

Cultural Sustainability and Issues of Urban Memory

Smaranda Maria Todoran¹, Laura Patachi

¹ *Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning
72-76, Observatorului Str., Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

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Abstract

Culture has only recently begun to be considered as one of the pillars of sustainability. Moreover, it is an open debate whether and how culture may act as a catalyst for ecological developments, human well-being and economic viability, as stipulated by the COST Action. Recent organisations and conferences have put forward these questions launching the beginning of a debate on the scene of cultural sustainability. The present paper tries to address the problem of how culture can support sustainability and vice-versa in the realm of recent urban developments. The subject-matter of the article is represented by the sustainability issues raised by cultural and natural monuments in the city scape. More particularly, monuments, as defined by legislation, are considered to stand for the memory of architecture. As a consequence of this premise, preservation policies are considered at the limit of sustainability. The question then raised is whether there are alternative ways of addressing/preserving/dealing with urban memory, which can respond to ecological, well-being and economical requirements. Analysing particular tendencies in design and the debates generated on the ground of theory aims at establishing implications of preservation on memory and its counterparts, considered culturally sustainable.

Rezumat

Cultura a început să fie de puţin timp considerată ca unul dintre pilonii dezvoltării sustenabile. Dezbateră cu privire la felul în care aceasta poate fi un catalizator pentru rezolvarea problemelor de mediu, sociale şi economice este încă deschisă – aşa cum se stipulează în cadrul concluziilor recentei COST Action, desfăşurată în ultimii patru ani cu sprijinul Uniunii Europene. Şi alte organizaţii sau conferinţe sub egida unor instituţii culturale au lansat pentru dezbateră chestiunea rolului culturii pentru o dezvoltare sustenabilă. Lucrarea de faţă se preocupă de acest subiect, în mod particular, tratând chestiunea patrimoniului în medii urbane, ca mod de realizare a dezideratului sustenabilităţii. Monumentele culturale şi naturale, parte a oraşului, sunt considerate o creaţie a modernităţii, cu întreg aparatul legislativ menit să le protejeze. Totuşi, o nouă perspectivă introdusă de apariţia culturii pe scena sustenabilităţii indică posibila schimbare de atitudine asupra patrimoniului - între o viziune centrată pe loc şi una centrată pe comunităţi.

Keywords: sustainable design; memory; monument; cultural sustainability.

¹* Tel./ Fax.: 0728046501

E-mail address: arh.smaranda.todoran@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The general context of the paper is represented by the recent emergence of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability – emergence stipulated in official documents around EU institutions or UNESCO affiliated ones. Within culture, a particular attention is shown towards heritage. The paper focuses on how heritage can be part of a sustainable development. In order to do so, it is hypothesised that an important conflict that heritage theories and practices needs to address from a sustainable point of view is the distance or dichotomy between lived memory and institutionalised memory associated to heritage. The methodology used in the paper has two aspects. On one hand, it is interesting to see how culture and subsequently, heritage, is understood from the point of view of sustainability. Official documents and actions are the basis of this part of the research. On the other hand, a few case studies that are subject of articles presented in conferences related to the matter of cultural sustainability are commented from the point of view of heritage and memory. These aspects of the methods used in the paper also correspond to the structure of the article, representing the subjects of its first and respectively, second parts.

The thesis of the paper is that lived memory and its interpretation by the official discourse are often in contradiction. Different forms of memory are discussed in the paper considering who is remembering, what and how the process of remembrance occurs, following a phenomenological approach as proposed by Paul Ricoeur. However conflictual some forms of memory may be, the acknowledgement of culture as a pillar of sustainability, with all its difficulties, sometimes shows how a deeper, more particular and less institutionalised understanding of cultural and heritage-related situations allows for a resolution between conflicted memories. The case studies come then to support certain theoretical aspects underlined in the first part of the paper.

2. Culture, Heritage and Sustainability

2.1. Short history. Documents announcing the inclusion of culture among the pillars of sustainability

A vision of sustainable development with three dimensions came into being at the end of the 1980's, which considered economic growth, social inclusion and environmental balance as its pillars. These were embraced in official documents promoting and developing strategies for sustainable development as was the case with the Brundtland Report of 1987 and The Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit's declarations of 1992.

