

HERITAGE AS ETHICAL PARADIGMS OF BALANCING IDENTITY AND CHANGE AMID SOCIO-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

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1. HERITAGE AND THE CURRENT SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPASSE

It has been evident by now that contemporary multicultural societies within cycles of economic and social crises face a grave problem in managing their existence and their distinct identity, as it is manifested in their heritage. Local heritage values, tangible and intangible, seem to be in conflict with global values of progress and development. Moreover, local crises, more often than not, are direct consequences of globalism.

In facing those problems, it has been attempted to increase the economic and social contribution of heritage to social development by acknowledging and facilitating an ever expanding number of stakeholders, cultural groups and their monuments, but only to the effect of making **the problem of heritage preservation impossible to handle in its vastness and multitude, due mainly to the contradictory values involved between heritage preservation and socio-cultural development.**

2. HERITAGE VALUES: A PRAGMATIC AND PRACTICAL APPROACH

It is time to consider heritage not as a side and secondary aspect of social values, but as a holistic exemplar of a sustainable way of life in terms of reuse of building stock, response to the natural environment and redefinition of human values. To that end, it seems that we need a radically new approach.

Heritage values should be reconsidered as to what they stand for. If we value heritage, we should preserve it for what it is - not for another purpose for the sake of another value. In Aristotle's terms, a heritage value is an end in itself and not a means towards another end - be that other end economic or social development. Heritage is a social value by being heritage, by being itself, and therein lays its capacity to monitor social development and resolve social problems. In these terms, heritage is not simply one more possible engine for development, but the basis, the stronghold and the anchorage of any engine for development.

As **heritage** expands in time range and social importance, it constitutes the stronghold of our identity; it gradually **becomes paradigmatic in three ways; by being pragmatic, by being ours and by being there in the places of our life.** It seems that heritage is what we've got in order to face the future, which seems oblique, uncertain and unpromising. Accordingly, preservation of heritage is not an act of conservative withdrawal from shaping the future, but instead an act of faith securely founded in accomplished exemplary achievements as a springboard for the future.

3. HERITAGE CONSERVATION AS AN ACT AND A PRAXIS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Heritage values, whatever we each-personally and collectively- consider as such, exemplify by definition permanence, stability and the unshaken premises of our life. They **constitute the Archimedean point for- and not part of- economic and social engineering.** They form a shelter and home for other values to come, such as progress, development, enterprises and ventures. Thus, we should not subdue heritage values to the overarching value of the current issues of development, but consider them in parallel, but form a local vantage point. We could go as far as to argue that as life accelerates its rhythm, heritage values are necessary to stand close to a sustainable development process.

Conservation and Sustainability are the two key issues that should be related to each other and be brought together in a common philosophy and practice. Sustainability in heritage's case acquires a more fundamental meaning than simply preserving natural resources, existing building stock and embedded energy towards safeguarding the future. Moreover than that, the preservation of heritage values showcases par excellence the **preservation of human values and the meaning of life, by preserving actual paradigms of that life as proper models of/for development.**

4. LOCAL HERITAGE AS ETHICAL PARADIGM FOR THE ART OF BUILDING

In dealing with heritage, we-collectively- started of by preserving heritage as a minor and limited practice amid dominant practices of development. We then went on by preserving heritage as an alibi, as 'in situ' museum pieces, amid omnipresent rapid as well as uncritical economic growth and development. We've now reached a point where all models of development are rendered not only obsolete but dangerous for human life on earth, physically and spiritually alike. **This paper argues that we should now move towards adopting heritage as ethical paradigms of development and new ways of life.**

Heritage can play this vital role because:

- a. **It is a living example of sustainability**, a witness and a proof that another way of life is possible. It is a pragmatic full model of life instead of a utopic abstraction or extrapolation.
- b. **It's ours**, because we value heritage not for the sake of the past but for the sake of the present in contemporary terms. Additionally, we value the embodied nature of heritage in our monuments, their very corporeality being the reason for relating to and identifying with them.
- c. **It's there, in place** pinpointing to the importance of place not as a cultural product but a cultural base and prerequisite for building up our identity and its premises. Heritage as place-bound is ours, but also- by superseding our life time- beyond us, as a value to aspire to. So, heritage is not only embedded materials and energy to be reused, recycled, modified and transformed, but also embedded and embodied values of life that, it seems, we find so difficult to create today.

5. A METHODOLOGY FOR REDEEMING HERITAGE VALUES

In a sense, heritage is condensed expertise for good life and we urgently need to develop the relevant conceptual tools to redeem this embedded expertise and make the best of it for our contemporary development.

The methodology of redemption can be analysed in three steps:

- a. **No general global theories of, but local proper exemplars for, development** To that end we have to **Re-examine** Modernity in its obsession towards pointless growth, **Re-assess** Glocality as favoring globalism and **Re-consider** Degrowth as it might be irrelevant for local cultures, which follow different rhythms of development and growth.
- b. **Paradigms or exemplars of development should be analysed in their pragmatic and practical nature so that to be imitated by analogy.** This method will allow for local cultures to be part of the world through their particular way of existing.

- c. **Local societies should adopt their own heritage as a Paradigm for their development.** In these terms, it is more appropriate to speak of internal envelopment of their identity in parallel to their external aspects of development.

6. REDEFINING A LOCAL TELEOLOGY FOR HERITAGE

The identity of a local culture, as manifested by its heritage, should act **as the internal horizon of assessing means and ends in relation to change**, considered as **the external horizon. Heritage should delineate the internal capacity and potentiality of each local culture and should be the sole measure of consistency and propriety of actions towards its growth.**

This notion of horizon in both of its aspects – internal and external, after Husserl - could be the proper conceptual tool because it can constantly generated ascribe means and ends in response to external circumstances and internal needs.

The notion of 'horizon', without resorting to metaphysical teleologies, indicates a necessary relativism in being open to many possible developments, but at the same time it binds those possible developments to the identity of a local culture. So, relativism in this sense is not a philosophical or political stance, or even an abstract notion, but the practical need and the pragmatic limitation of specificity, the specificity of a local culture and its heritage in its role in past, present and future development.