

# **Insights into the Cultural Heritage Landscape**

## **a Reader**

stemming from an ERASMUS Intensive Programme Project

“European Cultural Management Policies and  
Practices for the Creative Use of Cultural Heritage”

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## **Chapter 5. Politics of Cultural Heritage**

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## **Cultural Policy and Politics of Culture: Communities and Society**

### ***Living heritage in a reflexivity and integrative urban space***

#### **Introduction**

All approaches to the Cultural Heritage subject dependent on a theoretical position. At first, when the social actors and researchers interested in the problem of cultural heritage, they took a position of defending and preserving its cultural legacy, owned by community. This awareness has been evolving over time. In fact, the importance and sense of cultural heritage in community life was understood only gradually. Over time, national and international institutions built a complex theoretical, legal and administrative collection, reflecting views and perceptions of the role of cultural heritage in community's lives.

It is in this process of political management that we have seen cultural policies and the definition of politics of culture in cultural heritage. And it is at this point that the interests, the ability to impose, or not, rules and procedures, the definition of objectives about selection and heritage purposes, - these have led to a conflict between institutions and actors, with the authority to define, and with communities composed of cultural actors.

The conflict is not itself a problem. The problem is when it moves from fixed and not negotiated positions. Or when powerful political forces and totalitarian ideologies have a sectarian and discriminatory political culture. All cultural politics should be constructed from a politics of culture, with a new position about the meaning of "use" of heritage (Smith 2006), their membership and their interpretation within a relational social space.

In wanting to make a contribution to this debate, we propose a policy context of cultural heritage in anthropological research. The importance of this perspective is not only in a critical anthropological theory, in the bases of reflection in cultural heritage, as a problematic and complex subject, but in the ethnographic methodology and their consequences. Fieldwork with one ethnographic perspective in the research and in the implementation of one politics of culture, give us the conditions to understand politics of reflexivity and integrative actions in local communities. The values of this methodology are: position in relational rationality; conscientiousness of human values and negotiation of the self's; perception of the construction of new identities in a "frontier culture"; recognition of difference.

This is through everywhere, but is more important to understand the cultural policies, and mobilise one politics of culture about cultural heritage in the urban space. Fieldwork, work in and with "context", is a very important methodology to help researchers and professionals in heritage management and in technologies for heritage. This methodology, and their acceptance and application, enables peoples and societies to the recognition of difference in a relational reason (Sen 2009). Culture and politics represent a capacity to "talk back" to society; culture and politics deal with meanings. Only "in context" is it possible understand these meanings and to develop this capacity to "talk back". In everyday life, "culture and politics are real and concrete; they guide possible courses of actions and generate the conditions required for memory of the past and projection into the future" (Roberge 2011: 435). It is impossible to talk about the relationship between culture and politics without a discussion about the capacity to criticism in our societies, in one "aesthetic public sphere" (Habermas 1962/1989). Criticism is key to understanding how culture and politics converge in the process of creating society's interpretation of itself. The capacity to criticise is a condition to one society has a self-interpretation and gives opportunity to others groups outside dominant groups to have a social intervention in the democratization of policy arts (Jancovich 2013) and in heritage interpretation.

We suggest valuing the relationship that currently exists between social science and humanities-based approaches to heritage and the professional conservation sector oriented by a scientific materialism. Heritage

studies need one new account for its relationship to today's regional and global transformations by developing post-western understandings of culture, history and heritage and the socio-political forces that actualise them.

In this perspective, communities, researchers, professionals in heritage management, and political leaders need a new position for cultural heritage, where cultural policies are the expression of one politics of culture, part of one way of thought and action. If in this moment people propose a critical view of the cultural heritage studies, we need a process to implement this critical theory; we need to provide methods, and theoretical context for the development of innovative technologies and strategies, to investigate, treat, develop, and disseminate the cultural heritage. How? i. Exceed the historical, architectural and economic vision of heritage; ii. Propose a critical view of the meaning of heritage's identity and the potential conflicts that this vision might have; iii. Develop geographical strategies, information technologies and the human, cultural and social dynamics, creative management and invention of space; iv. Integrate communities in the development processes concerning heritage research, and the promotion of social and experiential spaces; v. Develop a new look at the concept of creative industry, museum practices and the management of cultural heritage.

