

Heritage and education in the context of migration and community regeneration

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Editor's note

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, multiple challenges including conflicts, climate change, economic downturns and environmental disasters have caused increased human displacement. Growing frustration among communities, coupled with eroding democracies across the board, has rekindled the discussion of 'we/us' vs. 'them/the other'. In this debate, culture and heritage play a central role. This article examines the role of heritage and education in the context of community regeneration, blending the displaced with local communities. Focusing on multiple alternative narratives of people and places, it stresses the essential need to go beyond the objectification of the 'other' and establish common ground to move toward a community of equals. It further argues that alternatives to narratives need to be imagined beyond the nation-state's official single version and take into account the viewpoints of all inhabitants, including newcomers and minorities. This requires examining and exploring the role of heritage from the perspective of human rights and democracy, which presents the potential to create organic links across sectors and encourages the mobilization of inhabitants toward more cohesive societies. It emphasizes that when heritage and education are considered essential elements for social transformation, they unleash possibilities for new cultural narratives underpinning community regeneration through a conceptual shift within communities. Finally, the article offers perspectives on the need to continuously redefine what heritage makers of today mean by 'we', through heritage-led and community-based initiatives in a network of heritage communities across Europe and beyond.

Key words

Education | Displacement | Local | Migration | Municipalism | Otherization | Cultural heritage | Community regeneration |



Patrimonio y educación en el contexto de la migración y de la regeneración comunitaria

RESUMEN

En los últimos años, numerosos retos como los conflictos, el cambio climático, las recesiones económicas y las catástrofes medioambientales han provocado un aumento de los desplazamientos humanos. La creciente frustración entre las comunidades, unida a la erosión de las democracias en general, ha reavivado el debate sobre “nosotros” frente a “ellos/los otros”. En este debate, la cultura y el patrimonio juegan un papel central. Este artículo examina el papel del patrimonio y de la educación en el contexto de la regeneración comunitaria, mezclando lo desplazado con las comunidades locales. Centrándose en múltiples narrativas alternativas de personas y lugares, subraya la necesidad esencial de ir más allá de la cosificación del “otro” y establecer un terreno común para avanzar hacia una comunidad de iguales. Además, sostiene que es necesario imaginar otras las narrativas que superen la versión única oficial del Estado nación y tener en cuenta los puntos de vista de todos los habitantes, incluidos los recién llegados y las minorías. Para ello, es necesario examinar y explorar el papel del patrimonio desde la perspectiva de los derechos humanos y de la democracia, su potencial para crear vínculos orgánicos entre sectores y fomentar la movilización de los habitantes hacia sociedades más cohesionadas. Destaca que cuando el patrimonio y la educación se consideran elementos esenciales para la transformación social, desencadenan posibilidades de nuevas narrativas culturales que apuntalan la regeneración comunitaria mediante un cambio conceptual dentro de las comunidades. Por último, se ofrecen perspectivas sobre la necesidad de redefinir continuamente lo que los creadores de patrimonio de hoy entienden por “nosotros”, a través de iniciativas dirigidas por el patrimonio y basadas en la comunidad en una red de comunidades patrimoniales de toda Europa y más allá.

Palabras clave

Educación | Desplazamiento | Local | Migración | Municipalismo | Otridad | Patrimonio cultural | Regeneración comunitaria |

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INTRODUCTION

There is a strong belief, embedded in our collective psyches and affirmed by formal education, that our culture, heritage, and way of living are more legitimate than others. This nation-state based message is widely disseminated in the name of national integrity, often based on a singular official history. While each nation may need these elements to foster a sense of belonging and identity, there is a danger in glorifying one dominant cultural influence, which threatens cultural diversity and the multiplicity of existence in a world that is increasingly on the move. This danger, often internalized as monoculture, is disrupted through human mobility, where various groups meet and have the opportunity to exchange and construct new shared narratives. In the emergence of these new narratives, where education plays a crucial role, it is important to carry on a discourse regarding culture and heritage, beyond the neoliberal approach to multiculturalism and a pluralistic society, questioning the underlying ideological relations of power and privilege.

In times of increased human mobility and rapid demographic changes, there is a delicate balance in dealing with heritage and education at local, national, and international levels. As these changes lead to the regeneration of communities, the discourse on 'we/us' –meaning the native population¹– and 'the other/them' –meaning newcomers (immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees)– also gains momentum. This discourse has a significant influence on public perception of newcomers and their integration into communities.

