

## PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURAL HERITAGE, PLACE, AND MEANING WITHIN HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

### PERSPECTIVAS SOBRE O PATRIMÔNIO CULTURAL, O LUGAR E O SIGNIFICADO NA GEOGRAFIA HISTÓRICA E CULTURAL

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#### Abstract

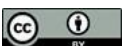
For a long time, cultural heritage studies have been shaped by an object-oriented approach, treating heritage in abstraction from its spatial context. This has led to the neglect of the social and lived dimensions of heritage. Drawing upon literature from cultural history and geography, this study aims to re-evaluate this gap in heritage studies through a critical perspective. It argues that space is not merely a passive background but plays a constitutive role in the attribution of meaning to cultural heritage. In this context, the study is developed around three fundamental axes: 'place', 'social memory', and 'power'. It offers a holistic framework that conceptualizes cultural heritage not as a static collection of objects, but as a dynamic, spatial, and historical process continuously reproduced through human experience, practices of collective remembrance, and social negotiations. Consequently, it is concluded that this approach holds significant theoretical and practical implications for heritage conservation and management practices."

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage. Cultural Geography. Place. Collective Memory.

#### Resumo

*Durante muito tempo, os estudos sobre o patrimônio cultural foram moldados por uma abordagem orientada ao objeto, tratando o patrimônio de forma isolada de seu contexto espacial. Isso resultou na negligência das dimensões sociais e vivenciadas do patrimônio. Com base na literatura da história cultural e da geografia, este estudo visa reavaliar essa lacuna nos estudos patrimoniais por meio de uma perspectiva crítica. Argumenta-se que o espaço não é meramente um pano de fundo passivo, mas desempenha um papel constitutivo na atribuição de significado ao patrimônio cultural. Nesse contexto, o estudo desenvolve-se em torno de três eixos fundamentais: 'lugar', 'memória social' e 'poder'. Propõe-se um quadro holístico que conceitua o patrimônio cultural não como uma coleção estática de objetos, mas como um processo dinâmico, espacial e histórico, continuamente reproduzido por meio da experiência humana, das práticas de lembrança coletiva e das negociações sociais. Consequentemente, conclui-se que essa abordagem possui implicações teóricas e práticas significativas para as políticas de conservação e gestão do patrimônio."*

**Palavras-chave:** Patrimônio Cultural. Geografia Cultural. Lugar. Memória Coletiva.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage has long been defined within academic literature and conservation practices through the lenses of historical continuity, aesthetic value, and material remains. This traditional approach, pioneered by disciplines such as history, archaeology, and art history, has largely positioned heritage as a monumental body of values belonging to the past that must be preserved (Lowenthal, 1998; Smith, 2006). While this object-centered perspective prioritizes the tangible, it has relegated the social and spatial contexts—where heritage is produced, experienced, and gains meaning—to a secondary position. Within this framework, space has generally been assumed to be a passive, neutral stage upon which events unfold; this, in turn, has led to the oversight of the living, dynamic, and contested nature of heritage.

The fundamental problem underlying this traditional approach to cultural heritage studies pertains to how space is conceptualized. Within this framework, space has been positioned in two primary ways: as passive ground and neutral ground. Passive ground implies that space itself is treated not as an agent that influences, but merely as an entity that is influenced. In other words, space is confined to a function such as "the empty area necessary for events to occur"; the relationship between human and space is not an interactional process, but merely a background relationship. Neutral ground, on the other hand, suggests that space is perceived as impartial in the production of historical, social, or cultural value. In this approach, space neither possesses inherent meaning nor assumes an active role in the production processes of heritage. As if space had no relation to the social context, spatial differentiations, local environmental conditions, or social practices are decoupled from heritage analysis (Relph, 1976; Lefebvre, 1991; Cresswell, 2004; Smith, 2006). These two conceptualizations have led to heritage being viewed solely as a neutral reflection of the past and to the oversight of the constitutive role of space in the construction of heritage's meaning.

In recent years, critical heritage studies, particularly as developed within Anglo-American literature, have opened this static and consensual understanding of heritage to question. This critical strand emphasizes that cultural heritage is not a fixed entity transmitted from the past to the present; rather, it is a negotiated process that is constantly reproduced in line with social relations, contemporary needs, and power dynamics

(Graham *et al.*, 2000; Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013). However, even this critical perspective has often failed to sufficiently centralize the role of space. While analyzing the social construction of cultural heritage, it has remained largely detached from questioning where and how this construction occurs, or what role spatial contexts play in this process.

This theoretical shift has rendered the analytical potential that cultural geography offers to heritage studies more salient. By rejecting the view of space as a passive vessel for social processes, cultural geography conceptualizes it as an active field where meanings are produced, identities are constructed, and power relations are embodied (Blunt *et al.*, 2003; Cresswell, 2004). This perspective enables an approach to cultural heritage not merely through the question of ‘where’ it is located, but through how it is produced, by whom it is experienced, and within which spatial relations it gains meaning. This study aims to rethink cultural heritage through a geographical lens. The central argument of this paper is that the meaning of heritage cannot be understood independently of the spatial, social, and cultural contexts that surround it. Space is not a passive background; it is a constitutive domain in which heritage is produced, experienced, and imbued with meaning. To develop this argument, the methodology of the study will first be explained, followed by a detailed discussion of the geographical foundations of heritage centered on the concepts of ‘place,’ ‘social memory,’ and ‘power.’ In the concluding section, the possibilities offered by this conceptual framework for the understanding and management of heritage will be evaluated.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

This study is designed as a conceptual review aimed at developing a specific theoretical argument and synthesizing existing literature within a new framework. Rather than an empirical data collection process, its methodology is based on the systematic analysis and synthesis of foundational texts in the fields of critical heritage studies and cultural geography. The reviewed literature is informed by three primary theoretical domains: (1) the humanistic geography tradition, led by thinkers such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph, which addresses the experiential and phenomenological dimensions of space; (2) social memory theories, shaped by the works of Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre

Nora, which examine the collective and spatial dimensions of memory; and (3) critical heritage studies, which discuss the political and ideological dimensions of heritage, particularly centered around Laurajane Smith's concept of "Authorised Heritage Discourse" (AHD). By bringing these three sets of literature together, the study aims to establish a holistic and multi-layered theoretical framework that re-conceptualizes cultural heritage within its spatial context. The study demonstrates how this theoretical framework can be utilized to reveal the central role of space in heritage studies and to transcend the limitations of traditional approaches.

