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Lecture

Cultural Heritage as a Strategic Driver for Empowerment – Exploring the Theoretical Conjunction

Abstract

This paper synthesizes academic literature to evaluate and refine the theoretical link between culture, heritage and empowerment. Analysis includes conceptual distinction and strategic application of ideas related to the matter.

Empowerment is an interactive process of power development and acquisition between people and their environment. It contains an internal aspect of building people's self-awareness and confidence and an external aspect of converting knowledge into tangible benefits. Culture as polyvalent glue of society can carry the internal and external empowerment process, employing heritage as a strategic application tool. Cultural heritage, understood as the cultural resources society and its individual members perceive as inherited, links present cultural developments with the past through strategic forming and management. This creation of a sense of inter-generational continuity in society empowers people internally. In the current capitalist economic system, culture and heritage are furthermore subject to market dynamics. To empower people and communities externally, heritage resources need to be processed in a way to generate tangible benefits.

The paper defines this process of heritage production as strategic selection, valuation and forming of cultural heritage resources and lays out a framework for applied integrated heritage development. It is suggested that selected cultural objects are systematically loaded with social, environmental, human, and economic value. All these together constitute the empowerment value of the heritage image.

Keywords: *cultural heritage, heritage production, community participation, cultural representation, empowerment, cultural capital, value creation, heritage management*

The conceptual link: Empowerment through culture and heritage

Sadan (see 1997: 73ff) defines empowerment as an interactive process of power development and acquisition between people and their environment, through which they manage to gain more control over their lives. Empowerment contains internal and external changes for individuals and groups: Internal empowerment denotes a conscience of and belief in one's own resources, abilities and agency while external empowerment is expressed in the ability to convert the acquired reflection, knowledge and information into practical skills, choices and tangible benefits (see *ibid.*: 76).

The essay at hand applies concepts of culture and heritage to this understanding of empowerment. Culture in this context is defined as a way of life of a people (Hatch 1985: 178), materializing in what people think, have, and do as members of society (see Ferraro 2010: 28). It stretches over all functional domains of society, including the economic domain of how people and societies manage and improve their satisfaction of material needs, the social domain of how they manage and improve their relations and group solidarity, and the ecological dimension of how they safeguard the natural resources required (see Carranza Valdés & Stoller 2002).

A number of theoretical approaches and practice-guiding policies (see Keitumetse 2014, UNESCO 2006a&b) suggest the safeguarding, promotion, and management of cultural heritage as a strategic tool for cultural empowerment in practice. Linkages between heritage and internal and external aspects of empowerment are elaborated in the following paragraphs.

1. Culture change, heritage and internal empowerment

Heritage, regarded as selected symbols of cultural history and achievement, can cater for the spiritual needs of the people and serve as a tool for cultural identification. Through management, heritage resources are preserved to be passed from generation to generation and consolidate our sense of what we are and where we came from.

Culture develops in a historical change process along the three temporal dimensions past, present and future. A society's way of life is permanently negotiated between assets and memories inherited from the past and present trends and influences. The components of culture a present society perceives and attends as inherited from the past can be defined as cultural heritage resources. They undergo adaptation and extension by current members of the community, and are passed on to its next generation (see Smith, 2009, after Jopela, 2011). Present changes can be the result of external

influences and interventions i.e. through trade dynamics or globalization, or internal innovations such as inventions. Current trends and influences are integrated and become cultural heritage when passed down generations.

The cultural development process can stall in times of accelerated culture change when present external pressures become too high to integrate with the past. In a discursive process, particular expansive cultural paradigms prevailed, extending to a wider social arena. They established hegemony in political-economic practice, and continue to strive to model others in the same manner. Unable to filter and attenuate the external influences through their cultural frame of reference, the recipients tend to perceive them as obtrusive and feel coerced to adopt them.

