Chapter 14
World Heritage Education and the Postdigital Age:
Considerations for Reflexive Practice

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ABSTRACT

The chapter problematizes the frequent lack of a genuinely global perspective in educational approaches at World Heritage sites, manifesting in limitations of educational contents and aims to local conservation, local history or art history, despite World Heritage sites' professed 'outstanding universal value' (OUV). To overcome such limitations, the authors strategically include the approach of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the context of World Heritage sites. Considering the emergence of a 'postdigital' condition, the authors sketch specific uses of communication at World Heritage sites to support reflexive formal and informal education processes. In doing so, the authors establish an original approach to reflexive World Heritage Education (WHE). The chapter demonstrates on the basis of practical examples the possibilities for reflexive, postdigital educational approaches at World Heritage sites by referring to the educational pilot project "Young Climate Action for World Heritage." The chapter concludes by identifying gaps for further research.

INTRODUCTION

Heritage and Paradigms of Heritage Education

Since ancient times, heritage provides important benefits for individuals and societies. In civic law of Roman Antiquity, heritage (*heredium*) describes the transmission of the family estate from the head of

the family (*paterfamilias*) to the rightful successor (*suus heres*). Thus, heritage was for individuals the transmission of material property between generations and for society the family's grave on the estate (*monumentum*) served as material evidence of the transmission's legitimacy (Kaser, 1971, p. 98). Today, heritage, monuments or material from past generations is most often used by societies to communicate knowledge or values to the present or the future generation (Lowenthal, 1985; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; International Council on Museums and Sites [ICOMOS], 2008). Such social and institutional communication about heritage is increasingly described as heritage interpretation (Staiff, 2016, p. 7). Staiff (2016, p. 8–10) claims further that heritage interpretation has been since the 1980s almost exclusively rooted in an educational paradigm. This seems to the authors' mind mainly due to the professionalization and standardization of institutionalized communication practices at heritage sites (cf. ICOMOS, 2008; Ludwig, 2015). With the possibilities offered by new media (Kalay, Kvan & Affleck, 2008), the authors stress the importance of combining heritage education with modern communication methods to leverage the full potential of heritage for human development.

However, the framing of communicative practices between heritage professionals and a wider public as 'interpretation' bears the risk of turning interpretation into exegesis, i. e. an activity of "technical and aesthetic experts" (Smith, 2006, p. 11) with specialized and privileged access to heritage. Within a hierarchical educational paradigm, i. e. a paradigm which rests on teachers and learners, the results of such activity are then "presented", "disseminated" or "popularized" for the general public (ICOMOS, 2008, p. 1). Rather than following this hierarchical educational paradigm of transmitting knowledge from teacher to learner or expert to public, the authors consider heritage education essentially as political or civic education, i. e. as a reflexive, non-hierarchical practice which shall enable all people involved to "make informed decisions and assume active roles locally and globally" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2016, p. 49). Such reflexive educational conception cannot be easily reconciled with a hierarchical teacher-learner educational paradigm and requires a specific educational setting which both provides information as well as a space for individual and collective reflection and debate. The authors claim that such educational settings can be established at World Heritage sites by appropriate use of digital tools in a postdigital context. The authors elaborate this claim by outlining the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the pilot project "Young Climate Action for World Heritage" (Institute Heritage Studies, 2022) within the framework of World Heritage Education (WHE) and UNESCO's World Heritage Education Programme (WHEP). While more conceptual or theoretical in approach, the chapter proposes some thoughts to think new thoughts in practical or managerial contexts. The authors hope that this will contribute to thinking differently about educational practices at World Heritage sites and ultimately change practices.

The chapter outlines in a first step the postdigital condition by making a distinction between 'digitization', the 'digital condition' – or the 'digital' – and the 'postdigital'. In a second step, the authors turn to risks and shortfalls of educational processes at World Heritage sites and the WHEP. The authors see these shortfalls originating in a lack of theoretical concepts in educational approaches at World Heritage sites and in the lack of a genuinely global perspective. To address these shortfalls, the authors sketch out an original educational approach to WHE in the following steps. To this end, a global, inclusive ethical perspective is introduced into education at World Heritage sites by strategically including Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in educational settings. This equally allows the authors to conceptualize the outcomes of both formal and informal educational processes at World Heritage sites as 'attitudes' towards the world and sustainable development, i. e. as acquired, individually specific ways of thinking, feeling and acting with respect to the world and the goals of sustainable development. Importantly,

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