The last two decades have seen a more and more affirmed position of culture as an important part of declarative and legislative actions with universal value, when it comes to sustainable developments. Notably, the paper focuses on documents issued by UNESCO and its affiliated organisms, such as UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments), as well as those issued by European Union institutions.

Before declaring culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability, one of the first actions in this direction put forward by UNESCO is the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of November 2001. The declaration itself is based on the Preamble of UNESCO's Constitution which affirms that “the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfil in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern”[1]. In addition, according to the Article I of the Constitution, UNESCO assumes the role of recommending “such international agreements as may be necessary to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image” [1]. The definition given to culture in the spirit of the Constitution is also framed as a recommended understanding of it:

“culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” [2]. Moreover, the declaration acknowledges the fact that culture is at the heart of contemporary debates about identity, social cohesion and the development of a knowledge-based economy [2]. At this point, the interest in culture as part of sustainable developments, among the other three pillars of sustainability (the social and economic ones are named here) – is already announced.

Another document announcing the introduction of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability is the Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions issued by UNESCO in 2005. The Convention stipulates the importance of cultural diversity for the creation of a rich and varied world, nurturing human capacities and values and therefore, being a “mainspring for sustainable development for communities, peoples and nations” [3]. The document emphasizes the importance of culture as a strategic element in national and international development policies as well as in international development cooperation, and is considered essential in preserving peace and eradicating poverty [3]. Among the principles announced by the Convention, two are directly linked to sustainability. The fifth principle is that of the complementarity of economic and cultural aspects of development, both considered to have an equal part in development, while the sixth principle of the Convention stresses that “the protection, promotion and maintenance of cultural diversity are an essential requirement for sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations” [3].

While both documents hint towards the importance of culture and cultural diversity for a sustainable development of societies and nations, their aims are to protect and promote the expression of cultural diversity, as stipulated in the fifth and sixth articles of the Convention [3]. However, it is important to note that the role and definitions of culture in relation to sustainability remain vague. This is due in part to the many facets of cultural expressions and manifestations:

“Cultural diversity is made manifest not only through the varied ways in which the cultural heritage of humanity is expressed, augmented and transmitted through the variety of cultural expressions, but also through diverse modes of artistic creation, production, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment, whatever the means and technologies used.” [3]

In addition, it is difficult to set a boundary to cultural contents of cultural expressions or identities, and even more so, when it comes to the impact it may have for a sustainable development, as it refers to **all** artistic and cultural values that result from the creativity of individuals, groups and societies [3] – an apparent infinite extension.

2.2. Agenda 21 for Culture

More and more, a concern with the importance of culture in general and with its potential to complement a strategy for sustainable development based on three pillars, the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) – through its Executive Bureau, approved the Policy Statement on cultural sustainability in 2010, in the framework of the World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders. The 3rd World Congress of UCLG, held in Mexico DF, produced the Policy Statement as part of *Agenda 21 for Culture*. This is the first document with worldwide mission value that proposes a framework for cultural development undertaken by cities and local governments [4]. Since its adoption by UCLG at the organization's creation as its reference document, a growing number of cities and governments worldwide have adhered to *Agenda 21 for culture* [4]. As in the broader *Agenda 21* adopted by the United Nations in the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, “21” stands for a vision of the 21st century that holds sustainability at the core of the debate for future development.

The Policy Statement introducing culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability thus has two

components. The first establishes the fundamental role of culture in sustainable development, while the second represents the adoption of the policy and the way to assume responsibilities linked to it by the UCLG.

The affirmation of the role of culture first appears as a consequence of documents already in place – such as UNESCO's *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, UNESCO's *Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, and *Agenda 21 for Culture*. It is also stated that while the lack of consideration for the cultural dimension of development is lowering the chances for sustainable development, peace and well-being, it is also necessary to complete the trio of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental balance when addressing contemporary problems of global societies [5].

Secondly, believing that “governance at all levels (local, national and international) should include a strong cultural dimension” [5], UCLG calls for an integration of culture into development policies, encouraging a solid cultural policy at local governance levels [5]. At the level of national governance UCLG calls for an establishment of concrete objectives and actions concerning culture in areas such as education, economy, science, communication, environment, social cohesion and international cooperation [5], while finally, the United Nations, development agencies and the international community are invited to explicitly integrate culture into programmes on sustainable development [5]. At all levels, governance is asked to promote the debate on “the implications of the inclusion of culture as fourth pillar of development” [5].

