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HERITAGE AS LEARNING. WHY SHOULD COMMUNITY LEARNING AND EDUCATION FOCUS ON CULTURAL HERITAGE?

ABSTRACT: The article relies on theory and research to argue that the concept of *cultural heritage* should be incorporated into adult education and learning studies. The focus on this issue has been prompted by a paradigmatic change in the way that researchers and practitioners in the cultural heritage field understand and define this phenomenon. Particularly relevant in this context is addressing and highlighting the links between cultural heritage and identity (formation), as well as re-defining the social values and meanings of cultural heritage. In this approach, the central role of adult learning (as a process, a strategy, a mechanism and a trajectory) is indispensable for the new perspective on 'heritage' to be recognized and applied. Adult education researchers and practitioners have long been involved in cultural education, promotion of social activism and museum education, but a new opening and radical change in "cultural heritage" sciences enable adult education researchers, among other scholars, to join the interdisciplinary debate on so-called Heritage Studies. The argument also draws on the partial research findings of the EU_CUL project partners, which showcase the interconnectedness of learning, heritage and community and leave no doubt that the past values and meanings of cultural heritage must be renegotiated for the present and the future.

KEYWORDS: cultural heritage, learning, community.

Heritage today

Today's understanding of cultural heritage stems from years-long research on heritage and has been transformed by the establishment of Heritage Studies as a separate discipline. The publisher's summary of Laurajane Smith's *Uses of Heritage* (2006) identifies two approaches to the notion of and research on heritage in a note on the book's cover:

Smith challenges traditional Western definitions of heritage that focus on material and monumental forms of 'old,' or aesthetically pleasing, tangible heritage, which are all too often used to promote an unchallenging consensual view of both the past and the present. An alternative conception of heritage is developed which establishes and develops themes of memory, performance, identity, intangibility, dissonance and place.

The emergence of an alternative view of heritage was prompted by a series of shifts in contemporary culture and social life. One of these shifts involved abandoning the notion of heritage as possessing 'things' and embracing heritage as a socio-cultural *process*; another consisted in relinquishing 'visiting' for *communication* with heritage and negotiation of its meanings – for meaning-making; and the third shift in practice concerned the prioritization of *experiencing* heritage here and now for the future over

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the preservation and management of the past (see Smith, 2006). Education undoubtedly has an important part in these developments as a mechanism that helps achieve goals in both approaches to cultural heritage, and as a mechanism useful and attractive to various actors.

In this paper, I focus on local education and research with adult learners and learning communities. Today's Heritage Studies researchers demand that the field be open to other disciplines (e.g. education sciences, management, economy, and natural sciences) with their respective legacies and that diverse perspectives on exploring and practising heritage be recognised and appreciated. Calls for expanding perspectives in actions and research related to cultural heritage are also articulated in one of the fundamental documents of the European Union, specifically in the European Cultural Heritage Strategy (see CM/Rec, 2017; COE, 2018). A similar standpoint that promotes an alternative heritage perspective can be found in the outcomes of a range of international interdisciplinary projects, such as, for example, EUCUL 2018-2021 (EUCUL, 2021), on which I draw in this paper (see Kurantowicz & Reut eds., 2020; van den Dries & Kerkhof eds., 2021; Lechuga Jiménez & Kurantowicz eds., 2021; Nizińska & Persson eds., 2021). Building on my own research interests I propose to examine a concept that I call *heritage learning*, which is informed by Smith's (2006) distinction between authorised and negotiated heritage and comprises learning and teaching as basic educational practices.

Learning and heritage

As the frameworks put forward by heritage scholars hardly take into account learning as a way of exploring or negotiating heritage, I feel all the more motivated to emphasise and depict learning in this role. As a matter of fact, there are multiple reasons why bringing together the fields of heritage and learning can be both illuminating and fruitful. Learning is clearly indispensable in order to find out about heritage and also to know how to use it. At the same time, cultural heritage is a resource that tends to be harnessed in order to manipulate the emotions, moods and choices of the public. Under such circumstances, knowledge can help individuals and communities to defend themselves against attempts to appropriate important areas of social life via the exploitation of the common heritage. Used thus, learning can be a practice of inquiry into all layers of heritage, making sure that heritage that is problematic, rejected and/or concealed by culture or (local) communities can be brought to light. This can only be achieved via practices of learning and acquisition of competencies for re-defining/reviving heritage, by restoring aspects of heritage to their place in culture, and through critical reflection on the uses of heritage. These practices and competencies are addressed

in several studies on Critical Adult Education (e.g. Brookfield, 2005) and can serve as a bridge between Adult Education and Heritage Studies.