The culture for development challenge lies in how to revert, the one-sided cultural appropriation process and restore the balance between the inherited and the incorporated. In the 1920s and 1930s, Ghandi and other intellectuals pointed to the necessity to root modern cultural change in the interpretation of each society's history and cultural traditions (see Escobar 1995: 52). Subjecting heritage to interpretive debate (ibid.) fosters communities'¹ critical consciousness of cultural resources and hence enables them to evaluate and distinguish between traditions worth safeguarding over generations and others to discard. Through documentation and promotion of selected ones, tradition is translated to modernity (see Tilley 2006: 12) and earns its rightful place in a modern world. Such historical integration and ownership empowers the selecting communities internally, they become agents who steer the cultural change process in their life sphere.

2. Multi-dimensional heritage production and external empowerment

Heritage serves as carrier of cultural values from different society domains and specifically as a medium of converting intangible values into economic benefits. Especially in the case of developing societies, the commercialization of cultural symbols can contribute to poverty alleviation and increase the living standard of populations (see UNESCO 2006a&b).

Under the contemporary global economic system, the duality of tradition and modernity outlined above becomes a trinity of tradition, modernity and market (see Hauser-Schäublin & Klenke 2010). Therefore, heritage representation and management efforts are subjected to and negotiated

¹ There are numerous and diverse approaches to define the term community depending on the focus of analysis. For the purpose of this paper the term refers to a group of people with a common relation to a cultural heritage resource.

between all three variables. When corresponding with a market, cultural heritage management becomes a form of production² in a sense that heritage resources are processed and transformed to heritage products that can be brought forward and exhibited to audiences.

Hauser-Schäublin & Klenke (ibid.: 25) suggest “ownership” to be the distinctive characteristic added to culture and heritage resources in the process of production. Through making culture, which they regard as a more collective and unprocessed category, a group’s or individual’s “property”, it becomes a “heritage asset” that provides its owner not only with a clear-cut pattern of identification but a potential opportunity to trade it on the market. Throsby (2012: 47) locates the base for treating culture and heritage as an asset in capital³ theory. Capital in the context of culture refers to various properties that add value to the asset and can potentially be converted into economic and non-economic outputs or benefits (see ibid.: 71). The embodied values (properties) of the heritage image asset are determined in a “valuation” process through quantitative and qualitative measurement and assessment (Andriessen 2005). Throsby (2012: 52ff) suggests several categories of value to determine for an asset responding to all four major domains of development, namely culture, society, environment and economy.

The process of systematic multi-dimensional value creation from selected cultural heritage resources shall henceforth be termed *heritage production*. As a concept it aims at comprehensive integration of internal and external empowerment through drawing upon intangible values and converting them into tangible benefits. A vivid example for multi-dimensional heritage production is the establishment of the European Heritage Label by the European Commission (see 2010). In that

² Production in its broadest sense can be understood as the act of producing, bringing forth, or exhibiting to view. More specifically, the term is often used in economics as the process of transforming tangible (raw materials, subassemblies) and intangible (ideas, information, knowledge) inputs/resources into finished products (goods or services). The aim of production is to transform the value or add value to a resource through processing.

³ Bourdieu (1986) and other scholars (Goodwin 2007, Throsby 1999) suggest different forms of capital society needs to accumulate, utilize and balance in order to achieve sustainable development. Cultural and economic activities of an agent (individual, group, or society) are bound to the available environmental capital in reach for utilization. Cultural capital, are the forms of knowledge, values, skills, education and other advantages an agent creates in response to the environment (natural capital). Cultural capital manifests itself in embodied form as the agent’s mental and physical self-concepts, objectified form as cultural goods such as pictures, books, instruments, machines, etc., and institutionalized form as legally guaranteed qualifications such as educational certificates (Bourdieu 1986: 47). The latter appears similar to the economic concept of human capital circumscribing an available labour force possessing formalized qualifications in specific areas of expertise (see Goodwin 2007). Social capital describes the extent to which the agent can activate and utilize resources of other agents through memberships, relationships, and networks of influence and support (Bourdieu 1986: 51f). Environmental, cultural, and social capital have to be converted into economic capital which denotes an agent’s command over monetary or money generating resources. Heritage capital accumulation is a cyclic process. For instance cultural capital is converted into human capital, which makes it expressible in money terms in form of salaries or generated income, which is in turn re-invested in the development and formalization of cultural and social capital.