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Here, “native” refers to long-term residents who claim ‘rightful ownership’ of land, culture, and heritage, either through inheritance or prior arrival. This term can be instrumentalized by protectionist and far-right groups against newcomers or those with immigration backgrounds. It should not be confused with indigenous peoples across the world who have been subject to systematic periods of European expansion and colonization and the ongoing “coloniality of power,” where settlers claim rights to indigenous territories and assert supremacy over native populations.



Bread and Puppet Theatre (Glover, VT-USA) | photo Hakan Shearer Demir

Integration policies inherently contain the concept of 'otherness', despite being promoted as a two-way process for harmonious coexistence (Ager & Strang 2008, 177-178). Reflected through varying integration and education policies, there is a strong aspect of heteronomy² embedded in these policies, consistent with the essence of a nation-state despite good intentions for a harmonious society. In this case, the long and demanding process of becoming a 'local' or 'citizen' evolves into a never-ending battle between acceptance and non-acceptance by the natives, while the expectation of 'fitting in' remains unchallenged.

However, in a constantly changing environment, challenging set norms becomes unavoidable, as people on the move seek alternatives with dignity and autonomy. The necessary process of continuously redefining 'we' also shapes how one defines culture and heritage and influences relationships transmitted through education to future generations. As formal education plays a crucial role in transmitting the shared values of society and conveying the top-down structure of heteronomy within the nation-state, alternative approaches to heritage and education need to be envisioned in the context of community regeneration.

While this article advocates for heritage as an integral part of community life and offers perspectives for a holistic approach to heritage, it also encourages each community to engage in dialogue with all inhabitants to reassess their culture and heritage, shaping specific relations between groups, genders, generations, and the natural world as today's heritage makers. Therefore, the way this article looks into culture and heritage in relation to education establishes a basis for critically questioning these relations and examining the role heritage plays in this equation. In this regard, Paolo Freire's concept of the praxis of solidarity—a 'way of being and becoming'—emerges in a process of community co-construction, constituting a quest for self-realization (Gadotti 1996). Through this pedagogical process, communities living side by side (a neoliberal interpretation of multicultural societies today) transition from Freire's concept of merely 'being', to making a concerted effort toward 'becoming'. Such a process of becoming requires deconstructing set norms and deep historical beliefs in a single narrative, imagining alternatives beyond current concepts of integration and citizenship, and working toward a community of equals. Accordingly, in reimagining communities in a changing world, people do not need to become a common being, but rather find meaning in being in common (Izhar 2017).

Culture and heritage have the power to bring people together and open doors for inclusive interactions. This needs to be managed, shifting from a territorial relationship, which is often characterized by possessive attitudes toward the land, to connections which are based more on relationships with the place, the people and the stories. This is particularly relevant

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Heteronomy, as the opposite of autonomy, refers to hierarchy, conformity and an inherited way of thinking. Entailing fixed impositions and excluding alternatives, heteronomous structures tend to operate around a single narrative, expecting all to assimilate, regardless of their social and historical relevance and meaning to the society.



in increasingly urban settings and peripheries of power, which are shaped by these relational connections. Indeed, culture and heritage can create a platform for a cooperative process of community co-construction, redefining and redesigning relations of citizenship beyond its legal meaning. It provides an opportunity for today's heritage makers to ensure access to the places, people, and narratives that constitute the basis for a co-construction process, one that honors a dignified life for all and works toward community well-being.

I realize that the issues surrounding cultural heritage, cultural diversity, and education are vast and complex, and my arguments are not meant to provide all the answers or address all concerns regarding these issues. Instead, the purpose of this article is to offer readers a different perspective on heritage and education in relation to community regeneration and reflective practices in times of change. This may ignite interest among local communities, professionals, authorities, and newcomers in a process of co-construction toward a community of equals.

Accordingly, I will focus on four main points:

- > The changing dynamics and demographics of our times and its challenges,
- > The implicit impact of education and heritage in perpetuating 'otherization',
- > Displacement, community regeneration and the heritage makers of today,
- > Possibilities in heritage-led initiatives to address societal challenges and work toward community well-being.

I will further offer some practical recommendations that might be useful for those who would like to explore or expand their efforts in addressing the challenges faced in their respective communities.

THE CHANGING DYNAMICS AND DEMOGRAPHICS OF OUR TIMES AND ITS CHALLENGES

Demographic changes of our times, whether through an aging population, decreasing birth rate in Europe, or human mobility in search of better opportunities elsewhere, are closely impacted by complex social, economic, political, and cultural factors. The natural outcome of population movement creates an environment of ongoing regeneration of communities that require a process of redefining and designing relationships in order to adapt to changing dynamics. This is essential to establish and sustain a certain level of community well-being and quality of life for all.