Academics', practitioners' and experts' considerations on learning and heritage bear a certain onto-epistemological similarity. This similarity lies in attempts to capture the nature of these phenomena and develop knowledge of them first and foremost by drawing lines and establishing what they – learning or heritage – are and what they are not. This is done to formulate unambiguous definitions of these notions, which often exclude the intrinsic mutability of learning and heritage (see Smith, 2006; Malewski, 2010). However, today's education researchers insist that learning is essentially ubiquitous, that *learning is everywhere*, whereby they take into account places, non-places, spaces, practices or life as such (e.g. Jarvis, 2009). Can heritage be likewise understood as being everywhere? And is heritage likewise premised on adult learners developing the need to avail themselves of and explore what is there, that is to undertake action and (through this) invest what is there (artefacts, histories, narratives, objects, places, etc.) with meaning? This educational activism, whether individual or social, appears to be the necessary condition for heritage becoming the negotiated heritage proposed by Smith (2006).

A similar reflection is invited by our efforts to study learning and heritage in order to know what they are. The traditional position holds that 'outcomes' and 'things' are the sources of knowledge of, respectively, learning and heritage. Grasping 'effects' and 'things' produces the knowledge of these phenomena. This answer, however, is not deemed satisfying by researchers and practitioners of the so-called alternative movement (e.g. Rogers, 2003; Smith, 2006). In the approach they employ, the focus is on contexts, relations, interactions, culture, language and settings where the knowledge of learning and heritage is generated and constructed. This position is rooted in the socio-cultural model of research on, and analysis of, both learning and cultural heritage (see Gołębnik, 2022). Interestingly, this particular similarity between heritage and learning can also be discerned at the functional-structural level. The crucial institutions responsible for heritage transmission are also – directly or indirectly – involved in schooling and educational activities. Besides museums, these institutions include schools, universities, institutions for the dissemination of culture and classical educational settings, such as local, neighbourhood, peer and family groups, as well as circles of friends or of people sharing common interests. The same actors are responsible for heritage and its transmission, that is, for the selection of the educational path, which can be transmissive or interpretive, passive or eliciting engagement, including or excluding heritage from learners' social identity.

Obviously, neither the way in which the public perceive what heritage is and what it is not, nor the dominant learning path are directly determined by researchers or

practitioners. Multiple research findings based on respondents' own statements confirm that heritage and, indirectly, learning are double-faceted. The purpose of the EUCUL research project was to study the ways in which the universities and local communities interact with each other based on their cultural heritage. This qualitative study based on 65 thematic narrative interviews (a minimum of 12 per EUCUL partner) with researchers, administrative staff (of universities, museums, galleries and other cultural institutions), leaders of local NGOs, heritage educators, artists, and local politicians. The interviews were recorded, and transcriptions were made, which served for further analysis as background material from the research (for more details see Kurantowicz & Reut eds., 2020).

In Table 1 below, I present opinions on this issue expressed by sample of respondents who work with heritage and education on a daily basis, which makes them, arguably, privileged in this context (university staff, NGO personnel and workers in cultural institutions).