European Union (EU) action one can observe the objective of promoting cultural identification on a local as well as on a continental level, the relationship between cultural identification and participatory heritage site representation, efforts of converting cultural identification into tangible economic benefits, and the importance of cultural education and awareness-raising.

From concept to strategy: Towards an applied cultural heritage production model

This section lays out a framework for systematic multi-dimensional heritage production based on a concept from architectural photography. In his article “Über das Abbilden von Bauwerken” Heinrich Klotz (1971) devises guidelines for the appropriate photographic display of buildings and architectural structures. In his work he asserts that the photographic representation must not only depict the building itself, but also its relation to humanity at large, to its environment, to the surrounding society, and to the actual beholder or interpreter (see *ibid.*: 7). This means that to become valid, the image of an object must relate with the meaning-creating properties of that object.

Following the previous argument that efforts of cultural heritage preservation and management produce processed images or representations of selected heritage resources, Klotz’ approach is applied to the proposed model of heritage valuation, meaning that the value of a heritage asset shall be determined in relation to the basic property dimensions humanity, environment, society, and consumer. Furthermore, the framework at hand merges Klotz’ dimensions with Bourdieu’s cultural capital concept (1986) and its current applications in the field of heritage and tourism (Throsby 1999, 2012). The proposed model is visualized in Fig. 1, followed by explanatory notes:

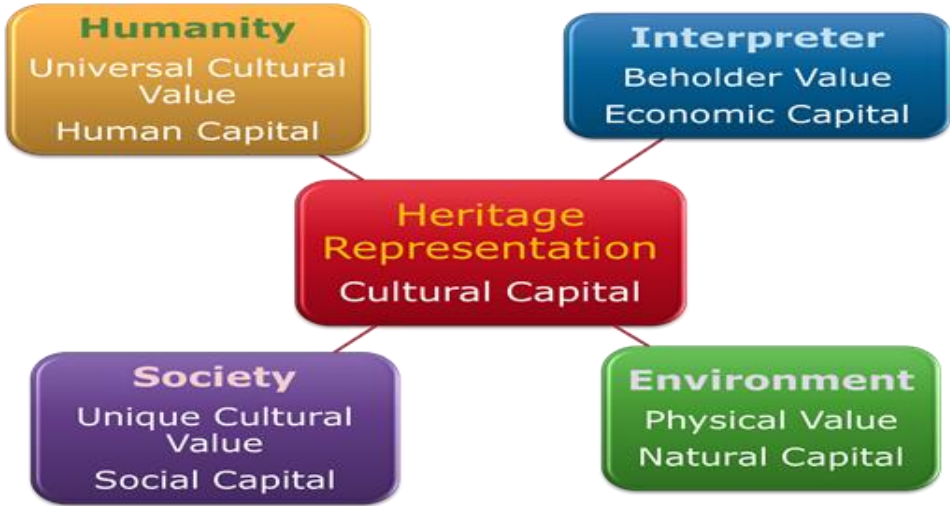


Fig.1: Proposed heritage production model

1. **Heritage representation (red):** This is the actual heritage image, object or site that is created in a project or other heritage management effort. In resemblance to Bourdieu's (1986) concept, the heritage asset can be conceived first and foremost as the manifestation of a community's cultural capital, the pool of heritage resources available, including values, practices, skills and self-concepts of the people, tangible cultural assets and objects, and heritage custodians and living human treasures. Different from Bourdieu (ibid.), the suggested model does not treat cultural capital as a separate category, but as the medium in which all other forms of capital culminate. Heritage valuation in this dimension responds to all forms of cultural value suggested by Throsby (2012: 54ff) including aesthetic value, symbolic value, spiritual value, social value, historic value, authenticity value, and scientific value of an asset. As a culmination point, the heritage representation itself serves as a medium for internal and external empowerment.

2. **Society (purple):** The heritage image foremost stands as a representation of the culture of the bearing society. To draw on this property it must be loaded with unique socio-cultural values characterizing that particular society. In Bourdieu's interpretation, utilizing the society dimension means drawing upon and developing available social capital, in the form of social relations, support, cohesion and solidarity, which society members can activate (see Bourdieu 1986: 51ff). This dimension promotes internal empowerment whereby community participation, stakeholders' willingness for sharing and cooperation, and people's awareness and identification with the asset serve as value indicators for a socially attractive product.