An example of further efforts to implement the Policy Statement's recommendations by policy makers is the four-year long COST Action “Investigating Cultural Sustainability”, developed from 2011 to 2015. Funded by the European Commission within its Horizon 2020 programme and supported by the European COST Association (Cooperation in Science and Technology), “Investigating Cultural Sustainability”'s main objective was “to highlight European research across its members' countries in order to provide policy makers with instruments for integrating culture as a key element of the sustainable development” [6]. The results of the four-year research were shared and discussed within a final public conference held in May 2015 in Helsinki, called “Culture(s) in Sustainable Futures: theories, policies, practices” [6]. Following the conference, several publications were issued, among which the conclusions from the COST Action – entitled “Culture *in, for and as* Sustainable Development”, as well as two Routledge volumes debating various aspects of culture within the sustainability framework. Among these, the importance of heritage emerges as a particular aspect of culture within a sustainable development model.

As the Conclusions of the COST Action “Investigating Cultural Sustainability” stipulate, culture is first a difficult concept to address from the point of view of sustainability. The document issued at the end of the four year research states from the beginning that although it seems obvious that culture has an important role in a sustainable development, for thirty years, since the Brundtland Commission's report “Our Common Future”, the incorporation of culture into sustainability debates “seems to remain a great challenge, both scientifically and politically” [6]. Although there have been attempts to bring culture into sustainability by trans- and inter-national organisations and by scientific organisations – the conclusion of the COST Action is that culture's role is still strongly shadowed by the initial perception of sustainability as linked to discourses on the environment and the economy. Furthermore, culture, sustainability and sustainable development are complex and complicated concepts which are “difficult to grasp by policy-makers”. Therefore, actions like the one sustained by the European Commission's COST, are, at this stage, aimed at understanding the multiple meanings and connotations of these concepts, the relations built and to be built among them, with a particular attention to the way culture may play a part in sustainability. The present paper further investigates the conclusions of various documents issued on the role of culture in sustainable development, with a particular interest in heritage as part of culture.

3. Heritage as Part of Sustainable Urban Developments. Case Studies on Memory Perceptions and Expressions

3.1. Culture in, for and as sustainability

In order to try to grasp the multiple facets of culture in relation with sustainability, a play of words was put up by the COST Action's Conclusions document, as shown in its title. Thus, first, culture's role is to support sustainability: from this perspective, it has a self-standing role in sustainable development. Secondly, it connects sustainability's other three pillars – having a mediating role among them. Thirdly, culture is a creator of sustainability: it has a transformative role as sustainable development. These three aspects of the relation between sustainable development and culture mean that culture can be seen as equal to the other three pillars of sustainability, as a linking element between the other three pillars or as a fundament, or all-encompassing element of all three pillars. These three roles are to be seen not as mutually exclusive but rather as possible representations of „thinking and organising values, meanings and norms strategically and eclectically in relation to discussions on sustainable development” [6].

At this point, culture, although not specifically defined in the article, appears as a concept specific to the post-modern paradigm. This multiple approach is possible within an understanding of culture that goes beyond the often-popular one – as art and creative activities, separate from public policy, from nature and broader society-related issues [6]. However, recent research has positioned culture at a less and less firm border with such aspects of society. For instance, especially in regard to nature, environmental regulation „has evolved to encompass a more holistic approach, representing a non-anthropocentric view” [7]. While the nature-culture divide permeated an underlying logic of international environmental regulation [8] specific to the modern paradigm in respect to policy-making, today's models propose an integration of culture and a broader, less separated understanding of it in relation to the other pillars of sustainability. Also, while science, art and aesthetic processes have become ranked above other manifestations of civilization (such as agriculture, nursing and caring [6]), the post-modern paradigm has given up such hierarchical models. Public policies are also subject to this integration-oriented framework. Therefore, in the case of a holistic solution to the challenges of contemporary society such as sustainability, the description of culture as its fourth pillar is indicative of a change of model and does not nearly exhaust the possibilities for understanding its parts to play in public policies.

