Historical and Archaeological Heritage and its Social Transfer: Contributions and Challenges

Maria Isabel Panosa, PhD
Artistic Productions and Antiquity Research Group
Institut Català d'Arqueologia Clàssica
Spain

Abstract

This paper analyzes the definition of historical and archaeological heritage and proposes some reflections about its value as a social identity factor and a stimulus for regional development. It also offers some recommendations and guidelines on the communication strategy in archaeological parks and historical sites to produce quality contents and to approach visitors more directly through experience-based activities.

Keywords: Historical site, archaeological park, cultural heritage, musealization, education on historical heritage

1. Introduction

The starting point is the premise according to which heritage is something that is inherited from the predecessors of current inhabitants and therefore something that belongs to the individual in his own right (Arjona 1986: 7). If we refer in particular to the cultural heritage, we mean the goods which are an expression and witness of human creation in relation to archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, education, art, science and culture in general. A monument is at the same time a historical source, an artistic creation and manifestation of a period (or memory) (Riegl 1984). It is also an element that has a symbolic value. It follows that the link of that heritage with modern society leads to the consideration that today's society is still generating cultural heritage.

2. Defining heritage sites and elements

For several centuries it is become clear that museums and their spaces have become very significant tourist attractions. Thanks to the relationship between these spaces and their urban environment, the citizens are now aware of a series of cultural values that they consider as their own. To achieve this reality, a continuous transformation has been required to heritage spaces, in addition to count on relative and updating principles and to assume the existence of a variety of patterns and forms that are consistent with the polyhedral and multicultural society of our century.[1]

Each historical or archaeological site spreads into an area and is accompanied by a set of beliefs, knowledge, organizational systems, technologies and forms of social organization. Some objectives stem from these two premises.

The first refers to the identification of the historical site to be disseminated, to its nature and to its territorial and temporal extent. First of all, it is assumed that such kind of centres must be integrated in a network in association with other itineraries, routes and tourist services.

The second consists in defining the contents related to a historical site, which initially will be drawn from the research and documentation activity and then transmitted to the visitors by means of the language, educational actions and communication resources that are determined for this purpose.

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[1] See Montaner's approach (2003: 150-151) on this issue regarding the relationship between museum, city and society.

A third objective is derived from the concept of cultural objects as reference values for cultural inheritance, and therefore as *cultural identity factors*. This cultural identity is expressed as a consequence and not as an object itself (Arjona 1986: 11), and also as the result of the addition or accumulation of cultural elements by a community throughout History.

In short, it deals with heritage spaces –which are physically passive– turning into dynamic parts that involve society and restore to it the right to know and enjoy them. This approach becomes a revealing way in recovering certain depressed historical areas, allowing to revalue them and turn them more dynamic. Moreover, as pointed out by Pardo (2003: 206), the historical and archaeological heritage brings a new product to the cultural supply and achieves a strategic value as a decisive factor in territory development and regeneration. It is an economic stimulus and it sets up jobs. In Greffe's words (1999: 23), cultural heritage becomes a "brand name image".

It should be borne in mind that cultural objects are not only instruments of a past memory that we can keep as a precious treasure of which we are proud, but they are also a fundamental aspect of our way of being and behaving (Prodi 1981: 8). Consequently, considering them as a part of our cultural and social environment will prevent that they should be conceived as petrified elements and as remains that are totally foreign to our present.

3. Addressing the dissemination of historical and archaeological heritage

In the French model view, the architectural and structural program applied for the adaptation and dissemination of a heritage space should mean a detailed and faithful translation of the needs identified through the cultural project (VA 2005: 20), which is created to protect it; that is, a reflection of the required specifications: the right area, the number and type of places, the needs of the research program, the importance and extent of the educational program, the demands of the tours, etc. It also requires a stable organization, suitable facilities and a staff that fit the philosophy of the project. Finally, a plan must be drawn including a right definition of the functions to be fulfilled (Moore 1994 and 1996).

The current trend on the conservation of archaeological sites is preserving them in place and musealizing them to assure that the public can understand them better in their original context. Now, this is possible for buildings and other architectural structures, because they obviously cannot be transferred to a museum and, in contrast, they can be endowed with the necessary reading so that they gain an understandable meaning for the visitor. Yet there is the discussion caused by the fact that the movable elements extracted in the archaeological excavations from these historical sites are usually transferred to museums and archaeological collections determined by the governmental institutions. Thus, these elements are eradicated from their natural space and carried to the museum for restoration and research tasks and finally to be exhibited in a conceptual space[2] that is itself very different from the one it has in its own original use period. This decontextualization measure is offset by other advantages in preserving security and in availability of means for cataloging, research, documentation and grouping of these elements with other items to form theme collections and exhibitions; thereby, visitors can access to large sets of historical objects in a single trip.