### **3 FINDINGS: THE GEOGRAPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The findings section presents the theoretical framework established upon the geographical foundations of cultural heritage. This framework demonstrates that heritage is not merely a collection of material remains inherited from the past; rather, it is a dynamic process continuously reproduced through space, collective memory, and power relations. Cultural heritage gains significance within specific spatial contexts through both its tangible dimensions (monumental structures, archaeological sites, physical landscapes) and its intangible dimensions (rituals, traditional knowledge, everyday practices).

Cultural heritage, in its traditional definitions, has predominantly been confined to tangible elements. Tangible heritage encompasses physical and material remains such as monumental structures, archaeological sites, historical city centers, cultural landscapes, and museum collections. These elements have been treated as measurable and observable objects in need of preservation (Lowenthal, 1998; Smith, 2006). However, UNESCO's recognition and protection of intangible cultural heritage in 2003 significantly expanded the scope of the heritage concept. Intangible cultural heritage comprises culturally transmitted elements—both social and embodied—such as traditional knowledge, rituals, music, dance, handicrafts, oral narratives, and practices of everyday life (Harrison, 2013). These two types of heritage do not exist in isolation; rather, they are complementary and often profoundly intertwined. For instance, a structure (tangible heritage) is not merely a physical object; it gains significance through the rituals

performed within it, the experiences lived there, and the narratives passed down through generations (intangible heritage). From the perspective of cultural geography, analyzing how these two forms of heritage converge, are experienced, and are reproduced within spatial contexts enables a holistic understanding of heritage.

### **3.1 From space to place: the spatial construction of experience and meaning**

The endeavor to conceptualize cultural heritage from a geographical perspective begins with recognizing the fundamental distinction between 'space', as an abstract and geometric expanse, and 'place', which gains significance through human experience. In his seminal work, *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1991) demonstrated that space is not merely a system of physical coordinates; rather, it is a social product generated by social relations, power structures, and ideologies. Lefebvre's analysis reveals that space is not a passive backdrop; just as social practices shape space, space also structures social relations. In *Place: A Short Introduction*, Cresswell (2004) defined the distinction between space and place even more clearly: while space constitutes a totality of abstract coordinates and measurable distances, place is a phenomenon that emerges when this abstract space is rendered meaningful through human experience, repetitive practices, and emotional connections. This distinction holds a central position in cultural geography literature and represents a critical threshold for understanding heritage (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976). From this perspective, heritage is not merely a collection of physical objects located at specific coordinates; it consists of "places" that are given meaning, remembered, and reproduced by the communities living around them.

The tradition of phenomenological and humanist geography has explored this concept of 'place' with further depth. In his work *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) emphasizes that place is not merely a physical location but a center of lived experience shaped by the actions, emotions, and intentions of individuals and groups. According to Tuan, as humans move through space and begin to pause and spend time in specific locales, that space gradually transforms into a meaningful, familiar, and belonged "place." Edward Relph (1976), in *Place and Placelessness*, asserts that the authenticity of place (sense of place authenticity) is shaped by internal, direct, and continuous relationships established with space. Relph's analysis

demonstrates that a place is defined not only by its physical characteristics but also by the collective memory, everyday practices, and emotional attachments of the people inhabiting it. Furthermore, Tim Ingold (2000), in *The Perception of the Environment*, examines how individuals perceive and give meaning to their surroundings, treating it not merely as a mental process but as a corporeal and sensory interaction. Ingold's perspective illustrates that place is constructed through repetitive, ritualized, and sensory engagements of the human body with space. The common finding of this humanist and phenomenological tradition is that place lies at the center of human experience, and this experience plays a constitutive role in the meaning-making of heritage.

When examined through concrete geographical examples, this distinction between space and place becomes even more evident. For instance, an old neighborhood in a city is merely a space in terms of geographic coordinates; however, from the perspective of its inhabitants, that neighborhood is a "place" where childhood memories, neighborhood relations, daily rituals, and collective memory are reified. When the same neighborhood is presented by tour guides as a "historic district," that space acquires a different meaning; for a tourist, it may be a space to be photographed or wandered through, but for the residents, it is a place at the very center of life.

Similarly, a monument, an archaeological site, or a historical building may be represented as a space located at specific coordinates on a geographical map; yet, for the surrounding community, that structure is a "place" that establishes a connection with the past, plays a role in identity construction, and constitutes a part of daily life. Tourism sites further emphasize this distinction: a tourist destination may remain a "space" for visitors (a temporary, superficial site for photography), whereas for the local community, that area is a "place" central to their lives. This perspective reveals that in the practice of heritage conservation and management, it is essential not only to preserve the physical remains of heritage but also to protect the experiential and social connections established with that heritage.

### *3.1.1 Sense of place and the meaning-making of heritage*

Yi-Fu Tuan's (1977) seminal work, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, stands as one of the primary texts clarifying the fundamental distinction

between space and place. According to Tuan, while space represents the freedom and immensity of movement, place is a "pause"; when an individual stops at a specific location and begins to spend time there, that space gradually transforms into a meaningful, familiar, and belonged "place." This transformation is not merely a physical change; rather, it is the settling of human experience, memory, and emotional attachment into space. Tuan terms this process "sense of place"—an emotional and social connection formed through the embedding of trust, familiarity, and belonging within a locale. In the context of cultural heritage, this sense of place transforms heritage from abstract historical information into a lived and felt experience. Consequently, heritage becomes not just an object to be preserved, but a tangible expression of a community's identity and memory.

Sense of place is formed through the embedding of trust, familiarity, and belonging within a locale (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977); this emotional connection ensures that heritage transcends being mere abstract historical information to become a lived and felt experience. When a structure, monument, or landscape is intertwined with a sense of place, that heritage ceases to be just an object requiring preservation and becomes a tangible expression of a community's identity, memory, and sense of belonging (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013). For instance, an old city square sits at the center of the sense of place for its inhabitants as a site of childhood games, social gatherings, and celebrations (Tuan, 1977; Ingold, 2000). The conservation of such a square signifies not only the preservation of architectural value but also the protection of the experiential connections, collective memories, and social identities established within that space.

