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From Universal to Regional: Theoretical Perspectives on Regeneration and Heritage

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From Universal to Regional: Theoretical Perspectives on Regeneration and Heritage

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Abstract

Regeneration comprises a set of processes designed to take a specific place from obsolescence to a projected future. It embraces the past, the present and the future. Inevitably, for some place is the principal focus while for others people come to the fore. Central to any discussion about regeneration is the concept of heritage, including both its tangible and intangible components. Influential individuals, groups and communities often bring divergent views to any plans for environmental and social preservation, conservation, construction and regeneration. An analysis of values lies at the heart of this and this analysis requires a multi-disciplinary approach in which specialists from many disciplines have a part to play. To focus our discussion we examine heritage as a social construction highlighting the importance of defining cultural benefits in any regeneration strategy. Referring to UNESCO Conventions we discuss tangible and intangible cultural heritage with particular reference to universality and individuality. Within this there is a concern to confront issues related to geographical marginalisation, language conservation, political devolution and decentralisation and the continuities in cultural expressions in music, text and the creative arts. The significance of these is evident in debates about the criteria used for the designation of UNESCO World Heritage sites and European Cities of Culture. We conclude with a discussion about the nation-state and cultural identity. It is essential in debates about the intrinsic and instrumental values of heritage to recognise the fundamental importance of national identity constructed from, or alongside, a multiplicity of cultural identities and heritages.

Regeneration is an attractively positive concept. It conjures up a future of inspirational new buildings and infrastructure combined with a cultural renaissance, bringing hope, aspiration, community consciousness and an improved sense of wellbeing to the residents of regenerated places. Degeneration, on the other hand, is epitomised by the dereliction and squalor of ghost towns, deserted villages and obsolescent industrial buildings. Regeneration comprises a set of processes designed to take a specified area, at a variety of scales, from obsolescence to a projected future. Regeneration, then, bridges the past, the present and the future. The key question underpinning this collection of essays relates to the ends that any regeneration policy, plan or project is designed to achieve. In a means-ends typology Sutton, drawing on the work of Ladd, distinguishes between 'pure people-oriented strategies' and 'pure place-oriented strategies'.¹ The former address the concerns of individuals and groups of residents especially with regard to their employment opportunities and well-being. The latter strategies are people-free and seek to achieve strictly economic benefits. These strategies, in their purest form, constitute the ends of a spectrum and between there are many varieties. Interestingly, she uses the term 'revitalisation' to highlight the people-oriented strategies, a powerful term that is encountered often in the regeneration literature.

Central to any discussion of regeneration is the concept of heritage. Regeneration occurs in places that have a history and within that history is embedded heritage. Heritage in any place is constituted by tangible and intangible cultural manifestations that are considered by influential individuals, groups and communities to be worthy of preservation, conservation, reconstruction and regeneration. As Gibson and Pendlebury state, 'The preservation of an object or environment is an assertion of its importance and therefore the culture or history associated with it'.² Combining the two concepts of worthiness and importance highlights the subjectivity inherent in any discussion about any heritage object. Values lie at the heart of this.³

The centrality of values

For a comprehensive review of the centrality of values in any discussion about heritage we can turn to the paper written by Mason in 2002 where he emphasised the diversity of values derived from their socio-cultural roots.⁴ Values cannot be disentangled from their location in time and place. They are dynamic in character and subject to

interpretation by groups and individuals who differ in their capacity to influence significant decision makers. It is remarkably easy to identify the principal types of values, including social, economic, political, aesthetic, cultural, environmental and national, but as one examines this list it soon becomes obvious that each type comprises a multiplicity of definitions, meanings and interpretations. Much depends on the perception of any individual and hence there are as many varieties of meaning as there are individuals. The varieties inevitably are the source of the search for harmony and consensus, on the one hand, and the source of conflict, on the other. What is clear is that to make sense of values in any consideration of regeneration and heritage requires a multi-disciplinary approach in which specialists from many disciplines have a part to play.

This is evident in the definitions of values Mason used as he developed a comprehensive typology of values in conservation. He distinguished between values seen as 'morals, principles, or other ideas that serve as guides to action (individual and collective)' and the 'qualities and characteristics seen in things, in particular the positive characteristics (actual and potential)'.⁵ In the context of regeneration, stakeholders have a choice of giving precedence to one definition or seeking to balance both. In essence, the choice is often made between developing a policy and a plan for regeneration of a place that seeks either monetary profit or the satisfaction of as many as possible of those people on whom any regeneration will directly impact.