The importance and historical value of a heritage site justify characterizing it as a *greater good*.[3] Its presentation to the public, along with the offered dissemination activities, should add for visitors an enjoyment understood as a field of experimentation, discovery and development itself (Greffe 1999: 8). In this sense, historical sites contribute an opportunity for learning and therefore, in a social point of view, they are more profitable than most of the consumer goods related to leisure time.

In the adaptation plan of historical sites is highly important not to compromise the integrity of the intervened archaeological structures or the areas to be intervened in the future. Even more, its scientific analysis and the subsequent exploitation for the public have to be guaranteed. The dissemination should be directed towards the consideration of these places not only as conservation centres of cultural elements, but also as interpreting centres. Thus, visitors can be offered the possibility to follow a few steps routing them to a correct interpretation of the narrative contents that make these places significant. The steps are defined in the following processes:[4]

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[2] See some reflections on this subject by Verdugo and Queraltó (2005: 102-103).

[3] This is a term derived from one of the concepts of *culture* and it has to be complemented with the sociological characteristics of the community which the site belongs to. See Greffe (1999: 4-8).

[4] Based on Laneve (1988: 34-36).

1. *Approaching the cultural element:* spontaneously and freely observing the heritage item, based on an "education through wonder" that pushes people towards research, as suggested by Aristotle. It may be accompanied by a *savoir voir*.
2. *Hermeneutic exercise:* analyzing the archaeological element to verify or change the first impression. It requires to the observer certain training guidelines that allow him to interpret and appreciate what he is watching.
3. *Contemplation:* lively and integrally capturing the cultural element; in other words, reading the parts and the whole simultaneously.

Along with ensuring the conservation of its physical elements, preserving its historical memory and its nature as a centre for interpretation, the adaptation of a historical site, in the current society, must also be able to fulfill some necessary functions, such as information and territory revitalization. These standards are consistent with following Pardo's expression: "the logic and the organizational culture in the field of services". According to him (Pardo 2003: 207-208), defining new management models by means of agile and imaginative organizational formulas will guarantee: a balanced and permanent development of projects, the dimension of both public space and space for socialization, and knowledge transfer as well. Lastly, this definition will also permit to integrate the heritage centre resources with education and intelligent leisure.

Furthermore, according to the postulate that rules over the museological and research centre of Altamira (Spain) (Lasheras *et al.* 2003: 175), a heritage site has to promote in the public intellectual activity, desire for knowledge and reflection as ways leading to enjoyment. For this reason one should put emphasis on the requirement that the site presentation has to be primarily free-flowing.

Also proposed as primary objectives of a project for adapting a historical site we have, on the one hand, to pursue the integrity and authenticity of what is shown to visitors and, on the other hand, to take into account in all actions the socio-cultural objectives. The planned actions should be fed on quality contents to be spread to the public both in an understandable and contextualized manner in order to provide them a lasting impression. It's about creating a space-time as a framework. It is also about dealing with content and didactic work in a creative way. And ultimately the project should be aimed at finding out and communicating the singularity of the place or, in Warnotte's and Fohn's words (2003: 29), "the spirit of the place."

In short, the integrated approach of a historical site or park involves the double definition as an archaeological reserve and an interpretation centre, in other words: a multi-purpose centre with a changing and perfectible physiognomy[5] that offers the possibility to reconcile research with conservation, education and leisure; a centre that highlights the preserved architectural structures and at the same time integrates them with the surrounding space (gardens, landscape, urban environment). It is also a centre that can contribute cultural identity, prestige, social cohesion and economic development to its neighbouring community.[6]

4. Communication strategies

In order to revalue an archaeological or historical site it is necessary, in the design of the dissemination project, to identify and exploit its own specificities (Warnotte and Fohn 2003: 29), which can be classified into:

1. *Symbolic or cultural characteristics*. They are those that the community perceives itself and to which it is heir. Such specificities generate a link with the older generations within a collective imaginary.
2. *Archaeological or scientific features*. They are, among other things, a repository of knowledge.
3. *Teaching possibilities*. They represent the connection line between the archaeological remains and the visitors. Its quality depends on the excellence of the scientific work, which is to be communicated by means of information and reading keys belonging to suitably developed educational proposals.

The main purpose consists of creating a new form of communication that reveals what is visible and what is not, and this through imaginative resources linked to a historic speech that highlights the value of the preserved site.[7]

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[5] These are features proper to the concept of *neutral museum*. See Montaner (2003: 11).

[6] Two emblematic examples of this kind are those of Altamira and Atapuerca in Spain (see Boj *et al.* 2006: 27-33).

[7] See Orejas 2001 for more details on this subject.