### *3.1.2 Sense of place and the "appropriation" of cultural heritage*

Sense of place plays a central role in the process of "appropriation" of heritage (Smith, 2006; Waterton & Smith, 2010). When a community develops a sense of place toward a specific heritage element, that element is "appropriated" by the community, and the motivation for its preservation becomes intrinsic. For instance, when a traditional handicraft technique is linked to a sense of place by the community practicing it, this technique ceases to be merely an object for museum collections; instead, it remains a living practice performed in daily life and transmitted across generations (Harrison, 2013; Assmann, 2015). Similarly, when a ritual or festival is connected to a sense of place by

the performing community, it moves beyond being a spectacle presented as a "cultural performance" and remains an integral part of the community's living culture (Nora, 1989; Till, 2005). Without a sense of place, heritage elements risk becoming collected, museumified, and displaced objects (Relph, 1976; Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004; Smith, 2006).

### **3.2 Sense of place and cultural heritage management practices**

However, sense of place is frequently overlooked in heritage management and conservation practices (Smith, 2006; Relph, 1976). While conservation experts focus on the technical and aesthetic values of heritage, they may disregard the sense of place and experiential connections established by local communities. This situation can lead to the decontextualization of heritage from its original social milieu through "official" protection and museumification (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013). For instance, a traditional building, archaeological site, or cultural landscape may be rendered into a "frozen" state for conservation purposes; this, in turn, can undermine the sense of place held by local communities (Relph, 1976; Till, 2005). While this "frozen" condition ensures the preservation of heritage as a static monument, it simultaneously risks stifling the dynamism and vitality of the social relations established with that heritage.

Effective cultural heritage management must aim to protect and strengthen the social sense of place established with heritage, alongside the preservation of its physical remains (Waterton & Smith, 2010). This necessitates the active participation of local communities in heritage management processes, ensuring that heritage remains vibrant in daily life and that the sense of place is continuously reproduced. Consequently, heritage ceases to be merely a remnant of the past and transforms into a place that plays an active role in the construction of the community's present and future identity. This perspective requires an approach that places the conservation, management, and utilization of heritage at the heart of local communities' sense of place.

### *3.2.1 Effective cultural heritage management: a sense of place-centered approach*

Effective heritage management must aim to protect and strengthen the social sense of place established with heritage, in addition to preserving its physical remains (Waterton & Smith, 2010). This necessitates the active participation of local communities in heritage management processes (Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004; Smith, 2006), ensuring that heritage remains vibrant within daily life and that the sense of place is continuously reproduced. Consequently, heritage ceases to be merely a remnant of the past and transforms into a place that plays an active role in the construction of a community's present and future identity (Harrison, 2013; Assmann, 2015). This perspective calls for an approach that places the conservation, management, and utilization of heritage at the very heart of local communities' sense of place.

However, this sense of place-centered approach is frequently unachievable in heritage management practices. Theoretically, the conservation and management of heritage should be constructed upon the principles of local community participation and the preservation of the sense of place. Nevertheless, in the real world, the management of heritage sites is often controlled by state institutions, conservation experts, and the tourism industry. The interests of these actors may differ from, or even conflict with, the sense of place held by local communities. Consequently, in the name of "preservation," the experiential connections of local communities to the heritage may be weakened, the original context of the heritage may be altered, and the heritage may be rendered into a "frozen" state. This practical reality demonstrates how far the conservation and management of heritage can diverge from theoretical ideals.

### *3.2.2 Negative impacts of the "frozen" state of cultural heritage*

The preservation of cultural heritage by rendering it into a "frozen" state often stifles its living, dynamic nature (Relph, 1976; Till, 2005; Smith, 2006). The negative impacts of this phenomenon can be observed across various geographical contexts. The museumification of traditional living spaces is one of the most prominent examples of this issue. For instance, the Medina of Marrakesh and the historic center of Venice were placed under protection after being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List

(UNESCO, 2023). However, this protection has significantly restricted the daily lives of the local communities residing in these areas. Internal designs of traditional houses cannot be altered, commercial activities are limited, and new construction is prohibited. Consequently, the younger generation chooses not to live in these areas, leading to a gradual decline in the local population. Heritage sites cease to be places inhabited by living communities and transform into open-air museums where visitors, guided by tour books, merely take photographs (Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004). Thus, although the heritage is "preserved," the sense of place and the experiential connections established by the local communities are substantially weakened.

A similar dynamic is observable when traditional rituals and practices are presented as "cultural performances" (Nora, 1989; Till, 2005). For instance, the Kathakali dance in India or the Barong dance in Bali are rituals traditionally performed within specific social and religious contexts. However, when these rituals are showcased as "cultural performances" for tourism purposes, they become detached from their original contexts. While Kathakali was traditionally performed during specific religious festivals, at prescribed times, and by a particular community, in tourism-oriented presentations, it transforms into a spectacle explained by tour guides in hotel lobbies. Dancers may alter the ritual to pose for tourist cameras, the duration of the performance may be shortened, or the context may be entirely modified. Consequently, the traditional community no longer experiences this ritual as their "own"; instead, it becomes "something performed for the tourist" (Harrison, 2013). The original meaning, sacredness, and social function of the ritual are thus lost.

Similarly, rendering cultural heritage into a "frozen" state can bring about economic and social marginalization. Machu Picchu in Peru is protected as an archaeological site and presented as a major tourism destination (UNESCO, 2023). However, this protection has significantly impacted the traditional lifestyle of the local Quechua community surrounding the site. Local land-use practices have been restricted, traditional agriculture has been hindered, and the local community has been unable to derive economic benefits from their own heritage (Smith, 2006). Instead, tourism revenues are controlled by the state and non-local tourism operators. Due to the "protection" of their own heritage, the local community has faced economic and social

marginalization. In the name of "preservation," this situation has led to the weakening of the local communities' sense of place and their relationship with the heritage.

