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## The Role of Cultural Heritage in Promoting Socio-Economic Development: An Analysis on Emerging Countries

**Nicola Boccella**

Sapienza University of Rome

**Irene Salerno**

Sapienza University of Rome

### Abstract

*The enhancement of cultural heritage through new forms of dialogue with the territorial communities and the so-called “heritage communities” of which such heritage is an expression, is becoming an increasingly important vehicle for the economic and social development, especially in emerging countries. The places that express the history, culture and values of the human collectives can become, in this way, laboratories in which the knowledge and the traditions are reinterpreted in a continuous dialogue. Of such valorization and of such dialogue, the emerging countries can benefit in view of a profitable local development that can also propose diversified and seasonally adjusted tourism routes, able to bring constant tourist flows, with positive economic and social consequences. In light of these considerations, the paper aims to explore the different paths through which, in emerging countries, it is possible to create new models of development also through innovative ways of dialogue with the so-called “patrimonial communities”. Central will be a reflection on how the most recent international patterns to promote social and economic development can be “translated” and adapted to specific developing geographic and sectoral contexts.*

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage, socio-economic development, emerging countries

### 1. Cultural Heritage and Local Development

Over the last decades, studies on cultural heritage as a way to promote local development have undergone an intense development (Loulanski, 2006) ; on the other side, increasing attention is being paid on the cultural and creative industries, as a source of economic growth: *“the cultural and creative sectors make up nearly 4.5% of the European economy, thanks to nearly 1.4 million small and medium-sized businesses generating and distributing creative content all over Europe. The cultural and creative sectors have shown great resilience during the crisis – they actually continued to grow – while stimulating creativity and innovation spillovers in other sectors. About 8.5 million people are employed in creative sectors across Europe – and many more if we take into*

*account their impact on other sectors such as tourism and information technology (European Creative Industries Summit, 2015)".*

In the period between 2012 and 2014, despite the global crisis, enterprises having invested in creativity have increased their turnover by 3.2%; companies that have invested in creativity were rewarded with a 4.3% increase in exports. Moreover, the 443,208 enterprises in the cultural production system, accounting for 7.3% of domestic enterprises, reaches 5.4% of the wealth produced in Italy, equal to 78.6 billion of euros. Arriving at about 84, equivalent to 5.8% of the national economy, if we include public institutions and organizations in the non-profit organization active in the field of culture.

Multiplier effects have been also generated by the economy of culture, with a positive impact on employment. In this regard, cultural and creative industries as well as the sectors of historical, artistic and architectural heritage, performing arts and visual arts, are actually employing 1.4 million people, that means the 5.9% of whole Italian employment – and over 1.5 million, equal to 6.3% of the whole employment rate if we include also the public and no-profit sector (European Creative Industries Summit, 2015; Boccella & Salerno, 2016).

Cultural heritage is, today, at the center of a reflection aiming to revise its role; in parallel, focus is on the ways in which it is possible to enhance this treasure, regarded as also a space for democratic and inclusive confrontation for different categories of subjects.

The institutions of culture are increasingly interested and involved in a dialogue with local communities more and more regarded as “interpretive communities” and “heritage communities”, sometimes even those named as “diaspora communities”, which are often marginalized, and placed outside the flow of communication interchange with society and the mainstream culture. Moreover, this new function is particularly important for the culture and society of a given migrant group.

Such assumptions have, actually, a key-importance, especially in emerging and developing countries, increasingly called for a wise use of territorial and cultural resources, in an innovative, sustainable and democratic way. This also in consideration of the fact that heritage can have a key role in the democratization process, to the extent that it becomes, especially in countries in democratic transition, a strategic reality for the maintenance and reinterpretation, reinforcement and re-enactment of cultural identities.

In this regard, it is also important to look at what, more generally, is happening in the relationship between the heritage and the community of origin of the same, as this is strongly linked to the issue of the heritage democratization. Today, the subjects and representatives of those peoples who have undergone domination, and whose cultures are exhibited in the most important museums - especially ethnographic - of the West, are made, as Pecci (2009) observes, promoters of important solicitations and claims of

the fundamental right to self-represent themselves as well as their own cultural heritages. This has led to the establishment of new research practices and new methods of relationship with the communities represented by the western world.

With such communities it has been established, for many years, a “bidirectional” relationship that sees museums engaged in confrontation with interpretations and meanings to assets, certainly not without problems and critical issues.

With regard on the new developmental contexts, heritage is recognized as both engine and catalyst of socio-economic development , and heritage-based development initiatives are planned and implemented in developing countries and countries in transition as well (Loulanski, 2006). In emerging countries, informal sales were estimated to reach a total amount of US\$33b in 2013, and to provide employment with 1.2 million jobs. “Performing arts are the biggest employers in the informal economy, providing unofficial music and theater performances (street performances, festivals and concerts that do not pay authors’ rights, private performances at marriages and funerals, etc.), which are often free for audiences (CISAC, 2015).

