

Prerequisites for Post-Disaster Regeneration of Historic Cities



Judith Ryser
Fatemeh Farnaz Arefian

Editors



Silk Cities

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Website

silk-cities.org

Contact

info@silkcities.org

Mailing list

silk-cities.org/join-our-email-list



vimeo

Judith Ryser

Fatemeh Farnaz Arefian

Editors

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Judith Ryser

Editor

Fatemeh Farnaz Arefian

Editor

Ali Puya Khani

Cover design, book layout and research assistance

Nafiseh Irani

Data management and communication

Maria Diez

Geographic coverage maps

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Beauty revealed in Pakistan and Italy

How younger citizens remove the veils that hide cultural heritage

Alessandra De Nicola, University of Milano Bicocca, Italy
Department of Human Sciences and Education, BiPAC -Interdepartmental Research Centre of Bicocca for Cultural and Artistic Heritage alessandra.denicola@unimib.it

Marvi Mazhar, Goldsmith University of London,
Pakistan Chowk Community Centre (PCCC), Pakistan

info@marvimazhar.com

Abstract

Drawing on a common sensibility that transcends local circumstances, we examine how similar solutions have been identified for problems with different root causes and arising in highly diverse settings in two different continents. The solutions presented share an educational approach based on offering sensory experience and encouraging communities to participate in the educational process. In the Pakistani example, this approach was proposed by a group of artists, while in the Italian one it was developed by researchers through their participation in and analysis of art projects.

Keywords: Heritage, Education, Civic engagement, Heritage activism, Karachi, Pakistan, Lake Como, Italy

10.1 Introduction

The theme of this chapter is heritage education as a tool for rethinking and re-appropriating our cities and local areas. Its point of departure is a shared perspective informing different approaches, from which it is hoped to develop a new project. If we think about the Universal Heritage declaration, we could assume here that it would be likely for us to be able to identify a single, universal definition of cultural heritage. A single definition would cover many types of heritage and identities while attempting to reflect the infinite nuances of the topic. If we were to conduct such an exercise of synthesis at the international level, this would provide us with common ground for reflection, made up of languages and sensibilities that can dialogue with each other, despite the numerous possible interpretations.

This is of utmost importance for present-day cities. Karachi, for example, with its multiple religions, sects and economic divisions and increasing stratification, has restricted the emergence of social sciences, art, literature, and cultural activities to a certain spatial demographic. As the city expands horizontally, wealth becomes concentrated in specific districts, to the detriment of others. The strong symbolic segregation that has come to be associated with space in the city has given rise to a mindset amongst the inhabitants of the city which is reflected in discourses of exclusion centring around “the purana shehr” (old town) vs. the “naya shehr” (new town)”, a categorisation that resonates with the orientalist notion of the ‘us versus them’ divide. This symbolic divide legitimises the lack of communication that exists between different demographic groups in the city and uninformed citizens remain oblivious of what exists outside their own demographic circles. (Mehrotra and Narain Lambah, 2004). This kind of situation, where concrete or symbolic barriers undermine the quality of life in a given territory, occur also in Italy and in the West generally. In the light of this background, our aim here is to initiate a fruitful relationship for research and practice between cultural heritage initiatives in the two nations of Italy and Pakistan. Naturally, the cultural heritage sites examined differ in terms of their form and function and therefore in terms of how they may best be used, protected, and promoted. They present different problems, to which however similar answers have been proposed, prompting this joint reflection, and the quest to exchange methodologies and approaches. Like in an ideal community where the same language is spoken, a shared lexicon enables us to mutually enrich our perspectives via the recognition and embracing of our differences (Jalla, 2016). The primary challenge in both countries is to find ways of reconnecting citizens, in particular the young, with heritage, attempting to lift some of the veils that all too frequently conceal landscape heritage assets, such as habit, a lack of knowledge, prejudice or a sense of inadequacy (De Nicola and Zuccoli, 2016). This may be achieved by conducting Heritage Awareness Programmes and Heritage Walks with youth and later getting young people to lead these activities themselves. When describing how this has been done to date in the Pakistani and Italian cases, we will seek to define tools for identifying people’s “horizon of identity”, that is to say, the cultural landscape within which their lives are situated. One such tool, by way of example, is collecting narratives from locals and other users of a given cultural space. We specifically focus on the heritage education programme implemented by the Pakistan Chowk Community Centre in Karachi. The goals of this “Walking Heritage into Future Cities” is to enhance awareness, share knowledge, generate income, and encourage community engagement following the model developed by Heritage Walk Calcutta (HWC) and Heritage Walk Karachi (HWK) for the conservation of heritage. A key aspect of the programme is the involvement of children as heritage activists.