In another context, the frozen state of traditional architecture can directly conflict with the daily needs of living communities. The Medina of Fez (Morocco) is a UNESCO World Heritage site where traditional architecture has been strictly preserved (UNESCO, 2023). However, this preservation prevents the updating of houses with modern plumbing, electricity, or heating systems. Consequently, families living in these traditional homes are deprived of modern living standards. The younger generation chooses not to reside in these areas, leading to the abandonment of houses or their conversion into tourist facilities (Relph, 1976). The frozen state of heritage diminishes the quality of daily life for local communities and significantly weakens the sense of place.

These examples clearly demonstrate that the preservation and "freezing" of heritage often stifle its living and dynamic nature (Relph, 1976; Till, 2005; Smith, 2006). Effective heritage management must go beyond preserving physical remains and must also account for the sense of place, economic interests, and everyday life practices of the local communities established through that heritage (Waterton & Smith, 2010). Such an approach ensures that heritage transcends being a "frozen" monument and remains a living, dynamic, and socially meaningful place.

### *3.2.3 Relph's theory of place authenticity and the concept of placelessness*

Edward Relph (1976) further deepens this experiential dimension of place, asserting that sense of place authenticity is shaped by internal, direct, and continuous relationships established with space. According to Relph, the true authenticity of a place stems from the long-term, intimate, and personal connections that the inhabitants maintain with their environment. In other words, the meaning and identity of a place emerge not through the eyes of a visiting tourist, but from the perspective of the people who inhabit it and perform their daily practices there. Place authenticity is a product of the collective memory, daily routines, and emotional attachments of the communities residing in that space. The more rooted and historical these connections are, the more potent and distinctive the identity of the place becomes.

Relph emphasizes that the weakening of these relationships in the modern era has given rise to the phenomenon of "placelessness." Placelessness describes a condition where spaces are assimilated and standardized, leading to the fading of local authenticity. Modernization, globalization, and homogenizing economic processes have eroded the unique character, local identity, and social meaning of specific locales. Elements such as shopping malls, highways, chain restaurants, and standardized architecture possess an identical appearance across different parts of the world, creating a spatial experience detached from the local context. This placelessness signifies not only the standardization of the physical environment but also the weakening of the semantic and emotional connections that individuals establish with space. Local communities may feel alienated within their own environments; as a result, space ceases to be a carrier of the communities' lived experiences and transforms into a realm of consumption and transit.

### *3.2.4 Placelessness and the decontextualization of heritage*

In terms of cultural heritage, the phenomenon of placelessness indicates a significant problem: practices that attempt to preserve heritage by severing its connection with the site on which it is situated can lead to the displacement of that heritage (Relph, 1976; Augé, 1995). For instance, when a building is repurposed as a museum, it ceases to be a part of the daily lives of the local community; instead, under the gaze of visitors, it transforms into an exhibit presented as a "cultural object" (MacCannell, 1976; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). The process of museumification erases the original function and social meaning of heritage, converting it into an object that is merely "to be seen." Similarly, when a ritual is presented as a "cultural performance," it is abstracted from its lived context and reduced from "place" to "space" (Goffman, 1959; Connerton, 1989). Restoration for tourism, museological practices, or traditional practices converted into cultural festivals can cause heritage to lose its original social and spatial context (MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 2002). In such cases, even if the heritage is preserved, its lived and interpreted dimension may become detached from its collective memory (Bloch, 1974; Connerton, 1989).

This process of displacement is also inherently linked to Marc Augé's (1995) concept of "non-places" (*non-lieux*). According to Augé, in the modern era, tourism sites,

museums, and standardized spaces cease to be "places" and transform into non-places. These non-places are transient and identityless spaces; within them, individuals act as consumers rather than inhabitants. Cultural heritage sites are under the constant threat of such "non-placement." Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia further elucidates this situation: museums are spaces isolated from all others, governed by their own internal rules, and detached from real life. Therefore, heritage conservation practices must prioritize maintaining the connection between heritage and the sense of place (Massey, 1994), preserving the experiential links that local communities establish with space, and preventing the displacement of heritage (Relph, 1976; Harvey, 1990). Effective heritage management should ensure that heritage remains vibrant and meaningful within social life, alongside the preservation of its physical remains.

#### ***3.2.4.1 The relationship between corporeal experience, daily practices, and heritage***

Corporeal experience and everyday practices constitute the foundation of this relationship between place and heritage. In his work, Tim Ingold (2000) examines how individuals perceive and make sense of their environment, treating it not merely as a mental process but as a corporeal and sensory interaction. Humans establish contact with a specific locale through walking, working, observing, or engaging in ritualized actions. These repetitive interactions gradually transform space into a "familiar" and "belonged" place. Michel de Certeau (1984) emphasizes the role of everyday practices in the meaning-making of heritage; through repetitive actions in specific spaces, individuals "appropriate" those spaces and imbue them with their own meanings. Consequently, cultural heritage elements are lived and gain significance through these daily practices (de Certeau, 1984; Connerton, 1989).

For instance, walking down a street every day, gathering in a square, working inside a building, or performing a ritual in a specific space creates a lived and embodied dimension of that heritage (Massey, 1994; Ingold, 2000). Paul Connerton (1989), in his work *How Societies Remember*, demonstrates that collective memory is transmitted through bodily practices; rituals, ceremonies, and repetitive actions function as mechanisms that carry the past into the present. Maurice Bloch (1974) further asserts that ritual and corporeal experience play a central role in the construction of social order and

memory. The disruption of these practices leads to the abstraction of heritage and its distancing from the local context (Lowenthal, 1998; Relph, 1976). To understand the impact of tourism on heritage, Erving Goffman's (1959) distinction between front stage and backstage is particularly useful; in tourism areas, the "front stage" performance of heritage often obscures or alters the original "backstage" practices (Goffman, 1959; Urry, 2002). John Urry (2002), in *The Tourist Gaze*, analyzes how the touristic perspective transforms spaces and heritage; the tourist gaze overlooks the original social function of heritage, seeing only an object that is "to be seen."

This perspective demonstrates that corporeal experience and daily practices play a central role in the conservation and management of heritage. Preserving only the physical remains of heritage is insufficient; the social practices, embodied experiences, and daily rituals established with that heritage must also be protected. In this way, heritage can remain a living place and function as a vibrant expression of a society's identity and memory.