Bread and Puppet Theatre, Glover, VT–USA (2013)
| photo Hakan Shearer Demir

Culture and heritage play a significant role in citizen engagement, community well-being, and defining social norms. With community regeneration in mind, how a citizen is defined and what norms and values are set determine the power relations between community members. Education has a tremendous impact on transmitting these values through formal, non-formal, and informal settings, shaping society and informing policies. In this regard, it is crucial to reflect on how heritage and culture are perceived, treated and reflected through education.

If heritage and culture are perceived as static notions, with a territorial and possessive approach in the name of national integrity, anything that falls outside this realm could be seen as a threat to this unity, a concept that is often propagated by nation-states. This perceived threat challenges the understanding of “we,” demanding that “the other” integrate into already established norms in the interest of the majority. This process of integration often takes place without taking into consideration newcomers’ backgrounds, potentials, and aspirations. Any digression from these norms could pose potential problems to integrity and unity. This approach sets a model of heteronomy in action and a subtle basis for otherization.

On the other hand, if culture and heritage are perceived as social and political constructs and fluid notions, with a relational approach to people and places, there is a greater chance to negotiate with each wave of changes and redefine “we” in a way that minimizes the conditions that perpetuate systemic

otherization. This approach would embrace more autonomy, allowing communities to redefine themselves as changes take place locally.

Displacement plays a triggering role in challenging established norms and hegemonic tendencies within communities. As communities regenerate, the dynamics and significance of heritage assets also change according to their relevance to current community members. This does not deny the artistic, architectural, and archaeological value or obscure historical facts; instead, it opens the door for further critical thinking from different perspectives, even addressing stagnation of history and dissonant heritage.

Examining some of the main aspects of community regeneration and its challenges in this article, the concepts of culture and heritage, citizenship, and education deserve further elaboration..

Culture and Heritage as a social & political construct and a fluid notion

Examining heritage and education in the context of community regeneration, it is beneficial to deconstruct key concepts and understand the fundamental causes and effects of the challenges faced. In this regard, in addition to their historic and artistic importance, we consider culture and heritage as social and political constructs that change with human mobility and remain fluid notions negotiated between groups over time.

This perspective provides us with additional tools to analyze the impact of heritage and education policies that (un)intentionally delegitimize the presence and importance of diverse cultural norms. It further offers a means to understand and address discriminatory acts in societies. This distinction is crucial to highlight the difference between merely living together side by side - where participation in cultural and social events is showcased as the 'soft power' of integration policies, a neo-liberal approach - and working toward a community of equals, where culture and heritage play a role in addressing socio-political challenges, embodying a political project of direct democracy.

While cultural expressions inherited from the past reflect and validate our identities, different groups have sought to dominate within the context of the nation-state by asserting their majority presence. This approach has silenced the stories of many minority and marginalized groups, leaving limited room for self-expression and participation in decision-making processes (Shearer Demir 2023, 308). The dominant groups have increasingly exercised power through persuasion rather than force, positioning culture and heritage within the realm of soft power.

Norms embedded in formal education and labor relations have prescribed what makes a 'good citizen' for newcomers. A critical look at soft power, with culture



Piazza del Campo (Siena) | photo Herbert Frank

and heritage as its key elements, reveals that current inclusion and integration policies perpetuate hierarchies and paternalistic relations between groups—not only for newcomers but also for natives who find themselves on the peripheries of power. The intersectionality of culture, heritage, and education is crucial at this juncture. Education emerges as an autonomous act, fostering critical thinking and creating an environment for the heritage makers of today.

The Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention), as a framework, is a useful instrument that provides guidance to encourage this critical look and advocates for considering communities with an inclusive and integrated approach, valuing the diversity of heritage, landscapes and peoples. With its holistic approach to heritage as a fluid notion and its emphasis on human rights and democracy, the Faro Convention highlights the significance of heritage for communities, as "...objects and places are not, in themselves, what is important about cultural heritage. The meanings and uses that people attach to them and the values they represent is what is most relevant. Such meanings, uses

and values must be understood as part of the wider context of the cultural ecologies of our communities” (Council of Europe 2009, 8).

Citizenship and the Nation-State

In times when communities feel unstable and insecure, they tend to hold onto their values, identities, and stories, as these seem to be the only stability remaining to them. In such precarious periods and conditions, heritage can easily become part of a battlefield, and the concept of citizenship can be instrumentalized for political purposes.