3. **Environment (green):** Culture is created in relation to surrounding natural environment, in other words it draws on available environmental capital (see Goodwin 2007). The heritage image must as well make references to the natural resources in which the displayed cultural characteristics are embedded. This property supports internal and external empowerment, observable through environmental awareness and protection (internal) and economic utilization (external) as value indicators.

4. **Humanity (yellow):** Heritage representations furthermore create value through relating to humanity at large, as we as humans principally share culture and several cultural universals. Clear references to such universal cultural values should complement the unique characteristics of the site to foster internal empowerment through intercultural applicability and integration. Again, heritage representations should depict temporal dynamics and change in the local embodiment of such universal values. The structural significance of humanity is reflected in the Outstanding

Universal Value (OUV) concept of UNESCO (see Labadi 2013) which assigns distinguished relevance to selected sites. This formalization through labelling creates opportunity for the generation of tangible economic benefits hence leads to external empowerment.

The humanity domain furthermore includes drawing upon and developing human capital available in the community, in this case the skills and competences in managing the asset. Bourdieu regards human capital as an institutionalized form of cultural capital, but for the purpose of the proposed model it is preferred to separate the two as follows:

- a) Cultural capital: Pool of heritage resources available
- b) Human capital: Skills/expertise available to process/develop/utilize cultural capital

However, the humanity dimension of heritage production facilitates external empowerment of communities, observable through qualification levels and employment rates.

5. **Interpreter (blue):** Lastly, the heritage representation must as well relate to the cultural values of the actual beholder, who often comes from a cultural background different from the site. The image has to be commercialized in a way to attract and satisfy customer groups in order to generate monetary revenue to sustain itself. This corresponds with the idea of accumulating economic capital embodied in culture, as a strategy to support the satisfaction of material needs of society members. The consumer dimension serves as a medium for external empowerment, assessable through value indicators such as market share, monetary income, and customer satisfaction.

One can argue that the value system of any interpreter beholding the asset cannot differ from the universal human and unique social references discussed above. The justification to separate this dimension is its economic focus. Different from the other property domains which serve the purpose of valuation, the economic properties of an asset cannot be utilized without their valorisation, meaning the actual sale of the product and realization of monetary benefit (see Andriessen 2005: 1f). This transaction coerces the heritage product to be disentangled from its context to a certain extent. Disentanglement contains the risk of forfeiting all previously assigned values and can therefore be regarded as the most delicate act in the production process which has to be balanced carefully.

In heritage production practice, the identification, protection, and development of all these value properties can be applied by activities, including institutionalization of cultural values in the form of legislative procedures, strengthening social support through participatory local, regional, and international networking, building human capacities through systematic heritage education programs, and developing effective culture commercialization strategies to convert the other forms into economic revenue. These efforts may lead to the protection of natural resources and hence facilitate empowerment of the people and sustainable overall development of societies.

Conclusion and way forward

The paper carved out cultural identification (internal aspect) and economic utilization (external aspect) as major functions of heritage for empowering people and proposed a multidimensional heritage production framework to integrate them. A way forward is to take the implications of the paper beyond theory and test them in applied heritage intervention programmes. In case the positioned assumptions hold they may eventually inform heritage management practice through incorporation into heritage and cultural policy frameworks and application to applied projects in the field.

One should as well bear in mind that the culture and heritage for development approach is also contested and earmark its criticism as another alley of investigation. Hauser-Schäublin & Klenke (2010: 27) show that heritage production is a hierarchic system where higher-level actors tend to impose dominant heritage concepts and meanings on lower level actors. Kreps (2003) asserts that indigenous culture first must be liberated from the hegemonic representation regime to eventually empower people.

Supposed the heritage for development approach can be viewed as both liberating and hegemonic, academic inquiry is advised to embrace this ambiguity. Further theoretical study should venture in both directions to provide further insights into the critical interpretation and at the same time refine the outlined strategies for practical application of the heritage for empowerment concept.

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