### **Communities and Cultural Heritage**

When we talk about community engagement in cultural heritage strategies, we are in the popular mode of heritage organisations (local councils, cultural institutions, etc.). They emphasise the importance of community consultation and involvement.

Alternatively, community engagement projects may also develop in response to grass-roots campaigning from the community groups that larger organizations may seek to engage with. Such projects often evolve from an identified need or area of importance, and often have established participants and community support. This form of community-driven engagement has the potential to move beyond the ambitions of a council or collecting institution to create meaningful ongoing collaborations between organisations and local communities.

The notion of cultural heritage change by one new awareness of mediation, between community and institutions of heritage. There exists a potential conflict in the negotiation of identity in cultural heritage, because it should find diversity of heritage, diversity of participants and diversity of "places", that is, diversity in politics of power: manifestation of the citizen's power encounter "authorised heritage discourse" (AHD) (Smith 2006).

In this way, heritage processes come to include and/or exclude different conceptions of the past (voices, experiences, interpretations and narratives), actors (individuals, groups, communities and nations) and materialities / immaterialities (objects, buildings, landscapes and localities, social and cultural performances, practices, etc.). The "use" of heritage is problematic (Smith 2006), but with different possibilities. Innovative use of heritage studies and heritage management by scholars and local community actors or world institutions (UNESCO, etc.), with a new conceptualized vision, give us a possibility to promote the participation in citizen development by civic groups and the promotion humanitarian values and human rights in global societies. More important than this, it is urgent look at the presence of these values in cultural expressions as one of the more important indicators of cultural heritage in local communities. Every community has one memory and particular contribution for human beings, and the right to enjoy this heritage. The ways to express and live this right are a cultural heritage, and integrate human rights in the evaluation and management of heritage sites and cultural heritage expressions have a central role in public interpretation in the politics of heritage (Mahoney 2007; Jokilehto 2012; Silberman 2012). This is true for one preoccupation to make an international doctrine with relationship between cultural heritage and human rights (Jokilehto 2012), but also in the safeguarding of documents and interpretation of heritage (Silberman 2012). The extensive production of international conventions by UNESCO for heritage, and their implementation by the members of this UN agency, is a considerable theoretical body on this subject.

Anthropologists and other social scientists have looked at the importance of the problem of human rights in the perspective of social activism (Goodale 2009, Meskell 2009, Hodder 2010). But other possibilities are more interesting. With the methodology and research in anthropology subjects, for example in cultural heritage, theoretical consequences of this research in applied anthropology can change the policy management of heritage, namely in the introduction of local communities in the field of heritage interpretation and communication with others stakeholders. The interpretation of a cultural landscape, historic cities, heritage sites,

or artefacts and performances, in a museum is not simply a matter of utilizing new interpretive technologies. These subjects are one history, one contextual culture and set of geographical conditions, a complex of relational powers and sophisticated interests, as the use of a simple innovative technology does not have the capacity to solve. We need cultural words, cultural meaning and to know the sophisticated field of communication of their cultural community, to make a good interpretation. A technology without access to the performative meaning, without integration local community is misunderstanding the cultural heritage communication. It is in this way that heritage, cultural and historical memory safeguard and communication is a cultural right, a human right!

If, as Silberman said (2012), UNESCO has over time evolved three policy perspectives, in consequence of the various changes in the approach of the relations between culture and human rights, what resulted from segmenting this policy? Yes, we face the historic development of ideas and the challenges of historic occurrences. But if ‘the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community’ (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 27) needs a scholarly discussion about a problematic conception of culture and about the meaning of “the participation in culture”, currently it is essential for one approach in which these three policy perspectives are worked at the same time. Identified by experts the art and literature with universal values, or working with the interpretation that Connerton (1989) has called ‘performative memory’, by the ‘anthropological’ understanding of cultural identity, the research in colonial and postcolonial countries, where culture was now seen as a distinctive way of life, musealised products of human creativity, or another, a third conception of culture, as a medium of global toleration.