Table 1. What is 'cultural heritage,' according to two research samples in the EUCUL project (EUCUL, 2021) taken from the study by the Polish project partner):

Universities	Cultural institutions and NGOs
Social VALUES, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES: openness of the world, inclusion, knowledge, discovery; thinking, action, relations, learning/teaching, research (how we act in the social world)	PRODUCTS: PROTECTION, PRESERVATION, CONSERVATION, that is, actions performed by institutions appointed to take care of heritage and its artefacts; bringing histories of cities/places/districts alive and making them socially accessible
IDENTITY of people and places (who we are; what places are and what they mean)	EXPERT KNOWLEDGE, that is, putting marginalised, concealed and silenced histories into social circulation.
HISTORIES, narratives, tales, rituals (told and untold, explicit and tacit)	NETWORKS AND RELATIONS, that is, fostering relations with local communities; combining heritage with work for the community and social integration (fairs, cuisine, jobs/occupations, traditions, perpetuation of new rituals rooted in locality).
OBJECTS, buildings, things (their known and concealed senses, symbols and meanings)	SPACE FOR CONNECTING THE PAST AND THE PRESENT through finding and sustaining social continuity and discovery of shared patterns of experience (e.g. of migration, exile, authoritarianism). MEMORY. PRESERVATION OF UNWRITTEN / FORGOTTEN HISTORIES / NARRATIVES; family stories, histories of places and minorities, revival of crafts.

The two research samples exhibit highly intriguing ways of problematising central thematic concerns in the debate on heritage and its role in today's societies. The temporal aspect of heritage is a disputable issue, according to the respondents. In their view, its meanings and relevance are predicated on being part of the present and the future, an insight that questions the traditional model of heritage, where heritage is predominantly associated with the past. However, as underscored by the respondents: *'I understand heritage as a way in which we make use of the past to build the present [...] it becomes heritage, when we use it, when we interpret it for the present'* (a university staff member). Heritage learning for the benefit of the present and the future is also a challenge because it entails understanding and accepting that cultural heritage is intrinsically ambiguous and obviously political and that interpreting it is contextual. Cultural heritage is *'a plan of action for civic consciousness-raising and for building democratic community'* (a museum worker); heritage is a theme and a lever of social debates sparked by the awareness that they may lead to a discovery of unwanted heritage or of areas of *'the lost knowledge'* of heritage which we *'will never regain, never depict, never retrace'* (a university staff member). Important challenges are posed by educational work carried out around conflicts, the deconstruction, critique and de-mythologisation of the past, the oppressiveness of heritage and its role in causing inequality. Arriving at an agreement on heritage hinges on publicising and opening up this educational work, which also invites us *'to the common table [...] to share the best we have and explore otherness'* (an NGO member).

The social context in which heritage and learning operate is also a challenge they both face. Like learning, heritage is bound up with the market and culture and plays an important role in producing the continuity and change which are fundamental to all socio-cultural processes. In the context of the economy, heritage is a good, a resource that makes up *'the market of cultural heritage'* (Murzyn-Kupisz, 2012: 31-45) and is subject to the rules of supply and demand. The heritage market prefers completed, rounded-off projects, confers unambiguous labels and relies on expert opinions. Like the education market, it offers *'ready-to-consume'* packages. In the context of the market, heritage management seems to be a key factor in the basic functions of socio-cultural processes, that is, continuity and change. Trends in today's heritage management, identified by Monika Murzyn-Kupisz (2012: 64-66), perfectly exemplify its power in fulfilling these functions. However, whether continuity or change will be the prevalent function of the heritage market depends on *'individual actors on the heritage market and their attitude to salient aspects of the heritage debate, that is, ways of, opportunities for and limits to its use and interpretation'* (Murzyn-Kupisz, 2012: 64). According to this model, heritage performs various functions – from legitimising power to entertainment and sale,

from building identities of places and feeding patriotic attitudes to promoting regions and enhancing their prestige.

Culture appears to be an obvious context for heritage. Nevertheless, the issue is complex as a result of the fundamental functions of culture in social life. On the one hand, heritage based on shared values and identities perpetuates the socio-cultural order, but on the other it is also a resource for redrawing this order.

At one level heritage is about the promotion of a consensus version of history by state-sanctioned cultural institutions and elites to regulate cultural and social tensions in the present. On the other hand, heritage may also be a resource that is used to challenge and redefine received values and identities by a range of subaltern groups. Heritage is not necessarily about the stasis of cultural values and meanings, but may equally be about cultural change (Smith, 2006: 4).

These tensions and the ‘two-prongedness’ of heritage are also enmeshed in power relations and the patent and latent power structures across the levels of individual and social life.

