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Editorial

Efficient Strategies for Integrating Heritage into Integrated Development Programs

Cultural heritage plays a pivotal role in shaping and defining social identity. Over the past century and into the contemporary era, the conceptualization of cultural heritage has evolved significantly. As a result, the methods and tools for its preservation have also transformed. Traditionally, cultural heritage was often confined to tangible aspects, such as buildings or architectural works. However, today, its intangible dimensions—such as traditions, rituals, meanings, and social contexts—are also recognized as vital components. Throughout history, the conservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage has faced numerous challenges. At times, cultural heritage was viewed as an impediment to urban and technological advancements, placing it at significant risk. These challenges can be divided into two categories: traditional and emerging. Traditional challenges include destruction driven by profiteering, war and violence, natural disasters such as floods and fires, and poor management. In some cases, individuals seeking to profit from the sale of parts of historical monuments or decorations contributed to their destruction. Unregulated urban development and, in certain instances, wars and military assaults, have also resulted in the degradation of cultural heritage. Notable examples include the Jame' Mosque of Isfahan, Shush Castle, and the Sadaghiani Historical House in Tabriz, all of which suffered severe damage during the Iran-Iraq War. This issue is global, not confined to Iran alone. Emerging challenges are also increasingly pressing. Urban expansion, construction projects that disregard historical context, and the impact of climate change—including rising temperatures, droughts, floods, erosion, and shifts in sea levels—have all placed cultural heritage under threat. The growing influx of tourists, heavy traffic, and economic exploitation exceeding the capacity of historical sites have caused both physical and semantic pressures on monuments originally designed for limited use. Moreover, inadequate management and political interference with non-cultural priorities have further jeopardized the preservation of cultural heritage.

In response to these threats, solutions must be pursued simultaneously across three fronts: education, policy, and implementation. The key recommendations are:

1. Providing training packages for management and maintenance appropriate to new risks

Designing and implementing courses, workshops, and guidelines need to familiarize building managers, urban officials, local communities, and operators of historical structures and monuments with new risks. This action will raise specialized awareness and reduce the vulnerability of monuments.

2. Public education and utilizing the capacity of social capital

Local people, associations, and volunteer groups can play an effective role in conservation. By increasing the community's sensitivity to cultural heritage, the likelihood of destruction can decrease while participation in maintenance increases. This policy can be institutionalized in the form of a "Cultural Heritage and Social Support" program.

3. Management appropriate to the capacity of buildings and monuments

Each historical monument has a specific capacity for exploitation. Overuse, the arrival of heavy vehicles, or sudden changes in use can lead to the gradual destruction of the monument. Scientific management should consider the needs, limitations, and characteristics of each building.

4. Defining a special mission for historical cities and preventing excessive development

Historic cities should have clear cultural and physical policies and boundaries to align their sustainable development with the preservation of historical context and urban identity. Implementing heavy industrial and economic programs in cities with high cultural and historical potential is destructive. Research shows that un-

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healthy competition among city managers in this area has severely threatened the livability of Iran's historical cities.

5. Integrating environmental protection and cultural heritage

Natural heritage (landscapes, pristine nature) and cultural heritage (buildings, rituals) are closely interdependent. Environmental damage is a direct threat to cultural heritage. Therefore, urban and regional planning requires an integrated and coordinated approach between historical, cultural, and natural factors to maintain the livability of cities.

6. Anticipating safe places to store movable monuments in times of crisis

An emergency plan for the temporary protection or relocation of monuments in critical situations, such as floods, earthquakes, or war, is essential. International heritage protection charters have also emphasized the need to develop these plans.

7. Redefining historical textures as future identity-building phenomena

Historical textures are not only remnants of the past, but also factors of social cohesion and cultural identity in the future. The loss of these textures creates a kind of identity rupture. Research has shown that preserving and revitalizing historical contexts strengthens the sense of belonging, social solidarity, and cultural dynamism in urban communities.

Cultural heritage, whether tangible or intangible, is an integral part of the collective identity of any society. Despite traditional and emerging challenges, these historical assets can be protected by adopting a scientific, participatory, and integrated approach. The continuity of cultural life and identity of societies depends on a deep understanding of heritage values and their conscious management.



Fig.1. The Jama Mosque of Aleppo in Syria. Source: Dr. Ahad Nejad Ebrahimi's archive.

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Fig. 2. The Jama Mosque of Isfahan during the Iran-Iraq War. Source: Dr. Ahad Nejad Ebrahimi's archive

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