*The ‘high culture’ approach is dependent on scholarship and authoritative discourse; the ‘collective identity’ approach is dependent on public participation; and the ‘cultural diversity’ approach is dependent on both individual autonomy and the acceptance of universal principles. Thus, through these various modes of public heritage interpretation the acknowledged human right ‘to participate in the cultural life of the community’ has multiple meanings and actions, not a single, unambiguous way to participate.* (Silberman 2012: 248-249).

The question is that (and it is the same Silberman position) the three approaches to culture are not exclusive, nor did one replace the next over time. When we talk about a ‘relational reason’, and others about ‘dialogic’ approach ((Ablett and Dyer 2009), we don’t talk only about intangible cultural heritage, in the exclusive senses of “transmitted from generation to generation, constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity ...” (Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention), but about all elements of cultural heritage, because performative expressions as material culture need one “relational reason” interpretation.

After the “elite” approach, the ethnicity preoccupation and after an intercultural dialogue – everyone a window on one historic moment of cultural interpretation –, all communities live the complexity of their cultural heritage with these three approaches, in every historic moment. This experience is problematic and many times a conflicting experience. But in this historic moment of cultural globalization, cultural communities need to live their heritage in continuous negotiation; ‘conflictive experience’ is now a place to understand and to make a relational interpretation of heritage. ‘Centers’ and ‘borders’ don’t exist in themselves, but every place and cultural artefact is a centre and a border in a relational position. Everyone is important, evolving and engaging in the communication and interpretation of what he thinks is his cultural heritage, questioning the relationship between authoritative voices and passive listeners (Yúdice 2003).

Local communities have the right to participate and the right to integrate in its heritage cultural values that best contribute to their quality of life and well-being. Quality of life, health and social justice should not be in the concerns of those who study cultural heritage? In participation, civic groups have a special role in the question about contributing to negotiate and mediate possible conflicts in cultural heritage research and promotion. When conflicts originate in “cultural identity”, what is the role of cultural heritage to build peace (Leher 2010)? The political and social significance of heritage can be understood in the context of the growing recognition of ‘identity politics’, ‘politics of recognition’ or ‘politics of difference’. Recognition of difference became, during the last decades an identifiable arena of political conflict. We need to incorporate the complexities of the cultural activities that heritage helps to mediate. In this work, civic groups, with critical participation, have an obligation to exercise cultural politics where this mediation is possible, as citizens’ power encounter ‘authorised heritage discourse’: diversity of heritage, diversity of participants, diversity of ‘places’ and diversity in politics communication of power.

The participation in cultural heritage management by local communities is a reaction to the exclusive professional and qualified management proposed by central authorities (AHD). Implementing the emphasis on local participation and the social dimensions of heritage is a criteria for one new cultural policy. In the relation between the concept of community and a concept of heritage (Waterton and Smith 2010; Crook 2010) is born the concept of community heritage. It is in the consideration of this concept that we considered the question about the sense to preserving cultural heritage and what role people in local communities and central heritage management should have.

### **Communities, use of ICT tools and mapping material and immaterial cultural heritage.**

The contribution of ethnographic methodology and theory to motivate and renew the creative methodologies of drawings of technology platforms, that want to integrate people in decisions about their cultural heritage, is one of more important influences in the new relationship between communities and heritage by ICT. Following the previous theoretical development, we need technological strategies to integrate people in these decisions, by active or passive forms. See the case of the relationship between ethnography and GIS into ethnographic mapping, via interview practices and innovative ways of communicating research results to stakeholder communities (Brennan-Horley et al 2010). With a construction of GIS mapping by a 'mental mapping' exercise of the respondents, the researchers are forming linkages between people and places.