10.2 The quest for a common “lexicon”: persons, objects, landscapes

A different project was a scheme to entirely abolish all words whatsoever. This was considered as a great advantage regarding health, as well as brevity. It is obvious that every word we speak is, to some degree, a diminution of our lungs by corrosion and, consequently, contributes to the shortening of our lives. Therefore, an expedient was offered, “...that since words are only names for things, it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them such things as were necessary to express a particular business they are to discourse on...” (Swift J., *Gulliver’s Travels*, III.5, p.21).



Fig.10.1 Children during heritage education activities with their drawings. The caption was “heritage activists!” on the PCCC Instagram profile (source: PCCC, 2019)

This chapter originated with a picture of a child found on a website, which prompted the Italian author to seek out, contact and initiate a process of exchange with her Pakistani counterpart. Crucially, the former conducts her research in the field of visual culture, which is partly based on the study of images. The photo that sparked her interest featured a group of children displaying their drawings, outdoors somewhere in what appeared to be an Eastern setting. There were two main points of interests:

1. The drawings represented buildings in a city.
2. The caption chosen by the authors was: “heritage activists!”.

In the field of art and heritage education research, images and in particular drawings can offer a key tool for community learning and participation in local life and heritage (De Nicola and Zuccoli, 2019). In particular, the use of drawing is a stimulating way to rethink spaces with multiple objectives in mind. From a design perspective, this domain is not the exclusive concern of designers or architects, it could also be a part of a teacher’s activities, if we view space as “the third educator”; as part of a creative or autobiographical narrative; as a means of learning about territories before and without the use of words. In the words of John Berger, “in the teaching of drawing [...], the heart of the matter lies in the specific process of looking” (2005, p.11). Our aim was to educate audiences’ gaze, attempting to overcome the barriers that prevent them from enjoying

and appreciating the value of everyday places, especially those in their own local area. We soon realised that the Italian and Pakistani partners were pursuing this goal from identical perspectives. Berger's useful definition, "drawing is discovery" is not just a phrase, it is quite literally true. It is the actual act of drawing itself that forces the artist to look at the object in front of him, to dissect it in his mind's eye and put it together again" (ibid., p.11.). The act of drawing therefore becomes a way of looking with fresh, different eyes at the places where we live, enabling us to pull aside the veil of habit that normally obscures our local heritage. The beauty that is thereby revealed is not so much a question of aesthetic experience but rather one of recognising the meaning of a place. Thus, we did not choose "Beauty Revealed" as the title of this work with a view to discussing beauty in the absolute sense, but rather to invite reflection on lost horizons of meaning. This is an issue shared by many contemporary landscapes, whether due to destruction wrought by earthquakes, human neglect, successive layers of urbanisation that have obscured their memory, or the fact that we have lost the habit of contemplating the places we live in mindfully. Indeed, people's tendency to be more aware of landscapes when they are on vacation than in the course of their everyday lives is a widely-studied phenomenon (D'Angelo, 2014). In the case studies that we describe here, "Heidegger's concept of *wohnen*, or living, in the sense of dwelling which underscores stable ties rooted in tradition, became a core category in a sense of landscape that, it was thought, would avoid the excessive emphasis on aesthetics of those who do not truly inhabit landscapes but rather view them as spaces of leisure and contemplation" (ibid., p. 76). Without addressing what Martin Pollack (2016) has termed "contaminated landscapes" - that is to say, those landscapes across the globe whose memory has been deliberately obscured to conceal the massacres and mass killings perpetrated in them - we set out to discuss landscapes that host cultural heritage assets whose value and meaning are lost to the local communities inhabiting them. However, to that effect we needed to identify a shared lexicon that did not require a precise definition of the heritage assets themselves. This would have been a demanding exercise and not of particular value to our avenue of inquiry in this chapter. Hence the citation from Gulliver's Travels at the beginning of this section. We radically simplified the task before us by identifying the shared object of our work as cultural heritage assets which, as numerous legislative frameworks stipulate, are first and foremost things¹.

