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New Museology and Urban Planning Approaches in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage

Nova museologia e abordagens de planejamento urbano na salvaguarda do patrimônio cultural imaterial

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Abstract

This study examines the historical development of evolving museology and its theoretical relationship with intangible cultural heritage (ICH) from a universal perspective on a global scale. Safeguarded internationally by UNESCO's 2003 Convention, ICH has been a decisive factor in the evolution of museums from a traditional object-centered structure to a human- and society-centered universal approach. While discussions on integrating living heritage had been evolving for decades, a critical milestone of this global transformation was the formal inclusion of the "intangible cultural heritage" concept in the museum definition updated by ICOM in 2007 according to international standards. However, while this paradigm shift represents a revolutionary step for heritage preservation, it carries structural risks such as the "commodification of heritage," "simulation of tradition," and the sterilization of living practices within museum walls, severing ICH from its original socio-spatial context. Addressing these risks, the new museology and ecomuseum approaches advocate for a "holistic safeguarding" framework where historic neighborhoods, public squares, and vernacular architecture function as living transmission spaces. Consequently, this study emphasizes that preserving ICH cannot rely solely on physical restorations or static museum displays; rather, intangible values and cultural landscapes must be structurally integrated into daily life through production-oriented zoning decisions, functional continuity strategies, and community-based urban management plans on a global scale.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), New Museology, Ecomuseum, In-situ Preservation, Zoning Decisions, Cultural Landscape

Resumo

Este estudo examina o desenvolvimento histórico da museologia em transformação e sua relação teórica com o patrimônio cultural imaterial (PCI), a partir de uma perspectiva universal e em escala global. Salvaguardado internacionalmente pela Convenção da UNESCO de 2003, o PCI tem sido um fator decisivo na evolução dos museus, de uma estrutura tradicional centrada em objetos para uma abordagem universal centrada no ser humano e na sociedade. Embora os debates sobre a integração do patrimônio vivo viessem se desenvolvendo havia décadas, um marco crítico dessa transformação global foi a inclusão formal do conceito de "patrimônio cultural imaterial" na definição de museu atualizada pelo ICOM em 2007, de acordo com padrões internacionais. Contudo, embora essa mudança de paradigma represente um passo revolucionário para a preservação do patrimônio, ela traz riscos estruturais, como a "mercantilização do patrimônio", a "simulação da tradição" e a esterilização de práticas vivas no interior dos museus, o que desvincula o PCI de seu contexto socioespacial original. Diante desses riscos, as abordagens da nova museologia e do ecomuseu defendem um modelo de "salvaguarda holística", no qual bairros históricos, praças públicas e arquitetura vernacular funcionam como espaços vivos de transmissão. Assim, este estudo enfatiza que a preservação do PCI não pode depender apenas de restaurações físicas ou de exposições museológicas estáticas; ao contrário, os valores imateriais e as paisagens culturais devem ser integrados estruturalmente à vida cotidiana por meio de decisões de zoneamento orientadas à produção, estratégias de continuidade funcional e planos de gestão urbana de base comunitária, em escala global.

Palavras-chave: Patrimônio cultural imaterial (PCI), Nova museologia, Ecomuseu, Conservação in situ, Decisões de zoneamento, Paisagem cultural

Introduction

Culture and heritage are dynamic values inherited from past generations as the common accumulation of universal human history, aimed to be transmitted to the future on a global scale (Alexander, 1987). Historically, early museology and heritage preservation were strictly object-centered, focusing primarily on the collection and exhibition of tangible artifacts. However, as the limitations of this traditional approach became apparent, the need to protect living cultural expressions emerged. While tangible cultural heritage has traditionally been read through monuments, historical sites, and physical objects (Tamarapa et al., 2012), spiritual values (ICH) that constitute the identity of communities in a globalizing world have increasingly come to the forefront. Established on November 16, 1945, to safeguard these cultural values globally, UNESCO initially protected tangible heritage through international regulations, and subsequently initiated universal practices to protect living values such as traditions, ceremonies, and crafts (Alivizatou, 2011).

The "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" was opened for signature on October 17, 2003, aiming to safeguard elements of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) such as traditions, ceremonies, and oral expressions at a global level (Lenzerini, 2011).

This international agreement moved the concept of general "safeguarding" and sustaining living heritage onto the global agenda, transcending traditional conservation approaches (Oğuz, 2009). The relationship established by museums with ICH gained profound value in the context of institutions reconsidering this universal "safeguarding" mission and evaluating their interactions with society from a holistic and global perspective (Ambrose & Paine, 2006). Museums are no longer viewed merely as passive storehouses of dead objects; rather, they function as active catalysts for community engagement, social cohesion, and cultural diplomacy.

Intangible cultural heritage and the global paradigm

Intangible cultural heritage encompasses practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities, groups, and individuals recognize as an integral part of their culture (Matsuura, 2004). Due to this dynamic nature, this type of heritage is referred to in global literature as "living cultural heritage" (Alivizatou, 2008). The term "intangible cultural heritage" developed as a reaction to UNESCO's object-centered traditional conservation strategy (Lenzerini, 2011). As communities interact continuously with their social environment, history, and nature, these abstract cultural values are constantly renewed and reproduced across generations (Tamarapa et al., 2012). This cyclical regeneration underpins the resilience of local identities in the face of homogenization forces driven by globalization.

The risk of museumification and the ecomuseum philosophy

Although participatory approaches and living museum concepts promise theoretical optimism, translating them into practice entails delicate structural dilemmas. Simply recording a cultural practice or staging it within an artificial museum environment risks severing the vital veins that sustain it (Alivizatou, 2011). Cultural heritage is not merely a static product; it is an evolving process that requires its native geography, architectural morphology, and social networks to retain its true meaning.