Culture and heritage are inherent parts of citizenship and will present challenges as long as citizenship depends on the nation-state, particularly in the context of increased mobility and community regeneration. On one hand, nation-states emphasize unity and integrity, driven by a single official history and often centered around the majority heritage. On the other hand, millions of people hold multiple citizenships and live in more than one place, which weakens the single-story argument with multiple affiliations and identities. Consequently, ‘the idea of a citizen who spends most of their life in one country and shares a single national identity loses ground’ (Tonkens & Duyvendak 2016).

While acknowledging our diversity, efforts to be inclusive may encounter intentional or unintentional relations of power and privilege, dominating common spaces. These power dynamics are sometimes reinforced in protectionist forms in the name of citizenship, making it challenging to foster true inclusivity and diversity as we construct and encounter ‘the other,’ inadvertently marginalizing certain groups (Shearer Demir 2021, 5). Looking into these issues through the lens of human rights and democracy, the role of heritage emerges with its potential to forge organic connections across sectors and mobilize inhabitants toward more cohesive societies.

Education beyond the state apparatus

Reflecting on how we live today and critiquing everyday life encourages us to envision beyond the limitations imposed by nation-state boundaries. It prompts us to question with whom we share our lives and experiences, what we have inherited, how we contribute to or damage it, and how we negotiate diverse existences in our communities. Moreover, it urges us to consider what we transmit to future generations.

Therefore, our educational approach needs to depart from the current reality, increasingly shaped by the regeneration of communities through human mobility, which challenges the single official narratives that reinforce nation-state structures. Critiquing everyday life today encourages us to revisit accepted norms and learning practices regarding our understanding of rela-

tionships between peoples, stories, and places. This process also prompts us to reconsider education as a whole, focusing on human rights and democracy, and to explore heritage in all its aspects, expanding from the local community to regional and global concerns and societal challenges.

As much as formal education system is shaped by national authorities through its institutions, communities play a central role in heritage work. A critical look at local and national heritage is essential and constitutes the basis for a process of dialogue toward a community of equals.

With current integration policies and emphasis on inclusion and participation, multiple narratives may not find a place in a formal education system as they might present challenges to the official history. Multiple narratives may surface periods such as colonization, slavery or totalitarian regimes. Dissonant heritage carries the marks of those periods today and highlights the need to decolonize education to move forward. Decolonizing in this sense would mean conceptualizing education beyond the apparatus of state ideology (Ruuska 2023), opening a delicate debate on what is perceived legitimate and 'authorized heritage' (Smith & Waterton 2012) today.

While cultural heritage and identity play an essential role in how societies operate, the difference between the heritage and identities 'of Europe' versus 'in Europe' calls for serious discussion as well, especially in light of the recent migration influx and the sensitive topic of Europe's colonial history. This process does not undermine the history and heritage of Europe but rather encourages expression through a more critical response to the past.

Perceiving displacement as a trigger for transformative social change and newcomers as resourceful people would help communities revisit the role of education and heritage as resources for social change. Such a perception requires a more autonomous approach where communities can define and design their relationships, with a better understanding of the cultural and heritage elements of others, working toward a community of equals. This would necessitate a strategic and alternative approach to non-formal education, gradually informing formal education with different perspectives that encompass the diverse elements of all inhabitants.

THE IMPLICIT IMPACT OF HERITAGE AND EDUCATION IN PERPETUATING "OTHERIZATION"

Considering the potential unifying and divisive role of heritage in the context of nation-state, it is essential to examine the significance of heritage and implicit messages that are transmitted through education that may perpetuate otherization and relations of power and privilege.



> Heritage that makes us proud

There is a noble enthusiasm in sharing childhood stories, favorite foods, games, and traditional practices. An irreplaceable pride comes with sharing one's culture and heritage with the world. Acknowledging and honoring the value of diverse heritage, and placing it correctly in history, is a challenging yet exciting process.

Heritage is an intrinsic part of the everyday lives of communities, encompassing places, stories, and landscapes. Its social value is priceless in terms of community engagement and pride. Terry O'Regan, the Irish landscape expert 'explains that 'how we perceive heritage largely depends on our age: children associate it with anything 'old' or historical, adults link it with identity, and seniors often see it as part of the 'past' and a 'loss' of values (Council of Europe 2014, 6). However, all ages recognize its importance at some level'. Thus, there is a close connection to and pride in heritage at all segments of society, which also constitutes a vital ingredient in educational programs worldwide. This positive approach to heritage can be a healthy and comforting asset for community wellbeing, if managed responsibly.