### **3.2 Social memory and spatial anchors: the geography of remembering**

This experiential dimension of "place" becomes even more layered through its profound relationship with social memory. Social memory is not a mere sum of individual recollections; rather, it is a collective process established through shared experiences, narratives, and, most importantly, spatial contexts. As Maurice Halbwachs (1992) demonstrated in his seminal work, *On Collective Memory*, even individual memory is invariably shaped within social frameworks (*cadres sociaux*), and one of the most durable components of these frameworks is space. Halbwachs shows that remembering is a social practice and that these practices occur within specific spatial contexts. Memories do not exist on abstract timelines; instead, they persist by clinging to specific spatial reference points—such as streets, buildings, squares, and landscapes—and are shared through these very spaces.

According to Halbwachs' theory, a group of people living in a specific place creates a powerful bond between the physical features of that site and the members' memories (Halbwachs, 1992; Casey, 1997). Space functions as a concrete anchor through which memory is fixed, shared, and transmitted across generations. Here, the "anchor"

metaphor, borrowed from maritime terminology, suggests that just as a ship's anchor holds the vessel steady amidst the waves, space holds memory steady within the flow of time (Bachelard, 1964; Casey, 1997). Memory is an abstract and ephemeral phenomenon; however, space provides it with a tangible form—a point of attachment. An old neighborhood of a city becomes the carrier of the collective memories of its inhabitants; streets, houses, and squares become the spatial representations of shared past experiences (Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann, 2011). When an individual walks through such a neighborhood, they move not only through a physical space but also through a field saturated with memory, where traces of the past are embedded in every corner (Bachelard, 1964; Boym, 2001).

This concept of the spatial anchor demonstrates that memory is not merely an individual psychological process; rather, it is socially and spatially constructed (Assmann, 2011; Gross, 1992). Space functions as a repository of memory; through the physical features, architecture, streets, and squares of a locale, inhabitants recall and reproduce their collective past. Edward Casey (1997), in his work *Getting Back into Place*, shows that memory is spatially structured and that spatial experiences lie at the very heart of remembering. Without space, memory remains abstract and inaccessible; without space, the past loses its connection with the present. Svetlana Boym (2001), in *The Future of Nostalgia*, analyzes the relationship between nostalgia and place, noting that when nostalgic emotions are linked to specific locales, the desire to return to the past can intensify. In this context, cultural heritage is a phenomenon in which social memory is spatially embodied, allowing the past to cling to the present (Halbwachs, 1992; Casey, 1997; Assmann, 2011). Heritage sites, much like these anchors, fix a society's memory within the flow of time, preventing the past from being forgotten and ensuring the transmission of memory across generations.

However, this direct and organic link between space and memory is undergoing a significant transformation in the modern era. While memory was spontaneously and naturally linked to space in traditional societies, the processes of modernization and urbanization have weakened this connection (Nora, 1989; Assmann, 2011). Spaces change rapidly, people are displaced, traditional ways of life are transformed, and the natural anchors of memory are destabilized. In this context, the preservation and transmission of memory no longer occur spontaneously; instead, they require a conscious

and institutional effort. Within this framework, sites of memory become tangible expressions of the endeavor to preserve and remember the past. Pierre Nora's (1989) concept of "sites of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*) was developed precisely to define this modern condition.

### *3.2.1 Sites of memory: the reconstruction of memory in the modern era*

Pierre Nora (1989) analyzes this relationship through the concept of "sites of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*), a term widely utilized within heritage studies. According to Nora, in modern societies where traditional environments of memory (*milieux de mémoire*) have dissolved, the need to connect with the past shifts toward specific monuments, museums, archives, commemorations, or rituals where a conscious effort to remember is concentrated. Rather than being places where the past is lived spontaneously, these sites of memory are arenas where the past is actively constructed, negotiated, and reproduced (Nora, 1989; Till, 2005). Nora's analysis demonstrates that heritage is not a passive reflection of the past; on the contrary, it is consciously constructed in accordance with the needs of the present. Sites of memory serve as pathways to establish a connection with the past, yet this connection is never entirely independent of the contemporary social and political context (Nora, 1989; Boym, 2001).

Cultural geography literature emphasizes that these memory processes are not limited to fixed narratives of the past; instead, they are continuously reconstructed through contemporary social relations, spatial arrangements, and power dynamics. Steven Hoelscher and Derek H. Alderman (2004), in their work "Memory and Place: Geographies of a Critical Relationship," analyze how sites of memory are constructed—specifically, which narratives are made visible and which are concealed. Monuments, exhibitions, naming practices, and representations produced in public spaces make certain interpretations of the past visible and legitimate, while potentially marginalizing alternative narratives and local experiences. For instance, which monument is erected in a city square, whose history is celebrated, and whose history is left in silence reflects social power relations. These choices demonstrate that sites of memory are not neutral; they are selective, political, and open to negotiation.

Till (2005) emphasizes the dynamic nature of sites of memory, asserting that these spaces do not represent the past in a frozen and immutable form. On the contrary, sites of memory are continuously reinterpreted in alignment with contemporary social needs, usage practices, and narratives. A monument may acquire different meanings over time; a museum exhibition may be reorganized; a ritual may be re-enacted with new participants. Therefore, social memory is not a passive reflection of the past but a dynamic form of engagement with the present. Within this dynamic relationship, cultural heritage ceases to be a fixed and unchanging set of values and transforms into an ongoing process that is perpetually reproduced and transformed through social memory (Misztal, 2003; Assmann, 2015).

### **3.3 Power, discourse, and the negotiation of heritage: authorised heritage discourse**

However, the construction of places and memory in this manner is never a neutral or apolitical process (Foucault, 1980; Hall, 1997). Which pasts are deemed worthy of remembering, which narratives are made visible in the public sphere, and whose histories are recognized as "official" heritage are always closely intertwined with social power relations (Gramsci, 1971; Smith, 2006). Laurajane Smith (2006) analyzes this condition through the concept of "Authorised Heritage Discourse" (AHD), which holds a central position in critical heritage studies. AHD is a dominant discourse—typically produced by states, experts, and sovereign institutions—that reduces heritage to technical, aesthetic, and monumental values while presenting a conflict-free national narrative (Anderson, 1983; Smith, 2006). While this discourse legitimizes specific interpretations of the past, it marginalizes or erases alternative, local, marginal, and dissident forms of memory (Hall, 1997; Young, 2000).