To conclude this part of my paper, let me restate that identity, time and contexts are major concepts that underpin links between heritage and education, while what can be called the double-facedness of heritage generates their interdependence (the kind of heritage determines the selection of concepts, forms and methods of learning and teaching). In view of the challenges listed above and the complexity of these fields, Figure 1 below illustrates my considerations and is my basis for developing a concept that I have called *heritage learning*.

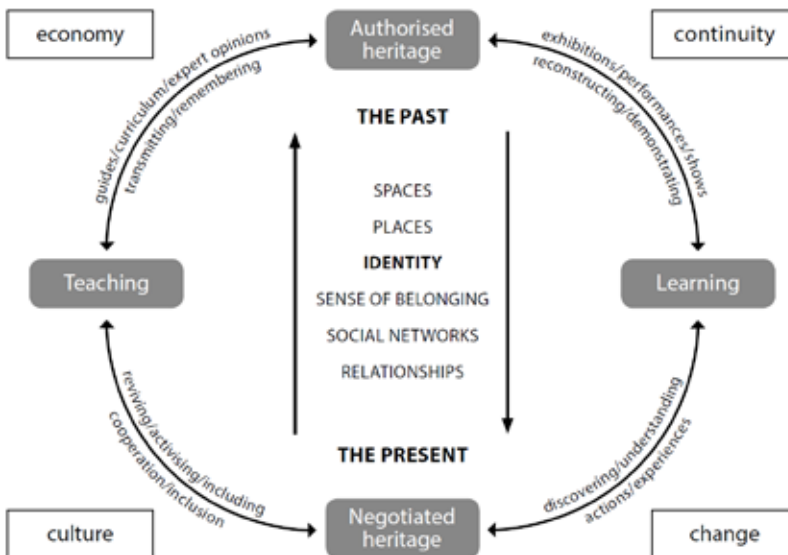


Figure 1. Links and interrelations of heritage and education
Source: own research.

I believe that the Figure above can be applied to map out in a tolerably orderly fashion the practice and research field in various areas of education and Heritage Studies. In terms of adult education as an area of major interest to me, the links and interrelations the chart visualises are probably most pronounced in learning communities and community learning (for more details, see Kurantowicz, 2012). This is implied by the processes unfolding between the past and the present (see Figure 1 above), as they concern the most important outcomes and contexts of learning, such as identity, place, social relations and the sense of belonging, which are signature characteristics of communities. Knowledge is provided by communities through the experience of being (in a community). Community heritage (both visible and invisible, cultural and natural) is part of this experience as well. Identity as a key element of learning is understood in Anthony Giddens' view in biographical terms and "... implies continuity across time and space", being "the individual's reflexive interpretation of such continuity" (Giddens, 2001: 75).

Communities and heritage

Importantly, community learning entails more than identifying and solving common problems or measuring the community's resources in competencies, knowledge and skills. First and foremost, community learning consists in learning through contestation, doubt and/or negotiation of meanings, values and understandings of the self and of the social world (Shaw & Mayo, 2016). At the same time, the process of community learning is particularly entangled in the external structures of power, politics, distribution and empowerment:

This charge has particular resonance for those practitioners who find themselves the instruments of such stealth tactics, 'delivering democracy' through managerial regimes which actually undermine democracy as a social and political process of contest and negotiation (Shaw & Mayo, 2016: 5).

Studies of community learning that investigate other, that is internal, relations of power and community membership are perhaps of special interest to researchers and practitioners. Lyn Tett (2016) draws on her own research experience of collaborating with communities and on the concept of *communities of practice* to argue that:

[l]earning is the process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind, it means that what is learnt is mediated by the differences of perspective among co-participants. It is the community, or at least those participating in the learning context, that learn under this definition. Learning is distributed among co-participants, not a one-person act (Tett, 2016: 161).

As Tett observes, challenges that arise in the process of community learning primarily concern power relations and sharing in community. Power stems not so much from

the status of community members (for example, as experts), but – as far as learning is concerned – from the relevance of experiences, knowledge possessed by the members and various definitions of what knowing means. The fostering of more equitable power relations is pivotal in this procedure. This is particularly true for relations between those who have very good prior educational experiences and those who would prefer to forget theirs because they experienced learning as a difficult and unfriendly act in the past. This kind of experience fundamentally affects individuals' self-esteem, their activity in social relationships and their readiness to engage in collaboration and cooperation in community, a *sine qua non* of this kind of learning.