> Heritage that makes us uncomfortable

We also acknowledge that heritage has not always been a comfortable one in Europe, with its history of colonization, wars, and structural injustices.



How we perceive heritage largely depends on our age. Sanfermines (Pamplona): Gigantes y Cabezudos | photo Rufino Lasaosa

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan novelist, playwright, academic, and literary critic, has extensively discussed his experience visiting Europe and its beautiful cultural heritage sites. He notes that while he appreciates their beauty, as an African man, he cannot stop thinking about the slave labor that might have been involved in their development (Wa Thiong'o 2015). These sites hold different significance for different groups, highlighting the importance of multiple stories about a place or site.

Cultural heritage, while highlighting our commonalities, also surfaces our differences and can easily be instrumentalized for exclusion. Diversity can be seen as legitimizing the undesired 'other', leading to hate speech, including xenophobic, antisemitic, anti-Roma, anti-Muslim, and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments. In dealing with changing dynamics today, we must consider the community in its entirety and create space for a participatory environment.

> Heritage that is invisible

We celebrate and cherish what we know and what we see, and at times, what we choose to see. Understanding the significance of culture and heritage requires acknowledging multiple stories and identities, regardless of how



Niños en Bangladesh vistiendo sari en la celebración de Pohela Boishakh en Agrabad, Chittagong (2016) | foto Moheen Reeyad

much they may not fit within dominant norms. Excluding any group in this process perpetuates the mistakes of history, marginalizing specific groups and treating them as “part without a part,” as described by Jacques Rancière (Baiocchi & Connor 2013).

At times, invisible heritage is represented through cultural extraction or appropriation, creating an asymmetric relationship between cultures and societies. The dominant culture or society often justifies its relations with minorities and marginalized groups by using their knowledge, ways of life, and art for capitalist consumption.

> Heritage that is silenced

When we discuss peoples, places, and stories, we also aim to uncover untold narratives of hidden or forgotten events and communities, including those currently unrepresented. These include Jewish heritage across Europe, Roma communities on the peripheries, and migrant and refugee groups who bring their own cultural and heritage practices but lack a platform to voice their opinions. Additionally, there exists an uncomfortable heritage of authoritarian regimes and atrocities that nations and communities may delay confronting in order to establish or maintain national unity. For instance, after the Franco period in Spain, El Pacto del Olvido (the Pact of Forgetting) meant a significant delay in reckoning with the past until the 21st century (Encarnacion 2014). Similar responses to a difficult and painful past have been common worldwide, including in North America, Latin

America, Australia, and Europe. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the delicate balance between democratization and silencing while ensuring that freedom of thought and expression is respected.

In the context of community regeneration, it is crucial to recognize the dominant relations of power and privilege both between and within groups that shape group dynamics for generations, perpetuating acts of silencing and the necessity of invisibility for survival. This issue is especially pertinent when there is a blanket categorization of newcomers, potentially overlooking distinct differences and dynamics among them. Such categorization can set a precedent for the treatment of 'minorities within minorities', silencing individuals' and groups' ability to express themselves and become a part in a co-construction process following displacement.

> Heritage that we make

Efforts to create a new narrative in Europe should not remain exclusive to specific groups based on who was there first, but should be accessible to all inhabitants in order to imagine and realize democratic and rights-based communities.

The multiplicity of identities and narratives of all inhabitants in a common space needs to be considered for constructive dialogue to take place. Otherwise, we risk perpetuating exclusionary policies where heritage becomes or remains an elitist notion for the privileged wealthy, and heritage assets increasingly become commodities to be consumed. A cooperative approach to heritage cannot afford to be an abstract discussion; it should make sense to community members and highlight necessary changes in their daily lives.

Education through heritage is crucial to begin a process of transformation where a commoning and co-construction process takes place in a shared space, the commons. Thus, cultural survival is not always about sustaining existing structures indefinitely, regardless of their implications, but rather about having the agency to adapt to changes and rebalance following the disorientation caused by each major change. All inhabitants need to feel comfortable and safe to bring their silenced stories into the daylight, become visible and recognized, and take part in the process of deciding what to sustain and transmit as heritage makers of today.

In the spectrum of efforts working for a just society, the culture and heritage may not be considered at the top of the list. However, they have a potential to create a platform for intersectionality, critically question official and single narratives, and allow multiple narratives to surface.

Commons and commoning are essential for creating a platform to engage in dialogue and move from words to action, ensuring that diversity and inclusive-



ness remain crucial components of education policies. This approach is vital for sustainability, where diversity emerges as a strength and a matter of survival.

