

## **Afterword**

### **Heritage and sustainable development in a postcolonial context: the fatal ambivalence**

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*On the basis of all this, it can be concluded that every person necessarily has heritage, even if he or she owned nothing, because heritage is in equal measure the capacity to own, the ability to own, and ownership itself. It is a quality and an attribute of the individual.*

– E. Dramard, “Patrimoine,” *La Grande Encyclopédie*, 1902

By addressing the potential meshing between heritage and sustainable development, a universal paradigm which is now a top-of-the-list best practice guideline, this book highlights a number of antagonisms. First of all, conflicting usage, as is often the case with heritage; conflicting representations, reflecting issues relating to history and recognition in a postcolonial context; and conflicting concepts surrounding the definition and role of heritage. To these are added conflicting scales, in particular territorial levels, that are increasingly encroaching on international charter jurisdiction, including and precisely with respect to authorities that have taken on the issue of sustainable development. Overlooking these contradictions in the hope of accommodating each of the underlying pursuits of power that oftentimes also come to clash therein does not seem to resolve anything. Let us delve into some of these aspects since they appear to be inherent to heritage, and undoubtedly more precisely to *patrimoine*, when considered from an international perspective.

Sustainable development has placed heritage within an international framework from which it came close to escaping as a result of the varying but increasing engagement of Cities in its identification and enhancement. However, it is hardly a coincidence that management research and practice looking to incorporate heritage as a territorial issue, by viewing it as a resource for development for example, are growing in number in Asia and Latin America, as has been noted in this book, i.e. a safe distance from the traditional core of heritage located in France and Western Europe. Neither deindustrialization nor decolonization have been able to entirely detach heritage from its hoary traditions. But what we have referred to as “the endless particularization of heritage” in an attempt to designate the culture-specific differentiation of the conceptualization of heritage (even in sister cultures or those that have become kin through colonization) is increasingly prevalent in the ocean of public policy.

So, how does the international framework of sustainable development affect heritage?

Because it was built and therefore “not natural,” heritage has long been suspected of jeopardizing the environment whose protection was at the heart of sustainable development. Old buildings with poor thermal performance, asbestos-trimmed

modernity, the scattering of buildings across territories, and poor density in older habitats had turned heritage into a liability, if not a polluter, especially within the range of cultural expressions to which it has been confined. This book highlights the extent to which monument conservation principles continue to affect approaches to urban heritage: entrapped in its institution, the heritage of historic monuments, intended for monstration, is more analogous to an ornament than to a development asset. Even – or especially – when heritage is a “sign of identity” for cities competing in the global arena, it is rarely viewed from a social and economic perspective otherwise than in terms of tourist spinoffs; ironically, demolition costs have only just recently started appearing in the heritage payoff column.

Conversely, sustainable development has long overlooked the culture into which heritage was at any rate confined, first and foremost for administrative reasons. The idea of balancing environmental protection with economic progress and social justice, laid down in 1992, seemed to adequately address the issue of fundamental human needs that had repositioned sustainable development under the banner of a “strategy.” This was before UNESCO adopted a declaration on cultural diversity affirming that “no development can be sustainable without including culture.” Sustainable development as a strategy therefore gained a fourth pillar, culture, regardless of huge epistemological and conceptual pitfalls, such as those emerging in debates pointing to the fact that society, the economy, and the environment are cultural phenomena in their own right. This is how heritage, henceforth “cultural heritage,” entered the realm of sustainable development, thereby preserving its status within international frameworks.

However, if the meaning attributed to culture, while taking great care to avoid a more explicit definition, is broader than “cultural activity,” this new internationalization of heritage bypasses the use made thereof by local authorities. Mirroring national governments, they often place heritage among cultural activities; in other words, in the context of living environment, its role is limited to being interpreted or visited. This is a reductionist approach, in particular if the intent is to reflect on sustainable development as intersecting economic progress, environmental protection, and social justice, although it should be mentioned once again that each of these concepts reflects a culture-specific worldview.