Decision making in the context of regeneration policy making and planning is a social activity where many voices, each with a particular value set, will wish to contribute but not all may be heard. Just as values are socially constructed, a message that echoes through the literatures of several disciplines especially since the 'cultural turn'⁶, so are regeneration plans. In analysing any plans, questions regarding the power and authority of individuals and groups, the positions of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', the interplay between politics and economics, the significance of community participation and citizenship issues all need to be addressed.

Values may be derived from social, economic, political, cultural and environmental contexts. There is a debate concerning the universality of values and a search by philosophers for basic values. Finnis regards the following as irreducible: life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, sociability, practical reasonableness and religion. They take on particular significance when they are placed in the context of the essential choices made in the prioritisation of aspects of heritage.⁷

Heritage as social construction

In everyday parlance, heritage is a simple concept. It refers to anything and everything that is inherited by one generation from another. Beneath this simplicity lurks an array of definitional difficulties, not least because a concern for heritage must inevitably lead to a consideration of priorities since heritage is umbilically linked with conservation, protection and preservation, activities and processes that are circumscribed by a spectrum of forces that extend from philosophical contention to resource allocation. Bluntly, not everything from the past can be retained as heritage. Choices have to be made. It is in this regard that heritage becomes, like values, a social construction. As such it is a dynamic concept, changing over time and between and across cultural groups.

It would be simplistic to suggest that heritage is all about the past but as Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge assert:

The concept of time has remained central: heritage is a view from the present, either backward to the past or forward to a future. In both cases, the viewpoint cannot be other than now, the perspective is blurred and indistinct and shaped by current concerns and dispositions, while the field of vision is restricted to a highly selective view of a small fraction of possible pasts or envisaged futures ... The present needs of people form the key defining element in our definition.⁸

This gives rise to a number of profound questions, including: who most needs heritage, people now or future generations? Why do they need it? And having identified those aspects of heritage significant for the present and then for the future, short term and long term, what are the benefits of those aspects? What are the criteria for defining a benefit and which agencies should be given or should take on the task of defining the criteria and then selecting the heritage aspects that best meet the criteria?

The relevance of these questions for urban regeneration has been carefully explored by scholars such as Garcia. She argues that 'a key realisation during the last decades of the 20th century was that, although cities have always had cultural functions, the evolution of a global, service-oriented economy has placed culture at the very centre of urban development, and has shifted traditional notions of culture as art and heritage to a view of culture as an economic asset, a commodity that

has market value and, as such, a valuable producer of marketable city spaces'. She goes on to state, 'In order to make the process of producing and marketing culture more transparent, cities need to develop policies that acknowledge whose culture is being supported at any one time and for what purpose.'⁹ It is clear that culture is her preferred term but it could just as readily be substituted by heritage. The term cultural heritage has become increasingly familiar suggesting that there are alternative adjectives that offer different discourses and voices.

Heritage is tangible and intangible

A useful starting point for a consideration of such discourses and voices lies in two UNESCO Conventions. The 1972 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* uses three categories to define cultural heritage: monuments 'which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science'; groups of buildings with the same universal value; and sites, 'including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view'. The Article continues with a definition of natural heritage that also has three categories: 'natural features consisting of physical and biological formations or groups of such formations, which are of outstanding universal value from the aesthetic or scientific point of view'; geological and physiographical formations and precisely delineated areas which constitute the habitat of threatened species of animals and plants of outstanding universal value'; and, 'natural sites or precisely delineated natural areas of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science, conservation or natural beauty'.¹⁰

This was followed three decades later by the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* and it used this definition: 'The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.' For the purposes of the Convention five intangible groups of

phenomena were highlighted: oral traditions and expressions, including language; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship.¹¹

The distinction between the emphasis on things of ‘outstanding universal value’ in the 1972 Convention and on what ‘individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage’ in the 2003 Convention is striking. There is obviously a profound difference between universality and individuality. To some extent, the latter is a reaction to what can be described as an over-commitment by influential authorities to time-bound and place-bound high cultural phenomena. As Watson and Waterton comment: ‘Aesthetes and experts, connoisseurs and curators, have [thus] made heritage their own resort, and their associated skills in interpretation, presentation and representation have defined a dominant discourse that is both powerful and resilient. There are two problems with this discourse, however. The first is its obsession with material culture . . . The second problem is that the reification of heritage has encouraged scholars to be equally focused on materiality and its associated representation practices.’¹² The shift away from materiality to a fundamentally different conception of cultural property and its place in cultural heritage was to some extent a recognition of the vulnerability of indigenous communities to the multiple forces of globalisation. It also represented a shift toward a postmodern perspective that emphasised the significance of the relationships between universal, multi-cultural and individualistic concerns. It reflected, ‘. . . growing doubt about the universality of Western notions of property and widespread recognition that culture cannot be reduced to an inventory of objects without marginalizing its most important features’.¹³ In this quotation we confront, in the context of intangible cultural heritage, the sources of confusion and contention: universality, ‘Western’ hegemony, the concept of property and its significance and ownership, and the marginalisation of important features. In the context of the essays in this special issue of the *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, where the focus is particularly upon post-industrial regeneration, these terms take on special significance in places confronting issues related to geographical marginalisation, language conservation, political devolution and decentralisation, and the continuities in cultural expressions in music, text and the creative arts. Underpinning this are the challenges posed by multi-culturalism located in place and time and the hierarchy of heritages that may or may not contribute to the contemporary cultural landscape, challenges to which we shall return later in this essay.