As Keith Nurse writes, “At one end of the sustainable development discourse, western science is viewed either as the cause or the solution to the problem. At the other end of the spectrum, traditional or localized, particularly non-western, knowledge is either seen as ‘backward’ and problematic or romanticized as ‘sacred wisdom’ and therefore valued for its future value. So that when we speak of the promotion of cultural identities, cultural pluralism, cultural industries and geo-cultures as key elements of the fourth pillar of sustainable development, it refers to a need to redress the global imbalance in the cultural arena.” [9]

3.2. Heritage and memory in relation with sustainability

When discussing policies in relation to the culture-sustainability duo, several areas are already in place, benefiting from existing, yet ready to be improved local, national and international regulations. Among these, policies negotiating memories, identities and heritage are part of a heated debate between the scholarly community, the policy-makers and various representatives of society in general. From the point of view of cultural sustainability, what seems to be at stake is the fact that such policies on one hand seek to protect and preserve the past, but on the other hand, to use and develop material and non-material heritage in order to contribute to development [6]. The

conclusions of the COST Action on cultural sustainability proclaim that for this reason such policies should be able to absorb ideas and aspirations from a large variety of groups involved in the preservation, consumption or use of heritage [6].

As part of culture, heritage, memory- and identity-related issues can be seen within the same framework that described culture in three positions or roles vis-à-vis sustainability. Thus, heritage can be a pillar of sustainable development alongside economic, environmental and societal aspects; it can have a mediating role, influencing and directly mediating between the other three components of sustainable development; finally, from a third possible perspective, heritage, memory- and identity-related issues can play in certain contexts the part of a fundament for development. Especially in complex urban situations, this tripartite view on heritage hints towards problems and possible solutions where heritage can contribute to sustainable development. A few case studies meant to illustrate this three-way view on heritage in relation to sustainability are further described.

3.3. Case studies illustrating possible relations between heritage and sustainability

The series „Routledge Studies in Culture and Sustainable Development” is centered on analyzing the diverse roles of culture in sustainability as seen through the eyes of academic research from different disciplines and thematic fields. At the same time, the interest of the series is to build an operative structure for understanding these roles and for bringing them forward on the policy-making scene. One of the volumes, with the title „Theory and Practice in Heritage and Sustainability. Between past and future”, puts together such research in relation to heritage and the problems it rises. These are divided in the two parts of the volume, the first addressing problems of equity, inclusion and citizenship, the second – problems associated to construction, recovery and resilience. The articles describe specific situations – especially urban ones – where heritage plays an important part in sustainability matters. While they are case studies rooted in the reality of the towns they speak of, the present paper further aims at exemplifying the different positions culture and heritage may hold in relation with sustainable developments in urban spaces.

A first example looks at the way heritage is understood at the official level – the one of the policy-makers, in contrast with the level of the local community – the every-day or temporary users of a protected site. It is the case discussed by authors Maria Leus and Leen Kosatka in an article called “Social sustainability in historic city centers”. The problem addressed in the article concerns the World Heritage Site constituted by Brussels's Grand Place and its buffer zone [10]. Originally a market place first mentioned in the eleventh century, the Grand Place became a seat of municipal power in the 15th century. It was a target for the French bombardment of 1695 which brought it to the ground. The rebuilding that followed is one of several ups and downs for the history of the square which only fully recovers its original splendour under mayor Charles Buls in the 19th century when its buildings are reconstructed or restored. With the declaration of the Grand Place as a world heritage site in 1998 [11], the square becomes one of the most visited sites in Belgium, with tens of thousands of tourists each year [12]. As Leus and Kosatka point out in their study, however, there are several problems related to the way the heritage site has undergone recent transformations. Especially concerning the buffer zone of the square, these problems relate to the perception of the site by local users and are manifest in the high degree of vacancy or decay of buildings. A social survey shows that while there is a strong feeling of authenticity as perceived by tourists, the sense of identity as well as the contribution of the WHS to heritage management are perceived as low [10]. The authors of the survey interpret these conclusions as having several causes, among which, the lack of social cohesion, the lack of information on the history of the square, as well as the contradiction between user reality and the regulations imposed by the WHS [10]. For the authors of the article, what is at stake is the rupture between a place-oriented vision of heritage (as embraced by the WHS policies) and a people-oriented vision of heritage that the new cultural dimension tries to achieve. In this case, heritage is meant to play a mediating role between the economic and social

components of sustainability. Its failure to do so proves the fact that those regulations alone, without a pertinent information and cultural consciousness related to the Grand Place, are insufficient.