The sudden need to review the future of entire swaths of territory devastated by the second wave of deindustrialization (that of the products of the Second Industrial Revolution), some of which are addressed in this book, has shown the pertinence of associating heritage and economic requalification, in particular in view of the property dimensions that distinguish heritage within culture, and even go so far as to dissociate it from what public policy deems to be culture. Aside from adaptive reuse, even measured against environmental protection indicators, urban dynamics (physical, economic, social, and other) that are specific to heritage, if considered from this angle, make it a key player in territorial development. Whereas Cities, as mentioned, choose to tackle this shift using still immature management and land use planning tools, what is required above all is a recognition of the epistemological and ontological specificity of heritage, in other words, what distinguishes a church building from a puppet play or a workers’ settlement from

street art. This shift also calls for a more relativistic approach than the one underlying the incorporation of conservation policy readily associated with heritage into the precepts of sustainable development. Held up as a principle, conservation presupposes an objectivity that heritage, eminently subject to change, does not have. This has been unequivocally expressed by Laurajane Smith: Heritage does not have value, it is valued. This is why heritage is also an agent of social justice: it recognizes the right to value. However, it should not be forgotten that heritage also gives value. This explains, at least in part, the stacking of multiple levels of decision-making and intervention that is characteristic of heritage, where every new level legitimizes the others, especially those at the top of the heap. It also accounts for the repeated attempts of international charters such as Historic Urban Landscape and Culture: Urban Futures to include heritage, regardless of the direction it takes in various parts of the world. Above all, this best explains the increasingly well documented property and social potential and effects of heritage.

No sooner was heritage freed from the monument's chains than it became amalgamated—conceptually and therefore administratively—with the culture within which it loses the better part of its capacity as regards sustainable development, and which places it at the heart of environmental protection, economic progress, and social justice. This seems to be a direct consequence of the international framework's grip on heritage, because the necessarily localized territory from which it emerges does not exist on a global scale: the heritage of charters and conventions is much more of an abstract representation than a living environment dynamic. On this scale, heritage, museums, culture, even libraries and archives, become interchangeable. Neither heritage nor sustainable development come out ahead.

Aside from the prevailing constructivist theory in heritage studies in France and the fruit thereof, the untranslatable concept of *patrimonialisation*, incursions into critical theory in the English-language literature have also severely judged the charters and conventions that took heritage to that level. As reviewed in this book, heritage, especially where included in public policy as a cultural expression, is a powerful agent of exclusion, and this clearly is no longer acceptable in a postcolonial context. However, inclusiveness in relation to heritage is not a matter of making it accessible in terms of the opening hours of historic monuments, for example, but rather is an issue of conflicting representations, exacerbated by the mobility of information; the dissemination made possible by social media, in particular, has exploded the sanctum of knowledge and debate. Anyone can claim his or her heritage: as noted, nothing can determine that three Louisiana African American community churches have less value than Notre-Dame-de-Paris. On the global scale and in a dematerialized world, that which is deemed more valuable happens to be backed by greater power.

Consequently, whereas in the context of the accretion of levels of expertise and decision-making, local territory, especially since the international framework recommends that it be considered, can make strategic gains in terms of recognition, this can only be obtained at the cost of exclusion of minority community items from the chosen body of heritage for example, as has happened in the past, as well as of a rather ironic dispossession. By its very nature, the international framework perpetuates the idea of a hierarchy of

heritage: items found on the world heritage list are more important than those classified on the national and other levels, as promoted by the strongly criticized concept of “outstanding universal value.” The heritage of greatest significance then becomes quite removed from a local population and its participation, inasmuch as it concerns “more” than that local population, justifying the assigning of its management to a regional or national authority, or even a supranational group in relation to which the local population’s importance is diminished.

Reducing heritage to a principle as it rises to the higher levels identified by international frameworks invalidates traditional regulatory frameworks as is the case for a number of policies and practices examined in this book. Furthermore, the ambivalence of a heritage that is both local and international is fatal because the abstraction and deterritorialization required for the conventions and charters established at this level hamper and even invalidate the role that heritage plays in sustainable development. In addition, in an era of decolonization, it can hardly be argued—as expected for the purpose of charters and conventions—that heritage can be defined in advance or elsewhere. As asserted by Eugène Dramard in *La Grande Encyclopédie* over a century ago, heritage is one of those ideas that, because of their apparent simplicity, appear as though they are self-explanatory and need no definition, because everybody claims to know what it is. In our *Age of Discontinuity*, as characterized by Peter Drucker, this is indeed possible. And it is also an issue upon which the principle of public intervention in heritage invites reflection here and now.