The irremovable external ensnarement of community in (not only local) politics and power relations and the fact that communities sometimes question and criticise the policies and interventions of the state makes them vulnerable to exclusion and de-legalisation, sometimes even posing a threat to their very existence.

It also raises perennial questions about the legitimacy of the community as determined by policy, on the one hand, and those community organizations which potentially challenge state policy, on the other. In this context 'unauthorised' community groups and activists may come under intense scrutiny, their validity questioned or denied (Shaw & Mayo, 2016: 6).

As highlighted by Mea Shaw and Marjorie Mayo (2016), community development, including the development of community learning, is pivotally bound up with 'the politics of solidarity', and thus with the understanding 'which communities are or are not regarded as legitimate and on whose terms.' Another problem with which community learning is doomed to grapple is the vision of 'local romanticism', a concept whose inherent conformity precludes the enactment of learning which is meaningful to community, in other words learning that results from 'celebrating cultural difference', learning which is aware of 'the local and communal inequality, marginalisation and oppression' and promotes equal participation in the learning process and the advancement of dialogue (see Johnston, 2003: 15-18). One of the challenges that community learning must confront, especially at the current moment, involves global problems, conflicts and events. They are bound to revolutionise community learning to a considerable degree, as pointed out by the latest publication of researchers active in the *Between Global and Local: Adult Learning and Communities* network affiliated with the European Society for Research of the Education of Adults (ESREA). The scholars note that:

At the present time, much of adult education is not providing any response to the great social problems: environmental issues, populism and the return of authoritarian practices, racism, gender inequality, xenophobia, precariousness, and so on (Evans, Kurantowicz & Lucio-Villegas eds., 2022: 1).

Undoubtedly, this 'collection' of global issues that communities and community learning must address should be expanded to cover wars, refugee crises, citizens' protests

against violations of human rights and action-based local solidarity and voluntary help initiatives (for more details, see Evans, Kurantowicz & Lucio-Villegas eds., 2022; Kurantowicz ed., 2022).

Heritage and community learning: some illustrations

In conclusion, I offer a few illustrations of community learning using cultural heritage. My examples are sourced from the materials compiled by the consortium of the EUCUL project, *Exploring European Cultural Heritage for Fostering Academic Teaching and Social Responsibility in Higher Education*, carried out as part of the Erasmus+ Action – Strategic Partnership for Higher Education 2018-1-PLO1-KA203-051104 (EUCUL, 2021). The consortium consisted of five universities: the University of Lower Silesia, the University of Gothenburg, the University of Malaga, the Open University of Cyprus, and Leiden University. In each of the partner countries, the consortium established contacts with associated partners (museums, cultural institutions, NGOs, local societies, citizen initiatives, etc.) to collaboratively produce and disseminate outcomes of intellectual pursuits. The partners represented a range of academic disciplines and subdisciplines (adult education, archaeology, history of art, heritage studies, education sciences) and various traditions in using European cultural heritage in partnership with local social actors. The three examples below come from field research carried out by Monique H. van den Dries, Marta Gontarska, Maria Gravani, Miyuki J.H. Kerkhof, Ewa Kurantowicz, Clotilde Lechuga Jiménez, Adrianna Nizińska, Agnieszka Paczkowska, Eleni Papaioannou, Maria Persson and Maria Reut and from project publications (van den Dries & Kerkhof eds., 2021; Lechuga Jiménez & Kurantowicz eds., 2021).