At the same time, the increasing use of digital and online applications, community-based and specialised educational programming has made heritage interpretation an increasingly powerful medium for encouraging dialogue and communicating heritage values. The participation of individuals and communities in the process of interpretation has become increasingly visible in public contributions to local heritage websites, online exhibitions and archives and in the creation of new online memory communities through social media networks.

In an other order, heritage can be analyzed from the perspective of a system (collection of objects, spaces, monuments – in a tangible or intangible interdependence between them, but that gains relevance as a whole in the process of social and cultural construction of citizens); it can also be seen in a service logic (exhibitions, guided visits to better understand the heritage, etc.); and, finally, can be worked as a product, through the commercialization of artefacts, that are part of the local heritage. The construction of computational systems can facilitate the use and a more democratic and integrative access for users. In the case of cultural heritage that is extremely important.

Interaction Design (IXD) is the field of user experience design that facilitates the relationship between people and the interactive products that they use, in this case cultural artefacts. Based on the principles of user-centered design, the practice of interaction design is based on a real understanding of the objectives, tasks, experiences, needs and desires of users. The interaction design process involves three key features as user-focused, specific criteria of usability and interaction. These essential traits are the foundation of four basic activities of interaction design, viz.: 1) – identify needs and establishing requirements; 2) – develop alternative designs that meet these requirements; 3) build interactive versions so they can be transmitted and enjoyed by other users and; 4) – evaluate them, i.e. measure its acceptance by users (Preece, et al. 2002). In the Participatory Design approach, users are the real experts in areas such as life experience, learning, work, etc. The "users" collaborate with designers, acting as co-creators in the design process (Sanders 2008). Involving users in the design process helps to cope with the expectation and feelings of ownership; however, how and when to involve users is an open question (Preece, et al., 2002). One of the advantages of participative design is the possibility of importing the requirements request for a wide variety of perspectives on the same aspect. Starting from the experience of the real situation, the participants (citizens) can provide very enriching contributions, giving emphasis to the aspects that are most relevant. Given the multiplicity of experiences and perspectives, the design process is thus richer, raising debate and giving a more realistic view of what could be and still isn't. We can talk then of a Contextual Design.

According to Holtzblatt (2001), the contextual design is based on the recognition that any interactive system incorporates a form of work. Contextual design is a method that helps development teams to reach an agreement on what your users need and how to create a well designed system for them. With the contribution of the ethnological methodology, the contextual design has developed new methodologies for interactive systems, for

example, the Service Experience Blueprint (SEB), contextual interview (Preece, et al. 2002), creative workshops, for example with contextmapping - according to Van der Lugt and Sleeswijk Visser (2007), the contextmapping aims to provide development teams with the empathy with the users, the promotion of new ideas, involvement with the project and its objectives -, or the cognitive walkthroughs, a special test of usability.

With the contribution of these ICT tools, worked by this theoretical perspective and methodology, the consequences in cultural policies are undeniable. When we work to integrate cultural heritage into urban life, the possibilities opened by these technologies for promotion and interpretation cultural heritage give us one opportunity to realize our objective. Technologies can be exclusive and accessible only to an elite, but they can also facilitate access to cultural heritage by citizens and provide space for an integrative and participatory discussion. The objective is to integrate the citizens in the construction of systems as in its future use and development.

If urban heritage is a history of one place, in the sense of M. de Certeau (1990), the construction of ICT tools to communicate this heritage needs the interpretation and participation of the local community. And there characteristic of contextmapping, in contextual design, give the possibility to a diversity of discourses and experiences. The interpretation of places also depends on the affordances of the representational medium through which these places are perceived and the ways in which such a medium is socially deployed and interpreted. For example, multi-user virtual environments (MUVES) are a new medium for researching the genesis and evolution of sites of cultural significance (Andrés et al 2012). MUVES are able to model both the tangible and intangible heritage of a site, allowing the user to obtain a more dynamic understanding of the culture. These new media, such as MUVES, can have a profound impact on the presentation and interpretation of cultural heritage sites. As Michon and Antably (2013: 18) say, the effect is “thinking through media”.