From the perspective of visual studies, which explore the relationship between how individuals define each object that they see and that which is visible, interpreting² heritage assets as objects means viewing them as a direct source of knowledge that is unmediated by any filter or barrier to access. To put this more simply, the visual process relies on a decoding of images that is informed by our prior experience and knowledge. For the purposes of the current study, one of the most salient aspects of visual studies is that "They particularly concern themselves with intersubjective phenomena [and] the dynamics of seeing and being seen by others as constitutive of the social sphere" (Mitchell, 2018, p.21). According to Mirzoeff "For most people, seeing the world still means first and foremost seeing our own city: taken together today's global cities make a world of their own. p.107). The new global city extends beyond the older concept of city limits (p.108). [...] Seeing in the global city requires active self-censorship from its residents as part of a highly controlled environment (Mirzoeff, 2017, p.109)". The goal of the work carried out at the Pakistan Chowk Community Centre and on Lake Como in Italy is to provide audiences with tools of learning to appreciate the value of the place where they

¹ We do not discuss immaterial assets in this chapter, although we refer in passing to the role of oral narratives as a means of enhancing appreciation of cultural heritage.

² Here the term "interpretation" is underpinned by the field of research launched by Freeman Tilden in 1957 with his seminal work "Interpreting our heritage" and significantly enriched from an educational perspective by the work of Eilean Hooper Greenhill.

live, and to overcome this sense of self-censorship (Zuccoli, De Nicola 2018). Because “...seeing is not believing, is something we do, a kind of performance [...] the key places [...] are the global cities, where most of us now live. In these immense dense spaces, we learn how to see - and also not to see - potentially disturbing sights - as a condition for daily survival” (Mirzoeff, 2017, p.15). The aim of the work described in this chapter is to help communities attain not just survival in the everyday life, but rather a good quality of life. We set out to invert the paradigm that has conventionally been brought to bear on approaches to cultural heritage by taking people, the local community, as our point of departure, and inviting them to construct contemporary landscapes - the stage on which they perform their lives - through their gaze, a stage that comprehends the objects and heritage assets making up individual identity. This research is intended to lay the ground for planning future dialogue and the concrete exchange of practices and knowledge on this approach.

10.3 PCCC- Pakistan Chowk Community Centre and its projects

Pakistan Chowk is a landmark heritage site in Karachi’s South District and is located in the middle of the Old Town. The Chowk has historically been the central point of the city where there used to be a weekly fish market. Slowly with time as institutes and educational hubs started opening, the chowk converted into a literary space, where people assembled to have conversations about literature, mainly in the form of *mus-hairas*³ {poetic symposia}, *baithaks*⁴ (talking circle) and similar. Over time, the horizontal expansion of the city and the horizontal concentration of wealth gave rise to a process of social exclusion that damaged the existing social framework. Disparity of class and infrastructure turned public spaces into vulnerable places which were classified as wasted space. The vision of intervening at the Pakistan Chowk was to restore art and culture for the immediate neighbourhood, and not allow it to remain neglected like in the past. In Phase 01 of this initiative, we remodelled a 6,633 sq. ft. space in the Pakistan Chowk by installing benches, lamp posts, trees, dustbins and conducting a mass cleaning of an area that had previously been a dark public space because of governance neglect, and decay. Following the successful completion of Phase 01, the Chowk got gradually occupied by women and children, artists and thinkers of the neighbourhood. As one of Pakistan Chowk Initiative groups, we started documenting the process and started curating outdoor activities. This formed a close relation with the neighbourhood and its immediate context.

As time passed by, this led to the emergence of multiple sensitive topics for dialogue and conversations that required a more intimate place. Consequently, we began to envision a space for hosting art and cultural activities that were not feasible to conduct in the open-air setting and needed more proximity and longer vision towards creating cultural nexus. That is when the Pakistan Chowk Community Centre was born. This was a two-room space housed on the first floor of the historic pre-partition Sultani Mahal Building in Karachi’s Old Town. It is located approximately 30 feet from Pakistan Chowk and faces the Saranagati Building. Our goal with this community centre is to bring the residents of the Old Town together by offering them a space that can be utilised for exhibitions, book launches, *baithaks*, town hall meetings, as well as a space that facilitates research and inquiry. The project is unique in its way and has no reference for a prototype. Since it’s the first of its kind, it developed its programme with an experimental approach. The

³ A poetic symposium is part of the Culture of North India, Pakistan and the Deccan, particularly among the Hyderabad Muslims, and is regarded as a forum for free self-expression.