DISPLACEMENT, COMMUNITY REGENERATION AND HERITAGE MAKERS OF TODAY

> Displacement and community regeneration

As the first quarter of the 21st century comes to an end, demographics and norms are changing in Europe, influenced by aging populations and population movement. In major cities, the white-collar workforce, the service industry, and street vendors are not necessarily people who were born and raised in those cities or countries for generations. Agricultural fields and construction sites are operational due to the presence of migrant and immigrant workers. Despite newcomers populating the market, schools, and cultural spaces, the fundamental structure of the class system and otherization

Chiesa Maddalena ai Cristallini (Rione Sanità, Napoli): La Chiesa Blu. This old and abandoned church was rehabilitated by community members, and its decoration reflects one of the major social challenges—the treatment of migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea. The images and boat pieces were collected from sunken vessels in the Mediterranean Sea. The message highlights stories of solidarity and displacement, establishing a common ground for social transformation. By acknowledging newcomers and creating space for them, the concept of “we” is redefined | photo Chiesa dei Cristallini

remains untouched (Portes 2010), as they are systematically pushed to the peripheries of power.

A 2001 UN report suggested that some 80 million migrants would be needed in the EU by 2050 to maintain the size of the potential working population (UNDESA 2000). In addition to significant numbers of newcomers in European cities today, with a possible scenario of a large number of newcomers arriving in Europe within the next 25 years, heritage, culture, and identities present in Europe will increasingly have relational connections to places and people. Such a situation requires the heritage field to adjust to new dynamics, ensuring cultural rights for all. Communities need to negotiate and manage heritage-related issues in a constantly changing environment.

Displacement has a triggering role for communities to challenge established norms and adapt to new situations despite prevailing hegemonic tendencies. This takes place in a gradual process of fusion. The traditional heritage of nations is transformed through elements of the dominant population's heritage, which are integrated into the festive routines of minority families. Alternatively, newcomers may recreate inherited practices to fit the circumstances of the present, resulting in a 'heritage in becoming' (Nikielska-Sekula 2019).

A healthier look into community well-being considers the whole community, including silenced and marginalized groups as well as those pushed to the peripheries of power, such as seasonal fruit pickers and migrant workers. Acknowledging the heritage and identity of all inhabitants, regardless of the duration of their stay or legal status, is a fundamental step toward addressing issues of 'otherness' and 'otherization.' Accordingly, a solidarity-based approach to newcomers and its reflection in educational activities is essential, as opposed to a charity-based approach. This requires substantial effort by communities to perceive and treat newcomers with dignity and as equals in community life, create common spaces, and ensure their access to these spaces for dialogue and joint action. Lived experiences in Italy show that 'creating common ground, common interests, and intercultural understanding works better than just 'assisting' people' (Shearer Demir 2023, 105). In this sense, promoting autonomy and independence is considered fundamental for newcomers, allowing them to exercise their cultural rights and take an active role in community affairs with dignity.

> Making a space for newcomers and accessibility

There is an existential need for the acknowledgment of heritage. This need plays a continual role in transmitting both traditional and new knowledge throughout communities. To honor this ethical demand for recognition, protection, and association, a safe and equal space for all inhabitants is essential. The significance of heritage assets is embodied in the interaction

between people, places, and stories, which requires a space to be redefined as needed.

Failing to recognize the presence of diverse groups, and not creating a neutral space and equal access for self-expression and dialogue, generates a position of power and privilege. This results in the privileged becoming both the narrators and the voices of marginalized people, influencing the contexts and circumstances in which dialogue takes place. Consciously or not, such a position exhibits a paternalistic posture of the privileged and powerful.

While the fear of the unknown inherently conditions relations between groups, excitement and curiosity for the new have the potential to create constructive opportunities for change. Times of change, if managed carefully, can become positive experiences and shape future relations among existing groups. However, power and privilege relations must be considered in this process, where the sense of belonging is regenerated through shared stories. In this regard, the stories of solidarity and displacement set the common ground for social transformation. Accordingly, 'we' is about today, bridging past and future, and redefining relations and norms with changing dynamics. This is where heritage and education intersect and play an important role.

Ensuring accessibility for all groups, with consideration of their socio-economic and legal status, race, class background, and gender aspects, is a significant challenge. This involves not only having access to what is presented but also being part of the decision-making process regarding what is presented and how it is presented. A fundamental distinction to emphasize here is the importance of mutual understanding and reframing relations. This requires not only exposure to the host culture for better integration but also the opportunity for newcomers to represent their own culture and heritage.

