to create a viable and just society for the present and future generations that recognises cultural diversity. ESD is important as it highlights the critical role that heritage plays in our society and the need to preserve it. One way to do this is to focus on heritage sites and the role they play in society.

There are important roles that heritage sites play in the various contexts within which they are found. These include economic/commercialisation as well as entertainment (Nilson & Thorell 2018). Economically, heritage sites are exploited through tourism for the overall benefit of the populace (Alexandrakis, Manasakis & Kampanis 2019). One such economic value of heritage sites relates to the tourism sector and job creation. Tourism generates income for the community as well as the nation. Heritage sites such as Fort Batenstein in the Western Region of Ghana and Robben Island in South Africa not only remind people of history, but also provides sustainable incomes which contributes to development through the provision of social amenities such as schools and healthcare facilities but also provide employment opportunities for the youth who may be found in that sector of the economy. This goes a long way in reducing the unemployment rate and the prevalence of social vices. Heritage sites, therefore, have economic importance for the local people and the country at large if properly managed.

Heritage management refers to instituting appropriate management techniques to safeguard and advance cultural resources for the long-term benefit of people (Ababneh 2016). Heritage management shapes humanity as it is employed to establish strategic engagement with all stakeholders in government and civil society. Examples of governance tools used for this purpose include lobbying and advocacy. Heritage values have also been incorporated into thematic political areas such as social inclusion and community well-being (Lennox 2016). It should be noted that one can maintain certain relationships and associations through identity. Certain heritage sites, such as land and water bodies, play a major role in connecting individuals to past practices (Bindu & Mohamed 2016). Examples are the water bodies found in Kodungallur in India. The interaction that takes place between human beings and non-humans serves as an enduring record of people's lives as well as the work of past generations who occupied a given space and time (Robertson & Webster 2017). It is evident that identity plays a central role in people's heritage (McLean 2006).

A country's heritage should be protected to preserve it for future generations. Better preservation of one's heritage promotes strong inter-connections in society and builds the spiritual and physical well-being of the citizenry. In addition, it promotes peace and common understanding. There is no doubt that heritage has a role in shaping one's identity as it has an identity-conferring status (Urry 1995; Silva 2014). It represents the identity of people by creating a more positive individual and communal self-image and, in effect, shapes the identity of people.

## **Heritage preservation**

Preserving our heritage is a major task for the global community. For instance, in the Sustainable Development Goals, target 8.9 focuses on tourism and target 11.4 emphasises the need to strengthen, protect and safeguard the world's cultural heritage (Morton, Pencheon & Squire 2017). Urbanisation is taking place at a rapid rate, especially in the Global South, and this is greatly impacting landscapes and territories. There is exponential growth in terms of population and unregulated migration, resulting in informal settlements and modified territorial and social structures. Continuous environmental hazards and human-made disasters could have serious effects on heritage sites, and governments need to protect these sites through policy and innovative support (ICOMOS 2021).

Our heritage plays a key role in humanity, and failure to preserve it will lead to the loss of key benefits such as economic gains (Von Schorlemer 2020). Heritage can shape humanity if management methods are effectively implemented, such as institutional frameworks, social mechanisms and values that can holistically be evaluated (UNESCO 2013). Heritage is considered communal property, and efforts must be made to preserve it as such (UNESCO 2013). Governments need to ensure that decisions taken are tailored towards ensuring the overall well-being of the citizenry as well as the locations where heritage sites are found. In most contexts, the heritage sites are isolated from human settlements to reduce the impact that human developments may have on these sites (UNESCO 2013). The surrounding human settlements together with these sites need to be protected and encouraged to develop together.

Recently, the concept of heritage has taken on a different dimension in respect of the context as heritage sites ceased to be isolated from human settlement. For our heritage to assume its rightful position in our society as something that shapes humanity, there is a need to engage all manner of stakeholders. These stakeholders will implement policies that can support the long-term management of such historical sites. Countries that have heritage sites are expected to collaborate with agencies that support plans to ensure that the sites are preserved for the benefit of humanity (UNESCO 2013).

## Factors that can hinder heritage preservation

Heritage shapes humanity when it is well managed by the community within which it is found (Halme et al. 2017). Failure to involve the community in the decision-making process can have negative consequences. An example is seen in a study conducted by Silva (2014) at the rural Portuguese village of Sortelha, which indicates that heritage could have an integrative as well as a divisive role in societies. Where the involvement of the community is relegated to the background and there are power imbalances between stakeholders, socio-economic influences such as extreme poverty among the community can affect the benefits it will have from a country's heritage sites.

It is also important that would-be managers of these heritage sites communicate and find a compromise with the community members in managing the sites. Negotiation is a tool that can promote the effective cooperation that decision-makers hope to achieve (UNESCO 2013).

## Conclusion

From the above, it can be concluded that heritage indeed shapes humanity, as it outlines one's identity. To a large extent, having a better appreciation of one's past goes a long way to surmounting the challenges of the present and future. The relevance and preservation of heritage sites were discussed, and factors that can hinder heritage preservation were also looked at.

It is not enough to just conserve our heritage sites. Rather, there is a need to effectively implement measures that will manage them in the long run for the benefit of society and the nation at large.

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