## 2. New International Patterns

In answer to the requests for participation and democratization in cultural heritage fruition as a vehicle for local and economic development, the Western world has increasingly adopted inclusive, dialogical and participatory strategies; such instances can give rise to extremely fluid scenarios if they are transposed in the emerging countries, especially in those being in democratic transition.

Starting from the Seventies of the last century, the ICOM developed a program proposing a reflection on the importance of critical, collaborative and inclusive languages as a vehicle for cultural participation and local development, and a tool to combat social discrimination. New reflections, related to the different ways to display and “narrate” both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, are intertwined with the suggestions coming from the “Cultural Studies” and from the research relating to tourism studies. Diverse strategies have been experimented all around the world, in order to promote innovative, democratic and inclusive ways to share cultural heritage: among the others, we want to mention the Participatory Learning Action or PLA, the method of Map of Parishes or Cultural Maps, the method of the Theatre Forum, the Research-action, the Planning for real, the Scenario workshop, the Searching for future.

Still rather experimental and oriented to the participatory inclusion of the users’ community is, indeed, the “storytelling” applied to cultural heritage. Such technique has been widely practiced and widespread in the Anglo-Saxon world, with the aim of contributing to the interpretation and attribution of meanings through the re-enactment and construction of memories.

Furthermore, it can be profitably used both for the creation of visiting paths to entire territories as well as for the reading, interpretation and use of cultural sites; the general objective of this technique is the increasing the socio-economic impact of local communities, or more limited places of culture such as museums.

Through innovative approaches, these new paradigms set the goal to increase the attractiveness of places holding cultural heritage and of the local communities as a qualifying element for the identity of a given territory.

Also in developing countries, in recent years there have been numerous attempts to enhance cultural heritage, even intangible, in a dialogic manner, linking such enhancement to local development including tourism; such is the case of music role in Senegal and its relationships with economic growth chances: indeed, musical performances in this country are strongly linked to other immaterial cultural aspects as they are rooted in folk traditions and ways of life (Boccella & Salerno, 2016). The typical performers, named as “griots” , have important social roles as they can perform ceremonial roles and transmit cultural memory through history and traditions - that can be considered as an intangible heritage.

On the other hand, we can refer to the case of the Indigenous Australian visual art; in this case, despite being in a context, the peculiar environment where the aboriginals use to live strikes many correlations with the developing countries environment (Boccella & Salerno, 2016).

Of capital importance is the communicative capacity of the institutions and the enhancement of cultural heritage, with the aim of promoting the territories and socio-economic development, also through the valorization of local communities historical traditions and culture.

In developing countries, in which new paradigms to promote heritage valorization and local development must emerge, there is a specific instance of targeted professional training of human capital, especially those that are often lacking in communicative skills.

### **3. The Need to Train the Human Capital. Best Practices to Build Professional Competences**

In order to promote the positive interrelation among cultural heritage, culture and local development, it is more important than ever the development of new methods and technologies for the communication to an increasingly widespread public. Above all, new skills must be developed in order to increase in the human capital of emerging countries the ability to promote the economic development of entire areas through the enhancement of the authentic and unique personality of the territories and places in which they operate.

In this regard, we find it interesting to refer to a research and training project

carried out in 2010 and until 2012 by the University of Rome “La Sapienza”, in view of a possible transferability and adaptation of its results.

The project, named “Museum Communicator”, was co-funded by the European Union under the Lifelong Learning program - Sub-program Leonardo da Vinci; it was aimed at studying the construction of a professional standard for a museum communicator capable of promoting local development.

The professional skills of this figure consisted in the ability to communicate with the media, mobilize synergies within the network of local actors and promote cultural activities aimed at the development and enhancement of cultural heritage as well as sustainable cultural tourism, which could serve as a flywheel for local development.

Once a professional standard was built through the intersection of various professional repertoires in the marketing, communication, cultural heritage sectors, it has been designed and realized a training course.

The basic skills to be developed consisted of:

- Ability to master the general reference context in which cultural and development operators do work and act;
- Ability to analyze a territory socio-cultural and economic system potentials;
- Ability to evaluate the potential of the cultural heritage existing in a specific territory;
- Ability to establish cooperative relationships with the territorial actors (public, private, non-profit);
- Ability to know how to co-design and coordinate the communication of events/initiatives integrated among several subjects for the enhancement of the museum and the territory (tourism);
- Ability to know how to participate in the design, configuration and development of cultural institutions through promotional activities, in connection with the social, economic and tourist actors of the territory;
- Ability to know how to define specific cultural projects and initiatives;
- Ability to define broad communication strategies;
- Knowledge of cultural marketing basic strategies for the cultural institutions and specific territories promotion;
- Ability to use communication techniques for the promotion of both ordinary activities and extraordinary activities of cultural institutions at the vast public;
- Ability to master the regulations concerning the territory and the landscape heritage enhancement.

In conclusion, it could be profitable to adapt such a professional standard to specific national realities, especially in emerging countries, in order to promote a new vision of heritage and cultural resources, with a view to sustainability and promotion of a new vision of such resources, to enhance human, social and economic growth.

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