Heritage is hierarchical

A theme that has emerged above is the hierarchy of heritages that has universalism at one level and individualism on another, with a number of other levels in between. As we have seen, the UNESCO Conventions of 1972 and 2003 have regularised the concept of universal heritage, highlighting the need for governments to heed the global importance of aspects of heritage of outstanding universal value. This is embraced by the work of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee that has identified 759 cultural sites, 193 natural sites and 29 mixed sites that have met their selection criteria. The categories of sites are those used in the 1972 Convention, listed earlier. Here we wish to highlight the World Heritage Committee's definition of outstanding universal value as expressed in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*:

Outstanding Universal Value means cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity. As such, the permanent protection of this heritage is of the highest importance to the international community as a whole.¹⁴

From the universal we can, following Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, move on from the macro-level, the world, to the meso-level, the continent. Illustrative of this level is the European Capitals of Culture programme. This programme affirms the existence of a European identity and a common heritage shared by Europeans. It was introduced by the European Commission in 1985 as the European City of Culture project. This was changed to the European Capitals of Culture programme in 2005 with a set of objectives specified in Article 4 of Decision 1622/2006/EC. Here it states that the programme must 'foster cooperation between cultural operators, artists and cities from host country and other EU countries in any cultural sector; highlight the richness of cultural diversity in Europe; bring the common aspects of European cultures to the fore'. Further, the programme must 'foster the participation of citizens living in the city and its surroundings and raise their interest as well as the interest of citizens from abroad; be sustainable and be an integral part of the long-term cultural and social development of the city'.¹⁵

The merits and demerits of this programme have been subject to much cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary attention. An early

comprehensive collection of studies of the European Capitals of Culture programme was edited by Bianchini and Parkinson and this focused particularly upon cultural policy and economic and physical regeneration.¹⁶ Bianchini follows the transition in urban policy making from the 1950s and 1960s to the electronic age. Few connections had been made 'between a city's cultural resources and their possible exploitation for urban renewal, tourism, image or economic development purposes'.¹⁷ In recent decades, most, if not all, European cities have felt the impact of social movements, some with strong political agendas that have disintegrated any sense of a harmonious, uniform culture drawn from a common heritage.

Multiculturalism, defined by, amongst others, ethnic, religious, gender and racial criteria found expression in tangible and intangible phenomena in which Bianchini includes 'experimental theatre groups, rock bands, independent film-makers and cinemas, free radio stations, small publishing houses, radical newspapers and magazines'.¹⁸ The local politicisation of such activities combined with changes in national centralisation and decentralisation policies brought the creative sector into the realm of cultural planning. Inevitably, this has resulted in tensions between advocates of using 'traditional' definitions of culture, embracing outstanding, permanent and tangible heritage aspects, and those who favour 'postmodern' definitions that celebrate diversity, participation and dynamism. These tensions also divide those who see heritage as precious and requiring careful conservation and protection, and those who see heritage as ever-changing and responsive to various contemporary and futuristic individual, community and national needs. This latter perspective fits well with the European Capitals of Culture programme where there is an explicit reference to the valuable opportunities afforded by the programme to: 'regenerate cities; raise their international profile and enhance their image in the eyes of their own inhabitants; give new vitality to their cultural life; raise their international profile, boost tourism and enhance their image in the eyes of their own inhabitants'.¹⁹

How this works out in practice has been demonstrated in case studies of Glasgow, Rotterdam, Bilbao, Bologna, Hamburg, Montpellier, Liverpool and Rennes.²⁰ It should be noticed that all of these are provincial or regional urban centres and all are faced with the complex needs of a post-industrial renaissance. They exhibit models of regeneration where heritage has an important part to play. One has only to reflect on Bilbao, located in Spain but rooted in a

Basque culture, to understand the interplay between an economic goal to achieve greater economic prosperity and a cultural goal that seeks to promote and sustain the heritage of the Basques. However, as Gonzalez explains, Bilbao was riven by two conflicting scenarios: one focused on projecting the city as a European capital attracting outside investment and tourists; the other focused on the indigenous strengths of the city with regeneration directed at the needs of local citizens.²¹ It is here we encounter the crucial matter of the tensions between cosmopolitanism and localism, between the need to construct a representation of the city that seeks to place the city in the globalised mainstream and another representation that seeks to highlight the distinctive heritage and culture of a particular place with its indigenous qualities.