A second case study that sheds light on another possible role of culture for sustainable development of cities has to do with former German towns of what was, before the Second World War, East Prussia. Among them, Kaliningrad (former Königsberg) is a relevant example. In 1945, the territories of East Prussia that were lost to the Soviet Union were subject to a deliberate destruction of their German ancestry. Thus, the castle of Königsberg, reminding of an almost millennia old tradition involving the Teutonic Knights, was destroyed and never rebuilt; the cathedral of the town was left in ruins; all statues reminding of the German rule – of the Kaiser but also of such internationally renowned personalities as Immanuel Kant – were brought down [13]. While the Soviet era was characterized by oblivion and the destruction of the German heritage, beginning with the 1990's the local administration supported by the large majority of Russian inhabitants started to proudly emphasize the Prussian origins of the town. According to researchers Mariusz and Michael Czepczynski, a genius loci of the place was searched for, in order to legitimize the town's resurrection and affirmation as an important attraction – for tourists and the international community as well as for its inhabitants [14]. In this logic, the Königsberg cathedral was restored, as well as the nearby tomb of Immanuel Kant. Statues of the philosopher were put back in place and his name was given to the 600-year old University as well as to the island on which the cathedral and his tomb are situated. As the authors of the research on German heritage in Southern Baltic cities affirm, these initiatives show a shift in the construction of identity by the local community who has embraced the history of a population that has largely disappeared [14]. This shift of memories – assuming the preservation and passing on the memory of a formerly mistreated group – has obvious positive influences on the evolution of the resurrected German town. Although it stays within Russia, today's Kaliningrad can be an example of how heritage is a sine-qua-non element to a sustainable development in contemporary society.

A last example of city integrating empirically the role of heritage in the course of its sustainable development is the Norwegian town of Rjukan. As Inger Birkeland shows, the town, situated in the core of Norway's territory was, throughout the twentieth century, the subject of two distinctive narratives [15]. The first narrative had to do with the picturesque landscape of the region, a fairy tale land of mountains and cascades – a Romantic miniature of Norway as described in Sverre Kjeldstadli's history of the town [15]. According to Birkeland, Kjeldstadli's narrative goes on to present the industrialization of the region with the exploitation of the water by the nationally renowned company Norsk Hydro – as the highlight of the region's development. However, after the Second World War, the fall of the electric company, high rates of unemployment and social disarray, made Rjukan the subject of a different kind of narrative. Thus, Rjukan found itself in the contemporary picture bearing the contradictory inheritance of a fairy tale place of progress and of a place with no future [15]. This dual heritage in face of the reality of contemporary problems the town faces can be a resource for sustainable development – for renewing and reaffirming the connection with the past in a way that can be useful for the community. Such a gesture was put in place by the local community recently, solving a problem that dated back to the beginning of the industrial town. When the community of workers was established in the Tinn region for Norsk Hydro, the company's creator Sam Eyde intended to solve the problem of low winter sun exposure of the town by installing mirrors on the mountain range above the town in order to light it artificially. This was never implemented at the time, but the initiative was taken up again recently only to see the light coming over the town in 2013. As the mayor of Tinn municipality – which includes Rjukan – stated, “Rjukan was built on new technology, and it is new technology that is now the basis for the sun mirror.” [16] Thus, a circle was closed, at the same time using heritage as an important component in sustainable development. The example of Rjukan goes beyond a simple technological solution, showing how heritage can participate and give meaning to the past in

order to build up the future of a local community.

4. Conclusions

The different roles of heritage in sustainable development take up on the more general roles or positions culture may play in relation with sustainability, as described by various documents with normative or recommendation values. As shown in the case studies described in the paper, alongside regulations imposed by a modern view of place-centered heritage, the introduction of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability marks a shift towards a more people-oriented understanding of heritage. This involves views of the past that go beyond general prescriptions and try to overcome dichotomies like those described by historians (Pierre Nora) or sociologists (Maurice Halbwachs) of the twentieth century – between a lived (collective) memory and a historical (official) one. The particularity of each case shows that only a profound culturally rooted acknowledgement of the values of heritage, specific to each situation, may play a role in sustainable development.

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