Illustration 1: Heritage of unknown spaces / heritage learning as experiences

Project: Young Ambassadors of Heritage (Maria Gravani, Eleni Papaioannou, Cyprus)
The history of Cyprus saw centuries of turmoil, with the Turkish invasion of 1974 as the latest difficult experience for the population of the island. Sites of cultural heritage stood abandoned and neglected for years. In 2008, the Technical Committee for Cultural Heritage (TCCH) was founded in order to develop a mutually acceptable mechanism for implementing practical measures for the proper preservation, physical protection and conservation (therein research and studies) of the cultural heritage of Cyprus. The Committee's work focuses on the heritage of Cypriot Greeks but also extends to all minorities that inhabit the island, such as the Cypriot Turks, the Maronites, the Armenians and the Latin-rite Catholics. Besides, the TCCH organises special public events and campaigns to bring all the inhabitants of the island together. In August 2019, the Committee launched the Young Ambassadors of Heritage project. Following

the open call addressed to all Cypriots aged 18 to 35, the Committee granted the title of Young Ambassador of Heritage to forty Cypriot Greeks and Turks. Their mission is to promote objects of cultural heritage among young people, to engage them in the TCCH-held events and to propagate history and post pictures of cultural heritage on social media.

Experiences of young adults are the most important element of heritage learning in this account. New and newly discovered SPACES of heritage abandoned as a result of invasion must (re)gain the status of those internalised and meaningful to the community. Deliberation on and negotiations of their social relevance are embedded in the public and authorised debate.

Illustration 2: Heritage integrating places / heritage learning as doing

Project: Grand Cafe NIGRVM PVLLVM (Monique van den Dries, Miyuki Kerkhof, the Netherlands)

NIGRVM PVLLVM is an archaeological heritage site dating back to the Roman period (47-275 AD), located along the Rhine on the Lower German Limes – the northern border of the Roman Empire that cuts across the present-day Netherlands. In 1970, routine archaeological digging was carried out there as part of preparatory work for erecting a community-based care facility for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD). During the excavation, several Roman ships and a castellum (fortress) were discovered, and multiple artefacts were found. To integrate the local cultural heritage and the care home, the facility decided to put the artefacts on display in a newly constructed visitor centre. The visitor centre also has a café which is a place of support for and promotion of social interactions of the residents with visitors from outside. The residents take part in running Grand Café and producing merchandise for the souvenir shop. The function of the Roman cultural heritage is people-centred as the main aim here is to use heritage to improve the residents' wellbeing.

Heritage learning results in pursuits that integrate various groups and various social functions of institutions and systems (caring, educational, cultural). The PLACE is meaningful to various parts of the local community (archaeologists, social workers, local authorities), and the cultural heritage of the place brings together ideas and actions, linking the past and the present.

Illustration 3: Heritage of community narratives / heritage learning as belonging

Project: KOM. Telling the Stories of Former Hospital Dwellers (Adrianna Nizińska, Maria Persson, Sweden)

The heritage of psychiatry has long waited to be brought to light, and mental patients' histories and experiences have rarely been described. It is crucial to unveil previously

invisible stories and remember once-forgotten and hidden narratives. The KOM project is one very concrete example of investigating this difficult heritage of psychiatry. The project is being implemented in collaboration with the University, the museum of medical history and the current owner of the building of Konstepidemin, an epidemic hospital founded in 1886 and, after nearly a century in operation, converted into a psychiatric clinic in the 1970s. Today, the building is the workplace of about one hundred and thirty artists, musicians, dancers, writers and film-makers. The project aims to tell the histories of the hospital's former residents by collecting ex-patients' memories and carrying out archaeological work on location, with the artists, poets, film-makers and musicians associated with Konstepidemin producing works of art which will be featured in an exhibition to be held at the site.

The heritage of this place restores the sense of continuity and bonds with the venue and its past through revealing concealed histories and also contributes to community building. Learning through the sense of belonging to a group committed to the past and present heritage of the place provides the community members with strong impulses for undertaking educational effort.

Last words

In conclusion, answering the key question posed in the title of this article: *Why should local communities focus on learning cultural heritage*, I used three examples of local activities based on cultural heritage. However, it should be emphasized that each (local) place has its own history and the meaning of cultural heritage changes depending on the people currently living and active there. It is they who are able to discover the potential and explore the intricacies of the heritage of their own territories with all their cognitive, emotional and investigative energies. And that knowledge – no matter how long they've been living there, where they're from, or how long they're going to stay – reinforces their sense of localness.

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