At about the same time as Bianchini and his colleagues were analysing the European Capitals of Culture programme, Ashworth and Larkham brought together scholars from various disciplines and from various European countries at a time when the European Union was being enlarged to accommodate the nations of Eastern and Central Europe.²² What unifies the studies in this book is the question: does a new Europe require a new past as a precondition for its emergence? The authors explore the tensions between policies that seek to promote European harmonisation and policies that seek to reinforce local, regional and national diversity. They identify the commodification of heritage to meet the requirements of an ever-burgeoning heritage tourist industry and the evidence of this in niche-marketing, city branding and urban and rural regeneration. For those seeking to market heritage, and especially a European heritage, the challenges are obvious. Europe means many different things to many different people both inside Europe and outside. This reference, easily written, to insiders and outsiders, raises many questions. Is Europe a place or an idea, or even an ideology? If it is a place, are the boundaries set by membership of the European Union (EU) and defined in terms of treaty bound nation states restricted or, given the changing membership of the EU, too fluid to be meaningful? Do the boundaries define heritage, identity and citizenship? Is the definition of European heritage the responsibility of Eurocrats seeking a centralised concept or the responsibility of the European citizenry or some elites? Either way, the task would appear to be circumscribed by difficulties associated with histories of war and international rivalries, the problems of the -isms, and challenges arising from representations of heritage in time and space perspectives.

The nation-state and cultural identity

Not surprisingly, Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge argue that 'the national scale still remains the dominant focus for heritage'.²³ They refer to the multiplicities of meanings and identities evident in nations. The commonalities of shared perceptions of heritage within a nation may be minor compared to the perceptions of heritages by individuals and groups. This is obvious when one considers the notions of heritage that are carried by the immigrants who have always been a feature of European nations, just as in the nations located in other continents. They also assert, 'The discovery and propagation of a distinctive national heritage was a pre-condition for the creation of the nation-state but, conversely, the organization and instruments capable of sponsoring and supporting a national heritage require the existence of a nation-state.'²⁴ As Lowenthal succinctly pointed out, 'Heritage is always mongrel and amalgamated ... No heritage was ever purely native or wholly endemic; today's are utterly scrambled. Purity is a chimera; we are all creoles.'²⁵ Here, he echoes the sentiments expressed by Inge, 'A nation is a society united by a delusion about its ancestry and by a common hatred of its neighbours ... We are all mongrels and the better for being so.'²⁶ While acknowledging the cultural diversity that characterises nation states, we recognise that in terms of heritage-related policies and the linkages between heritage and regeneration, we agree with Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge that the nation state is the key player. Nation states are social constructions, defined by boundaries of varying porosity and permanence. Nation states come and go but perhaps their heritages go on forever. The consensually accepted heritage of a nation state is likely to alter substantially over time.

This is not to suggest that aspects of such a heritage will be regarded equally between the national core and the periphery or between various parts of the core. If, for example, language is identified as a key component of a national heritage, and especially of its intangible representation, and the language survives as a minority language only in the spatial periphery, then those persons speaking that language will have a different sense of national identity from those nearer and in the core. Furthermore, if the nation state – as in the case of Canada – is a federation in which sovereignty in key areas lies with provinces, then of course the provincial state may undertake key roles with respect to heritage and regeneration that in unitary states are explicitly national. Thus, in Atlantic Canada four provincial

jurisdictions are involved, with the additional complication that all give some recognition to region, through the Council of Atlantic Premiers. However constituted, the state has the authority and the power to direct collective definitions of heritage. Governmental agencies lead the state in a continuous process of nation building in which political, economic and social sustainability is the major preoccupation. Crucial to this sustainability is a sense of heritage. Heritage is often seen as a unifying force that contributes to the citizen's sense of identity expressed in place and time. The creation of a collective memory through various state directed channels is essential to this. It can be seen, for example, in educational curricula, state festivals, state owned and/or controlled monuments and landscapes, state galleries, museums, libraries and other public buildings.