⁴ The talking circle is a sort of sitting/lounge room with an informal setting where all kinds of people can come together over a cup of tea to discuss the day’s events including social, domestic, economic and political issues. The goal of the Talking Circle is to create a space where people come together and talk about issues that plague their immediate environment and start movements as a result of them.

curation of the programmes was subjected to the demands of the neighbourhood and some initiatives were introduced by the PCCC group of the advisory committee as part of outreach programmes, and to strengthen the cultural nexus. The Pakistan Chowk Community Centre Projects used different methodologies to develop a relationship with the neighbourhood. The first one was to intervene at grassroots level by engaging with the community through various interactive programmes like open mic conversations, qawwali and sufi music nights, theatre and art shows. engaging with children through storytelling and drawings and then exhibiting the work in the streets of the old town on shop fronts and walls as part of an informal art exhibition. The second part of PCCC was to have an in house research and documentation lab. This approach gave us intimate access to get to know the regional old town context more sensitively and intimately. We used the following tools for our analysis. We started collecting oral stories, personal archives and photographs and we did street photo mapping recording living heritage. These methods helped us in collecting neighbourhood information on the historical past, dilapidated conditions, politics, bureaucracy of real estate developers and the possible decay of the old-town future.

The aim of the projects was to develop advocacy and give voice. Our three projects -Old Town Mapping, Spoken History and Heritage Walk Karachi - are interlinked research projects. They helped us create a platform for young researchers from various institutes to take part and help us analyse the tangible data and turn it into social research hypotheses. This information is absolutely critical for creating a narrative towards projects for the future preservation of the old town. People's voice was the most powerful tool and witnessing deterioration through visual collection every day helped us support our recording.

10.3.2 Project 01: Old Town Mapping “Sarak Chaap”

The Old Town Mapping Project is an informal indigenous way of mapping, where documentation is done by walking the streets and photographing the built environment in various ways -indoors and outdoors. We were focusing on special architectural details to understand the importance of each structure and its relation to the street, as well on exploring the social and political intricacies of the area. This format creates an archive of the various heritage sites in the Old Town of Karachi, as well as of the changes that have been made to them over time. This project aims to map the different communities in the Old Town, their environment and cultural heritage assets that could be conserved and documented. To that effect, we adopted different categories, such as sacred spaces, famous landmarks, gastronomy, public nodes etc.

10.3.3 Project 02: Spoken History Project “Ghair Sarkari Tareekh”

The Spoken History Project gathers storytellers and records information that is salient to mapping the vestiges of the space that was, and the space that is now. Informally entitled “Ghair Sarkari Tareekh” (non-government history), it emphasises the validity and legitimacy of memory and oral tradition. It begins with an interview, but spontaneously continues as an anecdotal charting of space. We seek to both preserve and re-activate memories and memorabilia of the Old Town, by simultaneously archiving and exhibiting them. Our story tellers are residents, labourers, loiterers, and all citizens associated with the neighbourhood. Their contributions help us analyse local spatial needs and trace the evolution of the community and its culture. These stories are from everyday which generate discourse amongst the users and residents of the old town.



Fig.10.2 Storyteller privileged witnesses to record information that is salient to mapping the vestiges (source: PCCC, 2019)

10.3.4 Project 03: Heritage Walk Karachi

This project is the conclusion of “Oldtown Mapping and Spoken History”. This project is also what makes the research sustainable, and earns small fees in order to continue developing mechanisms towards policies focusing on living heritage. The guided tour is a platform for activism bringing institutes, civil society, and students, writers, journalists to witness the decay the Old town faces every day. Collecting stories is an important part of the tour and makes it relatable and grounded. The aim of this project is to promote the engagement of people from all over the city with the Old Town area, and enable them to explore its historical treasures, beyond the narrow category of pictures. It includes workshops and field trips for students, as well as guided tours during which participants have the opportunity to explore previously unfamiliar alleyways, streets, buildings, structures and spaces within Karachi’s Old Town.