This is more interesting when we think about urban spaces and through these tools integrate the inhabitants in the discussion and interpretation of their cultural heritage. Actually, the representation of space and the narration of experiences in cultural space is also a cognitive construction (Campelo 2009), whose complexity is also linked to material systems that supports it. With the use of tools to represent space we made one interpretation of the space, because: (1) the act of representation tends to signify one interpretation of the place and to erase others; and (2) the act of representation tends to have a formative effect on the signified place.

The place, with their heterogeneity, is affected by the activities by large social groups. Dominant groups (i.e. very strong political groups, social and economic elites, academic specialists) typically try to impose one meaning of a given place, obviously theirs, on other groups. Thus, the place becomes an object for the dialectics of domination and appropriation. Maybe in Virtual Maps we ‘recreate’ privileges of the dominant groups’ history. We need to be consciously aware of this possibility, that it has a multiplicity of meanings. If not just that only certain meanings survive the ravages of time, the very act of representation fixes the meaning of place according to its producer’s time and worldview. Innovative visualization of space and possibility of access to other perspectives’ usage of them by minority groups, with virtual maps, allows a more democratic approach to the city ownership. The more visually believable the environment becomes, the more users will understand it as objective history. This objectivity is not a fixed truth or a speech that all space is defined, but in the sense that the perception of this urban space and heritage is truly related to the experience of using its inhabitants. The interpretation of heritage places depends on the affordances of the representational medium through which these places are perceived and the ways in which such a medium is socially deployed and interpreted.

Another field in heritage interpretation and conservation is “the community archives”. With ethnographic research methods and the use of ICT technologies is must easy and with more good outputs to promote the engagement by local communities, marginalized groups, and is most successful allow communities to combine the retention of control over their material with provision for its long-term preservation (Stevens et al 2010). The relationship between professional actors in cultural heritage conservation, mainstream publicly-funded archives and community-based partners give to the work of interpretation and conservation the sense of experience and emotion. The use of ICT technologies is a good preference to evolving experts and community-based partners; the use of ICT by local inhabitants is mostly a contribution to a more important role in planning processes with great consequences in heritage policies.

## Conclusion

Cultural policies associated with the preservation, promotion and interpretation of cultural heritage, in this case urban cultural heritage, require a politics of culture that has on local communities, on users of urban space heritage, an increasingly relevant role, in connection with the authorities, experts and everyone who visits towns and their heritage. A cultural heritage is not a possible policy without creating public space for debate and criticism. This is an opportunity to live the heritage in a responsible and sustainable way. Only the reflexivity and knowledge, provided by this critical debate, enables the participation of each of the citizens, groups and marginalized space, in the interpretation of heritage. It is also this reflexivity that has contributed to those new elements that are associated with the cultural heritage of a community, as in the case of human rights' values in preserving structures, institutions and collective systems that promote human dignity, peace, health and social justice.

Ethnographic methodologies have given an outstanding contribution to achievement these cultural policies. In such a way that contribution is recognized, that we are witnessing currently a close relationship between the construction of new systems and technological tools that promote interactivity, in the collection, processing and information dissemination, with the methodological tools of Ethnography.

But the interpretation of cultural heritage through alternative media prompts new issues in cultural heritage communication policies. ICT tools, the convergence of Internet and wireless technologies, and the increasing adoption of the Web as a platform for the publication of information, requires new strategies for heritage living and communication. With these facilities, it is possible one more personalized access to cultural heritage, as construction systems in order to enable the individual user to easily access it (Ardissono et al 2012). The consequence is a possibility of an online visit, with a more realistic scenario, managing a long lasting interaction, by multiple online visits, and a creation of groups collaborating in order to support the formation of virtual communities (Web 2.0). The technologies and personalized access facilities need more research with museum studies. This is a good objective for interaction with cultural heritage. But we need also to use ICT tools to facilitate interaction in small and large-size communities. We need a politics of culture that developed sophisticated ICT tools (with high-quality information standards at low costs) to construct the "aesthetic public sphere". Maybe the use of appropriate ICT tools is the opportunity to have a democratic, integrative and reflexive politics of cultural heritage.

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