While recognizing new cultural values and norms is important for newcomers, it is also crucial to be aware of the vulnerabilities of both the displaced and the host communities. The ingrained belief in fitting in or integrating may lead to unintended or intended impositions, as well as self-imposed exclusion by newcomers.

> Heritage makers of today

An essential question in education and heritage is What and whose stories are we trying to reproduce and transmit? The official history of the nation-state as the only legitimate, acceptable version of the history of a place and people has been the main focus of formal education systems across the board. When we focus on inclusive and cohesive societies in the context of community regeneration, the single official narrative that is transmitted through formal education in heteronomy is troublesome. Often sidelining the

history of colonization, slavery, systemic extraction of resources, formal education, as the ideological state apparatus, persuades everyone to become a 'common being' to conform to its heteronomous structures, rather than finding meaning 'being in common' through critical questioning and autonomy.

Claiming a monopoly over cultural norms and insisting that newcomers must adapt to them, while acknowledging the importance of diverse cultures, establishes the basis for power and privilege relations (Tonkens & Duyvendak 2016). Such relations are maintained through a professional, specialized educated class that skillfully transmits the version of history, culture, and heritage of the ruling elite and the majority that aligns with it. Often contributing to paternalistic and hierarchical norms of power, such an approach discredits the backgrounds, potentials, and aspirations of diverse inhabitants. Displacement interrupts this status quo and opens up the possibility to question the set norms, surfacing clashing conceptions of belonging within and between groups. Heritage makers engaging in the process of community co-construction create opportunities to address challenges and seek solutions together.

POSSIBILITIES IN HERITAGE-LED INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS SOCIETAL CHALLENGES AND WORK TOWARD COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

> Common ground

Creating common ground for a process of community co-construction requires a markedly different perspective: one that examines and challenges the relations of power and privilege among we/us and the other, as well as the extent to which there is space to equally engage in heritage-making today. In this regard, it is important to pay specific attention to the sensitive balance between making space to freely engage in the process and voicing one's perspective versus feeling safer to remain invisible and self-exclude. Therefore, co-construction is the key term to reflect upon for each community in order to revisit and possibly go beyond the commonly used terms of integration, participation and inclusion, which entail power relations in them.

The identification of common ground where multiple narratives are shared is essential as it facilitates mutual understanding and restores respect. Genuine dialogue, particularly in times of vulnerability when people are removed from their fixed positions, introduces new ideas and encourages exploration of different options. A common space is important for face-to-face interaction, to overcome the fear of the unknown and to acknowledge people who are easily otherized and perceived as vulnerable and in need. Commons and the process of commoning create a neutral space for communities where vulnerabilities are mobilized and collective action in equal terms takes place toward community wellbeing.



Chapiteau RajGanawak (Saint-Denis, Isla de Francia): It is a place of meeting, creation, dance, commitment, festivity and common development. A hybrid place, halfway between a performance hall and a neighborhood center | photos Dominique Secher

This organic linkage between heritage and communities is the manifestation of synergy between who we are and who we aspire to become, which is a basic right for all. Consequently, with community regeneration we experience across the board, this organic linkage needs to be revisited and co-constructed..

> A municipalist approach to heritage

Addressing social challenges requires appropriate instruments, resources, and strategies. The Faro Convention is an instrument that reflects on the role of citizens in the process of defining, deciding, and managing the cultural environment in which they live. It encourages direct democracy through civil society and institutions accepting responsibility to share and make decisions in a constructive manner.

Considering Faro Convention concepts, heritage can be a means to social transformation and an essential element in creating an equitable society rather than an end result in itself. Focusing on the community level, a municipalist approach to heritage has significant educational value, where community members practice democracy through community-based, heritage-led initiatives. At the local level, identifying, recognizing, valuing, respecting, and protecting the heritage of 'the other' is more manageable, which legitimizes the process of heritage-making in the entirety of community life.

While there are observed limitations for newcomers to be accepted and take an active role in community life (De Haas 2014, 17), a local structure based on municipalism, with the utilization of local resources, may create an environment where the community's agency can bring about change. Municipalities are where common spaces and the process of commoning can be realized as a process of co-construction, paying particular attention to the non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal, creative, bottom-up/grassroots aspects of community life while valuing the temporariness of the experiments through community regeneration. The exploration of the concept of municipalism and heritage as a viable option exercises power by all inhabitants, redefining relations and citizenship in a non-statist, community-based local structure. It addresses people's aspiration for a quality of life, beyond mere survival. In this regard, legitimacy of heritage is based on a community consensus – a social contract.