Smith's analysis highlights the significance of discourse and linguistic power in the production of heritage (Foucault, 1980; Smith, 2006). By claiming that heritage is a "universal" and "neutral" value, the AHD actually serves specific ideological and political objectives (Gramsci, 1971; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). For instance, a national monument may be erected in the name of preserving "national identity"; however, this "national identity" is, in fact, a construction defined by a dominant group that excludes the experiences of others (Anderson, 1983; Young, 2000). The cultural geography

perspective renders this discursive power visible and centralizes the questions of "whose heritage?" and "in which space?" (Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, 1991). These questions reveal the contested and negotiable nature of heritage.

Hoelscher and Alderman (2004) advance this analysis by stating that sites of memory are arenas of representation battles (Young, 2000; James Young, 1993). Different social groups struggle to make their own historical narratives visible within the public sphere (Hall, 1997; Smith, 2006). These struggles frequently manifest at the spatial level: decisions regarding which building to preserve, which street to rename, or which museum exhibition to open are, in essence, negotiations over how the past should be remembered (Harvey, 1973; Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004). For instance, the preservation and inauguration of a former colonial building<sup>1</sup> as a museum in a city may present that structure's heritage as part of the national culture; however, the same building can also be experienced as a site carrying the painful memories of the colonial era (Young, 1993; Smith & Akagawa, 2009). These two narratives collide within the same space, illustrating the negotiable and contested nature of heritage.

Assmann (2015), in this context, develops the concept of cultural memory, emphasizing that memory serves not only to preserve the past but also plays a central role in identity construction and the creation of social cohesion (Anderson, 1983; Assmann, 2015). Cultural memory is a way for a specific society to define itself and distinguish itself from others (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Assmann, 2015). Therefore, the negotiation of heritage is not merely a matter of how the past is to be understood; it is a matter of how contemporary social identities are to be constructed (Anderson, 1983; Smith, 2006). Which elements of heritage are to be preserved and which narratives will

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<sup>1</sup> Colonial Building: Colonial buildings are architectural structures constructed during a period when a region was under colonial rule, designed by the colonizing powers to institutionalize relations of administration, control, and power. Reflecting the political and ideological interests of the colonial administration rather than local needs, these structures render colonial authority visible and legitimate through their architectural and spatial organization. Colonial buildings are considered not merely functional architectural elements but symbolic tools through which power is spatialized. Structures such as governorships, administrative mansions, police stations, military facilities, and customs buildings reinforce centralized rule. Through their large scales, monumental appearances, and central locations, they spatially reproduce the hierarchy between the indigenous population and the ruling class. These buildings often exhibit a conscious rupture from local architectural traditions, serving as the architectural equivalents of discourses on "modernity," "civilization," and "order." Thus, colonial ideology is reproduced within daily life through space. Today, colonial buildings are treated as multi-layered cultural elements at the heart of debates on heritage, identity, and representation, carrying the spatial memory of the colonial past (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988; Çelik, 1997; King, 2007).

occupy the public sphere reflect the political and social struggles of the present (Gramsci, 1971; Young, 2000).

This perspective demonstrates that heritage is not a neutral or spontaneously formed field (Foucault, 1980; Smith, 2006). The production, representation, and utilization of heritage are invariably shaped within power relations, discursive strategies, and social negotiations (Foucault, 1980; Hall, 1997; Smith, 2006). A geographical point of view renders these processes visible by analyzing them at the spatial level, revealing how heritage is constructed, whose interests it serves, and which alternative narratives are excluded (Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, 1991; Young, 2000). This analysis indicates that heritage management and conservation practices must become more inclusive, participatory, and equitable (Smith, 2006; Smith & Akagawa, 2009; Young, 2000).

### **3.4 Cultural heritage from a tourism geography perspective: space, representation, and economic transformation**

The geographical perspective addresses the relationships between heritage and tourism holistically, rendering visible the complex interactions among the production, representation, and utilization of cultural heritage (Lew *et al.*, 2004; Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000). The orientation of tourism toward heritage sites can bring about the reorganization of space, the visibility of specific narratives, and the marginalization of certain forms of memory (Urry, 2002; Smith, 2006; Özgüç, 2017). Consequently, heritage is reconstructed through spatial preferences, and a selective process emerges among different narratives of the past (Tümertekin & Özgüç, 2017; Graham *et al.*, 2000). This selective process is never neutral; a tension exists between the interests of the tourism industry, the development goals of the state, and the needs of local communities (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Lew *et al.*, 2004; MacCannell, 1976).

Tourism geography analyzes these tensions and conflicts to demonstrate the necessity of a more equitable and inclusive approach to heritage management (Özgüç, 2017; Tümertekin & Özgüç, 2017; Emekli, 2006; Yurttagül, 2013). Williams (2009) underscores the disciplinary significance of tourism geography by emphasizing that tourism is an intensive geographical phenomenon which, by stimulating the movement of people on an increasingly globalized scale, establishes distinct relationships between

visited spaces. This perspective necessitates analyzing the tensions and conflicts created by tourism in heritage sites not merely as economic or technical issues, but as complex phenomena with social, cultural, and spatial dimensions.

When discussing the geographical foundations of cultural heritage, it is impossible to ignore the impact of tourism on the production, representation, and utilization of heritage (Özgüç, 2017; Tümertekin & Özgüç, 2017). From the perspective of tourism geography, cultural heritage sites emerge as dynamic geographical spaces that cannot be reduced to mere representations of the past; instead, they continuously gain new meaning through contemporary modes of usage, economic functions, and circulated narratives (Urry, 2002; Lew *et al.*, 2004). Tourism practices create a powerful sphere of influence that dictates how heritage is represented, which elements are prioritized, and how they are preserved (Graham *et al.*, 2000; Waterton & Smith, 2010; MacCannell, 1976). Tourism geographers have demonstrated that heritage sites are not static objects to be merely preserved, but are dynamic components of the tourism economy (Özgüç, 2017; Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000). This perspective transforms heritage management from a purely technical conservation issue into a field of economic, social, and spatial negotiation.