To overcome the risks of "commodification" and "staged simulation," the international conservation discourse increasingly relies on the Ecomuseum philosophy. Originating in France during the 1970s, the ecomuseum approach rejects the traditional "museum-city" model that reduces living urban settlements into passive open-air exhibition objects (Rivière, 1985). Instead, it treats the entire neighborhood, its daily routines, acoustic landscapes, and craft production networks as an integrated living organism. Consequently, new museology dictates that safeguarding intangible values requires stepping out of sterile museum buildings and embedding heritage directly into the organic flow of everyday urban life.

The role of international conventions and normative frameworks

UNESCO continuously expanded its conservation framework through landmark international legal instruments, including the 1954 Hague Convention, the 1964 Venice Charter, and the 1972 World Heritage Convention (Alivizatou, 2008; Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010). Building upon this legal evolution, the 2003 Convention internationally safeguards the intergenerational transmission of intangible cultural heritage through formal or non-formal education frameworks (Davenne, 2012). Global statistics indicate that numerous elements—spanning five main geographic regions and encompassing 788 registered components by 2024—have been inscribed worldwide, demonstrating how this convention has generated widespread intercontinental awareness and cross-cultural solidarity (URL-1). These normative instruments provide a shared vocabulary and operational guidelines for nations striving to protect their fragile living traditions against modern socio-economic pressures.

Intangible cultural heritage and museum relations

Museology, which originated from enclosed cabinets of curiosities and private collections where valuable objects were kept throughout historical processes, has transformed dramatically in parallel with global social changes (Shaw, 2004; Lewis, 1982). The concept of the museum, based on the Greek word "mouseîon" (seat of the muses), has evolved from rigid, object-oriented structures into human-oriented, inclusive, and participatory environments over time (Kim, 2004; Lambert et al., 2014). Although debates surrounding the incorporation of intangible heritage into museology had been ongoing for years prior, the formal inclusion of the "intangible cultural heritage" concept into the official museum definition by ICOM (International Council of Museums) at its 22nd General Conference on August 24, 2007, served as a fundamental breaking point on a global scale (Lenzerini, 2011). It is crucial to distinguish that while the 2003 UNESCO Convention established the macro-level international normative framework for state parties to safeguard heritage, the 2007 ICOM definition represented a distinct paradigm shift enacted by a separate institutional body, specifically transforming the professional and operational framework of museums themselves. This new definition ensured that museums became universal institutions protecting both tangible and intangible heritage with an integrated, holistic approach, while acting as proactive educational platforms for social transformation (Yoshida, 2004).

Integrating ICH into zoning decisions and urban planning policies

A critical evaluation of global conservation practices reveals a persistent disjunction between physical historic preservation and the continuity of living culture. Traditional conservation master plans and urban rehabilitation projects often prioritize structural

envelopes, volumetric heights, and facade regulations while entirely neglecting functional continuity. For ICH to survive in historic urban landscapes, zoning laws and planning instruments must be structurally reformed:

- **Production-Oriented Zoning and Functional Continuity:** Traditional crafting and production zones within historic settlements should not be swallowed by generic commercial or residential re-zonings. Special sub-zoning regulations—such as "Traditional Production Districts"—must mandate that a designated percentage of ground-floor spaces in historical quarters remain dedicated to active craft workshops. This ensures that streets function as active preservation corridors rather than mere tourist thoroughfares.
- **Preservation of Cultural Landscapes and Agricultural Buffers:** Vernacular architecture is inextricably linked to its surrounding agricultural and topographical landscape. Zoning frameworks must protect agrarian heritage zones (such as historic terraced slopes and micro-climatic agricultural belts) not merely as aesthetic green backdrops, but as living production spaces where traditional ecological knowledge and seasonal rituals (such as harvest practices and local gastronomy) are intergenerationally transmitted.
- **Legal Recognition of Functional Elements:** Historic production facilities—such as traditional pottery kilns or pressing vats—must be legally protected as active functional elements rather than treated as inert archaeological decoration. Municipal environmental and zoning codes should accommodate technical solutions (e.g., modern filtration systems) that allow these historic production units to legally operate within urban fabrics, keeping the visual and auditory memory of the neighborhood alive.
- **Community-Based Management Plans:** Sustainable heritage management requires decentralized governance models, such as Local Heritage Boards or Community Councils composed of resident artisans, heritage bearers, and local stakeholders. Planning decisions concerning functional shifts, tourism carrying capacities, and adaptive reuse must be co-produced with the community to prevent gentrification, spatial alienation, and the superficial decoration of historic streets.

Final remarks

This study has comprehensively examined the paradigm shift from object-centered museology to the human-oriented new museology approach on a global scale, highlighting the

critical role of translating intangible cultural heritage preservation into active spatial, zoning, and urban design policies (Vergo, 1989; Alivizatou, 2008). The analytical findings clearly demonstrate that safeguarding ICH cannot succeed through physical restorations or isolated museum exhibitions alone; rather, it demands an integrated "Living Neighborhood-Museum" model rooted in ecomuseum principles (Erlien & Bakka, 2017; Davis, 2011). ICOM's 2007 definition update remains the foundational institutional milestone of this ongoing global process (Lenzerini, 2011). Future research should deeply examine the international role of emerging digital technologies, carrying capacity assessments, and community-co-curation models in bridging the gap between urban planning regulations and the fluid, living nature of intangible cultural heritage.

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Research ethics. This study did not involve human or animal subjects, thus ethics committee approval was not required.

Use of artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence tools were used solely for language translation purposes.

Data availability. Data were compiled from relevant international conventions and literature sources.

Author contributions. As the sole author, all stages of the article (conception, literature review, writing, and editing) were carried out by the author.

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