Forging a sense of unity becomes increasingly difficult in the face of globalisation and this force is particularly noticeable in urban architecture and city planning. Travellers are wont to complain about the homogenisation of architectural style that becomes apparent as they walk through international airports and travel on expressways to city centres that appear no different from the places from whence they came. Uniformity of city centre streetscapes can be seen not only in the arrangement and brands of shops and offices, banks and fast-food outlets but also in the associated residential buildings. Iconic buildings designed by 'starchitects' give cityscapes a distinctive characteristic but this distinction is symbolic of the search for modernity and vibrancy by city planners seeking to engage in a global competition for foreign investment and tourist income. To design buildings that aspire to celebrate aspects of national heritage, as different from national identity, may be perceived as part of the 'instrumental performative roles of heritage'.²⁷ It is in the debate over intrinsic and instrumental values of heritage that national identity, alongside, or constructed from, a multiplicity of cultural identities and heritages, is an essential component. This debate informs regeneration policy making and planning since both intrinsic and instrumental values may be projected through new buildings, clusters of buildings and whole districts in both urban and rural settings. Of course, both sets of values may simply be ignored or more deliberately rejected. Places that have been regenerated have their own characters, raising the central question: how far do, or should, heritage and identity – in all of their pluralistic forms, ranging from the universal to the provincial and regional – shape regeneration plans and achievements?

Notes

- 1 S.A. Sutton, *Urban Revitalization in the United States: Policies and Practice: Final Report* (2008). <http://www.columbia.edu/>; H. Ladd, 'Spatially-targeted economic development strategies: Do they work?' *Cityscape* 1, 1 (1994): 193–218.
- 2 L. Gibson and J. Pendlebury (eds.), *Valuing Historic Environments* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2009).
- 3 See D. Lowenthal, 'Stewarding the past in a perplexing present', in E. Avrami, R. Mason and M. de la Torre (eds.), *Values and Heritage Conservation: Research report* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2000); also M. de la Torre (ed.), *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2002).
- 4 R. Mason, 'Assessing values in conservation planning: methodological issues and choices' in M. de la Torre (ed.), *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage*.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 6 J. Duncan and D. Ley, 'Introduction: Representing the place of culture' in J. Duncan and D. Ley (eds.), *Place/Culture/Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993).
- 7 These issues have been reviewed in J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) and D. Gillman, *The Idea of Cultural Heritage* (Leicester: Institute of Art and Law, 2006).
- 8 B. Graham, G.J. Ashworth and J.E. Tunbridge, *A Geography of Heritage* (London: Arnold, 2000), 2.
- 9 B. Garcia, 'Cultural policy and urban generation in Western European cities: lessons from experience, prospects for the future', *Local Economy* 19, 4 (2004): 313, 314.
- 10 UNESCO Conventions: *The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (Paris: UNESCO, 1972).
- 11 UNESCO Conventions: *The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Paris: UNESCO, 2003).
- 12 S. Watson and E. Waterton, 'Introduction: A visual heritage' in E. Waterton and S. Watson (eds.), *Culture, Heritage and Representation: Perspectives on Visuality and the Past* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2010).
- 13 M.F. Brown, 'Heritage trouble: recent work on the protection of intangible cultural property', *International Journal of Cultural Property* 12 (2005), 41.
- 14 World Heritage Committee's definition of outstanding universal value as expressed in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (Paris: UNESCO, 1972), paragraph 49: 14.
- 15 European Capitals of Culture programme in 2005 with a set of objectives specified in Article 4 of Decision 1622/2006/EC, *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (Faro: Council of Europe, 2005).
- 16 F. Bianchini and M. Parkinson (eds.), *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration: The West European experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).
- 17 F. Bianchini, 'Remaking European cities: the role of cultural policies' in Bianchini and Parkinson (eds.), *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration: The West European experience*.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Bianchini and Parkinson (eds.), *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration: The West European Experience*.
- 21 Julia Gonzalez, 'Bilbao: culture, citizenship and quality of life' in Bianchini and Parkinson (eds.), *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration: The West European experience*, 84–85.
- 22 G.J. Ashworth and P.J. Larkham (eds.), *Building a New Heritage: Tourism, Culture and Identity in the New Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 23 Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, *A Geography of Heritage*, 76.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 184.
- 25 Lowenthal, 'Stewarding the past in a perplexing present', 21–22
- 26 W.R. Inge, *The End of an Age and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 127.
- 27 Gibson and Pendlebury (eds.), *Valuing Historic Environments*, 7.

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