Britton (1991) analyzes the relationship between tourism, space, and capital, demonstrating that the tourism economy radically transforms spatial structures. This transformation is not merely physical; it is a reconstruction of the social, economic, and cultural meaning of space. Processes of functional reintegration for tourism purposes incorporate cultural heritage into economic development policies while simultaneously transforming the historical and emotional bonds that local communities establish with space (Britton, 1991; Tümertekin & Özgüç, 2016; Lew *et al.*, 2004). When a structure is repurposed as a museum, a street is turned into a "tourist strip," or a ritual is presented as a "cultural performance," these elements are re-signified within a new context and distanced from their original social meanings (MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 2002). This process of re-contextualization alters the meaning of heritage; heritage ceases to be a phenomenon lived and interpreted by the local community and transforms into a spectacle designed for the tourist gaze (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Smith, 2006).

Britton's analysis of capital and space elucidates the economic mechanisms behind this transformation: the logic of the tourism economy converts space and culture

into marketable commodities (Britton, 1991; Peck & Tickell, 2002). The "tourist strip" phenomenon created by tourism in heritage sites serves as a concrete example of spatial reorganization; on these streets, local needs are ignored in favor of tourist expectations, and space is transformed into a zone of consumption (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Lew *et al.*, 2004; Tümertekin, 1997). This situation demonstrates that the relationship between cultural heritage and tourism does not merely offer an evaluative field limited to economic contributions; rather, it creates a multi-layered arena of discussion encompassing dimensions such as spatial justice, modes of representation, and the continuity of local memory (Tümertekin, 1997; Özgüç, 2017; Saarinen *et al.*, 2017).

Heritage conservation practices must prioritize keeping heritage interconnected with the sense of place, preserving the experiential bonds local communities establish with space, and preventing the de-placement (placelessness) of heritage (Waterton & Smith, 2010; Saarinen, 2014). Effective tourism management necessitates striking a balance between tourist expectations and the interests of local communities, as well as developing an approach that preserves the social and cultural value of heritage alongside its economic worth (Saarinen *et al.*, 2017; Tümertekin & Özgüç, 2017). In this context, the tourism geography perspective can contribute to the construction of a more equitable, participatory, and responsible model for heritage management.

#### *3.4.1 The "tourist strip" phenomenon: spatial reorganization and the transformation of meaning*

The "tourist strip" phenomenon created by tourism in heritage sites is one of the most concrete and visible examples of spatial reorganization (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Özgüç, 2017). A tourist strip represents the conversion of a traditional street or square into a consumption zone reconstructed in alignment with tourist expectations. This transformation is not merely a physical change; it is a radical redefinition of the social, economic, and cultural functions of that space (Tümertekin & Özgüç, 2017; Lew *et al.*, 2004). For instance, while the old quarter of a city is traditionally a place at the heart of the local community's daily life, with the intensification of tourism, these streets increasingly transform into spaces where visitors, guided by tour leaders, stop to take photographs. In this process, local shops are redesigned to sell tourist souvenirs,

traditional restaurants are made more expensive to offer an "authentic experience," and the architecture of the streets is "cleaned" and standardized for the tourist gaze (MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 2002).

At the core of the tourist strip phenomenon lies the design of space specifically for the "tourist gaze" (Urry, 2002; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). John Urry's concept of the tourist gaze explains how tourists perceive and experience spaces and cultures; the tourist views a location as an object that "must be seen," independent of the significance it holds for the local population. This gaze triggers a reorganization of space. On tourist strips, the environment is designed to meet tourist expectations: narrow streets are widened for photography, historical structures are restored for an "authentic" appearance, and local culture is presented as a "cultural performance" (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Lew *et al.*, 2004). This design process overlooks the daily life practices of the local people and the semantic connections they establish with the space. Consequently, the tourist strip ceases to be a "lived place" for the local population and becomes a "consumed space" for the tourist (Tümertekin & Özgüç, 2017; Özgüç, 2017).

The spatial consequences of the tourist strip phenomenon are accompanied by economic and social marginalization (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Graham *et al.*, 2000). Even if the local population continues to reside within these areas, the tourist strips are no longer at the center of their daily lives. Local tradespeople are compelled to sell souvenirs; families cease to live in these areas due to rising rents; and traditional social practices—such as neighborhood interactions, communal gatherings, and rituals—become impossible to sustain in these spaces (Özgüç, 2017; Lew *et al.*, 2004). Consequently, the tourist strip becomes a "non-place" (non-lieu) for the local community; these are transient, transitional, and anonymous spaces lacking a distinct identity (Augé, 1995). Within tourist strips, a dichotomy of "front region/back region" (front stage/back stage) emerges between the local population and the tourists (Goffman, 1959); the "front stage" performance presented to the tourist conceals or entirely obliterates the original "back stage" practices.

From the perspective of tourism geography, the tourist strip phenomenon is an indicator of how spatial justice is violated in heritage sites (Tümertekin & Özgüç, 2017; Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000). Spatial justice implies that all social groups have a voice in space and can participate in the process of spatial production (Harvey, 1973; Massey,

1994). However, on tourist strips, the local community is excluded from the process of spatial production; the tourism industry, the state, and conservation experts decide how the space is to be designed (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Lew *et al.*, 2004). In this situation, heritage sites cease to be places that are the "right" of local communities and instead become "products" of the tourism economy. To mitigate the negative impacts of the tourist strip phenomenon, effective heritage management must ensure the participation of local communities in spatial decision-making processes, the preservation of local life practices, and the equitable distribution of the benefits of the tourism economy (Tümertekin & Özgüç, 2017; Özgüç, 2017; Waterton & Smith, 2010).

#### 4 CONCLUSION

This study proposes a re-reading of cultural heritage from a cultural geography perspective, moving beyond traditional object-centered approaches. The fundamental argument is that heritage should be understood not as a static collection of remains, but as a dynamic process that is spatially grounded, socially produced, and politically negotiated (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976; Smith, 2006). Treating space not as a passive container but as a constitutive element—one that transforms into a 'place' through human experience, serves as an anchor for social memory, and embodies power relations—offers a multi-layered perspective on the phenomenon of heritage (Halbwachs, 1992; Lefebvre, 1991; Foucault, 1980).