In any case, the implementation must avoid that the museographic resources have a prevalent role in relation to objects and original structures (Tarrats 1999: 33). Actually, museography as a scenic recreation tool should complement and support the historical document but not replace or minimize it. A notable example in musealization which is respectful both with the scientific rigour and the natural environment and which also looks for a minimized impact in the inclusion of modern elements for the adaptation of the site is the Iberian settlement of Sant Miquel de Vinebre (Spain) (Genera 2003: 200-203).

To make the musealization a profitable task and to achieve a successful dissemination, it is advisable to propose a high quality standard addressing to a public not interested in principle in the archaeological or historical heritage. This is the paradox suggested by Alcalá and others with regard to the Marroquíes Bajos Archaeological Zone (Jaén) (Alcalá *et al.* 2003: 225). It is proved that an impact and widespread project, even subject to a territorial marginality, can provide in return a change in the attitude of visitors that previously were not sensitive to this type of leisure or, at least, the mobilization of potential publics whose stimuli are to be strengthened.

Therefore, in these centres, it is advisable to carry out the design of activities from a transversal point of view and going beyond the age borders. It starts from the premise that the content to be transmitted are valid for virtually all visitors. The communicative format and the language level can vary, but the format of the exhibition structures as well as the interactive devices should follow the same prerogatives for all audiences. Achieving this aim brings consistency to the approach and lets save money in design and assembly.

Furthermore, in addition to the research objectives to be achieved in a historical site on archaeological, historical and documentary fields, the research objectives on teaching strategies cannot be left aside. Research on educational strategies should be based on updated knowledge concerning available resources, site possibilities, periodic evaluation of already implemented dissemination activities and regular inclusion of new contents supplied by historical and archaeological research, which is ultimately the real motive power that feeds the spread of knowledge. This type of action benefits from visitors' feedback and reactions, from technological advances and from new teaching resources for further improvements in the approaches and formats according to a constant renewal's policy. This trend should help to the public loyalty and participation thanks to a wide and periodically changing offer.

In general, among the people visiting museums, archaeological parks, historical sites and natural areas with educational spirit, a series of basic needs are detected. They should be defined and met. These requirements have been standardized as it follows:[8]

1. Comfort, which involves aspects such as access, cleaning, rest areas, services and the absence of barriers.
2. Guidance on the visit direction.
3. Good welcome and taking care of the visitor.
4. Enjoyment, besides the possibility to have a good time without excessive barriers.
5. Socialization, allowing interaction and to share experience with others.
6. Respect for all people, regardless of origin, training level, social status, etc.
7. Communication: being open and available to everyone, being clear and also enabling visitors to ask and comment.
8. Learning, that is, letting visitors learn something new; it has to be taken into account that people learn in different ways.
9. Choice and control, so that visitors have a certain autonomy and freedom to move and choose what they want to watch.
10. Challenge and trust, that is, offer visitors the opportunity to test their skills to achieve a goal.
11. Revitalization, which is achieved by a smooth presentation capable of providing an enjoyable experience, facilitating visitors' active involvement.

It is also essential that the designed activities can trigger stimuli and emotions. Moreover, a balance should be found between the transmission of information and the nature of experience. It is proven that all these aspects help to better understanding, while ensuring an internalization of values and knowledge through experience.

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[8] Based on Rand (2001: 13-14), who presents the results of a research carried out by the Visitor Studies Association on visitor behaviour, his environment and determined human psychological aspects.

And with reference to the public from schools in particular, the idea that should inspire the methodology of educational activities is the potential of archeology and history in education and scientific knowledge, because it teaches how to think, to infer, to compare, to put information in order and to deduce dates; in short, how to think in an orderly way, because it facilitates learning the method.[9] Note that these are actions that agree well with the educational approach of today's schools.

Lastly, the transmission of actions concerning the historical periods of heritage centres by means of a performance causes in current visitors a desire to approach through mimicry the former inhabitants. This perspective gives prominence to the participants and provides them with a greater understanding of the message. In Clara Masriera's words (2006: 17 & 20), it consists in doing an immersion in the past as an experience for the present. Thus, the study on ancient times is approached through a series of hypotheses[10] to be checked, tested and proved, which means a different way from the classical assimilation of ordered facts in a succession. This participatory trend aims to teach and learn using the scientific method and the own experience.

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[9] See Santacana 1999: 64 ff; 2006a: 8, and 2006b: 11 & 14. Through this educational system it moves from concepts to empathy, so that new knowledge capture becomes more efficient.

[10] See in this regard, among other examples, the virtual reconstruction project of the ancient Greek city *Emporion* (Spain) (Aquilué *et al.* 2003: 285-291, 2005: 113-124).

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