This, however, should not remain local with a parochial mindset and needs to be connected to larger networks at a European level and beyond. These unique and rich experiences in various corners of the continent require a collective approach that maintains and furthers constructive dialogue within and between actors to assess, analyze changes and challenges, and make necessary adjustments.

CONCLUSIONS

"Otherization" remains a cloud over communities and nations despite all the challenges in groups coming together and redefining 'we' and 'the local,' without acknowledging all existing cultures and making space for them. Working toward a community of equals requires avoiding the division between those who are perceived as local and those who are not (De Waal 2020, 243). An important aspect of heritage in community regeneration is to stop pitying or victimizing newcomers and to start treating all as equals, learning from each other's culture and heritage instead of requiring one to adapt to other. In this sense, it might be possible to hear authentic voices and deconstruct existing hegemonies while disrupting paternalistic patterns that may have existed in local cultures as well (Köchling 2021).

The stories of community regeneration must find common ground to work toward a community of equals. The pedagogical aspects of co-construction and commoning help communities gain mutual understanding, build a consciousness for collective wellbeing, and reframe relations. Democratic education needs to mobilize innovative powers to build more just communities that respect human rights and dignity. In this regard, a critical look at heritage allows us to question the constant reproduction of dysfunctional practices, and a critical examination of education sets the ground for a social transformation process.

Engaging with all layers of society is fundamental, regardless of how much they may diverge from the official narrative or fall outside the common comfort zone. This helps define the legitimacy of heritage to a specific community over time and nurtures community well-being.

In line with the topics discussed in this article, some practical steps in non-formal education related to heritage could inspire further action, including:

Allocate Common Space and Accessibility: A process of community regeneration involves a shift from the concept of participation to cooperation and co-construction, where local communities play a central role. The co-construction process should ideally take place in 'neutral' locations where possessive power relations are minimized among all involved groups, and dialogue occurs on equal footing. Municipalities are the most suitable entities to explore such an approach. A positive step forward would be for municipalities to allocate municipal space and a specific budget for local heritage groups to organize and represent themselves, thereby working towards a heritage community network.

Create opportunities and a platform for each group to represent its culture and heritage, as opposed to requiring cultural adaptation events where newcomers are expected to learn about the new culture. This represents an important shift from heteronomy to autonomy, where each group is genuinely interested in engaging in dialogue and searching for common ground and mutual understanding.

In this context, dialogue goes beyond merely sitting around a table and exchanging views; it involves actually constructing something together to redefine and redesign relationships within a new framework. The entirety of such a process presents the elements for non-formal education that inform formal education, policies, and community well-being.

It is essential also to address the natural process of conflict that exists in each community and to establish an organic mechanism for conflict transformation, acknowledging traditional knowledge and practices in each place. An



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important aspect of this approach is to be aware of and avoid reproducing patriarchal and hierarchical dynamics in the name of traditions and cultural relativity. This is the essence of direct democracy, where silenced groups, specifically those who have been discriminated against based on gender, are given a voice.

Elaborate on joint actions where inhabitants can take part in heritage-led and community-based projects, making decisions based on the principles of direct democracy and human rights. In this regard, municipalities and local CSOs play a catalyst role as facilitators and troubleshooters, ensuring an inclusive process. Municipalities and CSOs further collect lessons learned from these processes to reflect on local policies and link to national and European networks, including the Faro Convention Network. Such an approach encourages the redefinition of citizenship in its essence beyond legal terms and aims to treat all inhabitants with dignity.

Establish a self-monitoring and evaluation body with community members where they can observe the principles established by the social contract and provide constructive feedback to the community. Such an independent body also provides policy advice to local institutions and the municipality while ensuring linkage with international networks.

Community regeneration and addressing the accompanying challenges is a complex and multilayered process. Heritage and education are at the crossroads of addressing some of these challenges. One approach is to hold tightly to protectionist and nation-state-based norms that insist newcomers or marginalized groups must fit in. Another approach is to view it as a natural process of change, try to understand 'the other,' and together engage in a process of heritage making. It is important to recognize that migration is not a problem but a solution. With every step toward community co-construction, the "other" becomes "we." Ultimately, as the south African activist Steve Biko expressed:

"Culture is essentially the society's composite answer to the varied problems of life. We are experiencing new problems every day and whatever we do adds to the richness of our cultural heritage. If culture is inherently dynamic, every time the conditions of life change, culture changes in response."

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