This holistic framework makes it possible to understand not only what cultural heritage is, but also how it functions, for whom it holds meaning, and which social purposes it serves (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013). The four analytical axes presented in this study—the distinction between space and place, social memory, power relations, and tourism geography—collectively demonstrate that heritage is not merely a relic of the past; rather, it is an arena for the social, economic, and political contestations of the present (Nora, 1989; Young, 2000; Waterton & Smith, 2010). The multi-layered nature of heritage indicates that the practices for its conservation and management must be equally complex.

#### **4.1 Practical implications: heritage management and local participation**

The findings presented in this study hold significant implications for heritage conservation and management practices. Instead of approaches that view heritage solely as a matter of technical conservation, there is a need to develop more inclusive, participatory, and equitable processes that account for the experiential bonds local communities establish with space, various forms of memory, and the political dimensions of heritage (Smith, 2006; Waterton & Smith, 2010; Assmann, 2015). The conservation of heritage should signify not only the protection of a physical structure or object but also the preservation of the experiential connections, local narratives, and social memory associated with that heritage (Casey, 1997; Till, 2005).

This necessitates that local communities have a voice in heritage management, that alternative narratives occupy the public sphere, and that heritage be treated as a process open to negotiation (Young, 2000; Smith & Akagawa, 2009). On a practical level, this may involve the following concrete steps: Ensuring the participation of local communities in heritage management decisions; Making visible the forms of memory and narratives of different social groups within the public sphere; Centering local knowledge and practices in heritage conservation processes; Ensuring the equitable distribution of the benefits generated by the tourism economy; Preventing the "fossilization" of heritage and supporting its vitality within local life (Tümertekin & Özgüç, 2017; Özgüç, 2017; Harrison, 2013). Such an approach can transform heritage conservation from a project imposed by the state and experts into a process that grants local communities the right to define and protect their own heritage.

#### **4.2 Spatial justice and modes of representation**

Another significant contribution offered by the cultural geography perspective to heritage management is the concept of spatial justice (Harvey, 1973; Young, 2000; Massey, 1994). Spatial justice implies that all social groups have a voice in space, can participate in the processes of spatial production and management, and can benefit equitably from the advantages offered by that space. Ensuring spatial justice in heritage

sites requires establishing a balance between the interests of local communities, state institutions, and the tourism industry (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Lew *et al.*, 2004).

Furthermore, the modes of representation in heritage constitute a significant issue of justice. Which narratives are recognized as "official heritage," whose histories are made visible, and which forms of memory are marginalized are invariably linked to power relations (Smith, 2006; Hall, 1997; Spivak, 1988). Effective heritage management must interrogate these modes of representation, support alternative narratives, and ensure that the voices of "subaltern" (marginalized) groups are heard within the public sphere (Young, 2000; Waterton & Smith, 2010).

### **4.3 Future research: concrete contexts and new technologies**

Future studies can further enrich the theoretical framework presented in this article by applying it to concrete heritage sites across diverse geographical contexts. For example: Urban Transformation Areas: The redevelopment process of an old city quarter serves as a concrete example of the spatial reorganization of heritage. In this context, processes such as the preservation of traditional architecture, the displacement of local populations, the phenomenon of gentrification, and the transformation of heritage into a "tourist strip" can demonstrate the practical applications of the theoretical framework (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Tümertekin & Özgüç, 2017).

Tourism Destinations: The management of heritage sites for tourism purposes clearly reveals the conflicts between the tourist gaze and local experience, as well as issues of spatial justice and economic transformations. In these areas, themes of local participation, equitable economic distribution, and the vitality of heritage can serve as focal points for future research (Özgüç, 2017; Lew *et al.*, 2004; Urry, 2002).

Post-Conflict Regions: In regions recovering from war, internal conflict, or ethnic cleansing, the reconstruction of heritage, the negotiation of memory, and the building of a peaceful future are critical issues. In this context, analyzing the conflicts between the "official" narrative of heritage and the memories of victimized groups can demonstrate the profound importance of the cultural geography perspective (Till, 2005; Young, 1993; Waterton & Smith, 2010).

Migration Regions: The recognition of migrant communities' heritage, the negotiation of heritage within multicultural contexts, and the coexistence of diverse forms of memory constitute significant areas for future research (Hall, 1994; Gilroy, 1993; Bhabha, 1994).

Digital Heritage and Virtual Memory Spaces: The role played by digital technologies in the representation and accessibility of heritage, the creation of virtual memory spaces, and the sharing of self-narratives by local communities on digital platforms emerge as crucial fields for future studies (Smith & Akagawa, 2009; Harrison, 2013). For instance, sharing local memory on social media platforms, creating digital archives, and developing virtual tour applications can enhance the accessibility of heritage and broadcast the voices of local communities to a wider audience.

#### **4.4 Methodological implications: research methods in cultural geography**

The theoretical contributions offered by the cultural geography perspective in understanding heritage must also be reflected in research methodologies. While traditional heritage studies often focus on archival research, architectural analysis, and conservation techniques, the cultural geography perspective necessitates the integration of methods such as ethnographic approaches, oral history, participatory research, and spatial analysis (Ingold, 2000; de Certeau, 1984; Connerton, 1989).

For instance, to understand a heritage site, researchers should: Conduct in-depth interviews with the local population and listen to their narratives regarding the space; Observe daily practices in situ to understand how heritage is lived; Compare the forms of memory held by different social groups; Participate in heritage management processes to analyze power relations; Document spatial changes through maps and photographs to demonstrate transformations over time (Casey, 1997; Massey, 1994; Waterton & Smith, 2010). This methodological approach makes it possible to understand not only "what" heritage is, but also "how" it is lived and "why" it matters.

#### 4.5 Recommendations

In conclusion, interpreting cultural heritage through the lenses of cultural and historical geography transforms it from a passive relic of the past into a dynamic and negotiable field of the present. This perspective shifts heritage conservation practices from purely technical matters to issues of social justice, modes of representation, and local participation. Consequently, heritage management can become a more inclusive, participatory, and equitable process.

By applying this theoretical framework across diverse geographical contexts—utilizing new technologies and participatory methodologies—future research can achieve a more profound understanding of the complex web of relationships between space, meaning, and society. In this way, cultural heritage can serve not merely as a memory of the past, but as a catalyst for building a more just and inclusive future.

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All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

#### **Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study’s findings are fully available within the article.

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