

Chapter 5

Heritage Studies: Constructing a Field of Research for a New Generation of Scholars

Marie-Theres Albert

Institute Heritage Studies, Germany

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the function of heritage studies in the role of human development and sustainable heritage protection. The chapter details the importance of sustainable heritage development and the importance of identity-building, examining their role comprehensively in conjunction with UNESCO conventions, as well as epistemological and paradigmatic reflections from studies ranging from cultural anthropology to material heritage studies. The text also focuses on developments and challenges within the field of heritage studies and the application of theoretical approaches within the study. Finally, the study reflects on the ways in which heritage, with a focus on world heritage, have developed and changed over the course of time, and possibilities to address negative developments.

INTRODUCTION

The destruction of the heritage of humankind is multidimensional and “the deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural and natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world” (UNESCO, 1972). This is the important message of the World Heritage Convention and one of its guiding principles. Following this view, it is consequent that individuals and societies are responsible for the sustainable safeguarding of their heritage.

The sustainable protection of the heritage of people is therefore the focus of important international conventions related to heritage. The most famous convention is the World Heritage Convention, which celebrated its 50th anniversary on the 16th of November 2022 (Albert et al., 2022). Others are the Faro Convention of the Council of Europe, the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage or the Memory of World Programme.

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All these conventions consider the identity-building function of heritage. They therefore can neither be understood only based on the material interpretation of heritage as it is mainly considered in the World Heritage Convention, nor on the humanistic understanding of heritage in the Intangible Convention, nor on the humanistic-literary understanding of heritage in the Memory of the World Programme. Furthermore, it cannot be sufficiently interpreted only on the sociological understanding of the Faro Convention.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND PARADIGMATIC REFLECTIONS

The identity-building function of heritage is a holistic and complex paradigm, which needs to be developed through a similar complex theoretical system. This is the heritage studies system as it has been developed, and since 1999 implemented by the author and their team of former UNESCO Chair on Heritage Studies at BTU Cottbus. The heritage studies system has been implemented through the World Heritage Studies Master's Programme, and since 2010 through the following PhD programme. The Institute Heritage Studies (IHS) at the Internationale Akademie Berlin (INA) has continued the programme through many projects; among others the project Transboundary European World Heritage - a Topic for UNESCO Associated Schools.¹

The intention for developing Heritage Studies as a paradigm for sustainable safeguarding of the heritage of humankind was, and still is, to develop a holistic understanding of heritage as promoter for sustainable human development based on the 17 goals defined in the Agenda 2030 (United Nations, 2015). It can be said that this concept of Heritage Studies has been accepted worldwide.

Efforts to position Heritage Studies in a disciplinary manner have shaped the construct of heritage in the context of a holistic understanding of heritage and have determined heritage itself as a dynamically constructed phenomena. Aspects of heritage studies were and are presented and discussed, particularly by British publishers such as Blackwell Publishing, Manchester University Press Series and Oxford University Press, but also by IHS publications. International journals have raised awareness amongst many communities concerning the topic of heritage. A complex understanding of heritage could be constructed and disseminated through different topics such as: Heritage and Identity, Heritage and Multiculturalism, Expressions of Intangible Heritage, Tangible Heritage and Spaces, Legal Aspects of Heritage or Heritage and Local Communities, as well as Management of Heritage.

In scientific discourse, it is of equal importance the concept of "Critical Heritage Studies"² based on a postcolonial approach with Laurajane Smith (2006) as editor, or the concept of "Material Heritage Studies"³ based mainly on material sciences such as architecture, urban planning or conservation and preservation. Heritage Studies discourse understood as *Heritage Transformation Processes and Human Development* is the research focus of the IHS at INA and has been published via the *Heritage Studies Series* with de Gruyter from 2012 – 2015, and with Springer Nature International Publishing since 2017.

Meanwhile, the theoretical constructions were broken down into fields of application through an immense number of case studies. Case studies have become an infinite pool of knowledge for heritage studies. They have reflected the diversity of existing cultures and the different aspects of their heritage. Thereby also general preservation strategies with regards to particularities could be modified. On the other hand, the boom of the heritage communities' interest in details has pushed back the interest in holistic, complex, and above all, comprehensive knowledge. The atomization of heritage was accompanied by the atomizing scientific expertise.

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