10.3.5 Heritage Awareness Programme developing heritage activists

The Pakistan Chowk Community Centre has successfully organised about 100 events over 30 months. These events include numerous activities for children such as music workshops, origami classes, clay art workshops, sketching classes, storytelling sessions

etc. The Pakistan Chowk Community Centre provides a platform for kids of all ages to showcase and explore their talent by participating in, and organising multi-dimensional activities. The basic purpose of involving children in such activities is to enhance their understanding of art in its different forms and its role in our culture. The Pakistan Chowk Community Centre initiated the process of enhancing heritage awareness among children by organising talks and workshops in different schools and also by introducing a Heritage Society as a part of co-curricular activities in schools. These initiatives come under the Heritage Awareness Programme- (HAP project). HAP creatively fosters critical thinking and the free expression of emotion based on a newly acquired understanding of the existing historic built environment and its importance. Architecture is everywhere but nobody teaches us how to understand and enjoy the city and all its complexity. We believe that teaching students from primary school through to higher education how to observe, understand and enjoy the built environment will open up their minds to a more creative way of thinking and prepare them to play an active role as the citizens of a sustainable future. The programme is designed for implementation with public and private schools and universities. HAP also involves conducting Heritage Tours and Training. The Pakistan Chowk Community Centre has successfully delivered numerous HAP sessions at schools all around the city and PCCC's Heritage Walk Karachi Project has been co-opted by the Heritage Society in a number of schools to conduct talks, workshops, and walking heritage tours in the Old Town of Karachi. The PCCC has also successfully run a HAP kiosk named "Developing Little Heritage Activists" at a family carnival, where kids could play a number of heritage education games and print their own heritage tote bags.

10.4 A western point of view: an overview on a theoretical framework of an outdoor education - a long tradition

Since the time of the ancient Greeks, and the school founded by Aristotle, walking has been seen as functional to the development of critical thinking and to philosophical speculation. This was the era of the Peripatetics or walking philosophers. However, it was only with the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau that walking became a cultural, and in parallel, an educational activity. Indeed, in his "Confessions" the French philosopher declared that he could "meditate only when I am walking. When I stop, I cease to think; my mind only works with my legs" (Rousseau, 1976, p.426). In "Emile, Or Treatise on Education" he both discussed walking as an educational act in itself and laid down the foundations for what has come to be known as empirical education, or educational processes that draw on sensory experience. The next significant developments concerning the theme of walking did not occur until the twentieth century. The 1900s saw numerous educationalists theorise the value of teaching methods that involve leaving the classroom setting and benefitting from the educational potential afforded by the local area and its cultural heritage assets. They include the activist John Dewey, the Italian Giuseppina Pizzigoni who theorised the educational value of school gardens and of field trips in the neighbourhood of the school, the Agazzi sisters who invited their pupils to bring to school objects found during exploratory walks, and Loris Malaguzzi and his concept of space as the "third educator", that is to say as a core aspect of all educational design. Outdoor education has thus become one of the contemporary methods of active teaching and learning. This has gone hand in hand with an increase in the opportunities for children and youths to have educational experiences allowing them to become agents of responsible social change (activists). Two historical international examples of this are the Scout movement and the youth branch of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent. Alongside these instances of an educational model that combines peer education with the moral and ethical values of international humanitarian law,

many local projects have sprung up with the aim to encourage children and families to change their lifestyles, especially for environmental reasons. Examples are the Massa Marmocchi (an offshoot of the Critical Mass movement) which promotes the conscious choice of cycling to reduce motor traffic volumes, or the many “walking bus” campaigns organised to get groups of children traveling to school on foot. A final example would be the emergence of youth councils that accompany democratic institutions.

These were the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the student work placement programme conducted at Lake Como’s Museo del Paesaggio [Landscape Museum]. There are two main differences between the Karachi initiatives outlined above and this project. First, the Italian programme was implemented in a local area setting, Lake Como, that bears all the classic attributes of a landscape. Second, while the work experience officially took place within the institutional framework of schools, the participating youths followed the programme independently, without their teachers’ supervision, during their 2019 summer break, and were awarded academic credits as a result. What the two initiatives have in common is the need to educate young people’s gaze so that they can grasp the value and meaning of the places where they live, given that everyday habits often work to obscure the symbols that denote a community’s specific identity. This quest for a community, as an expression of the local area with the capacity to offer children and youths unmediated insights into the value of the place where they live is the main point of contact between the Lake Como and Karachi programmes. The surprising thing is that the Italian students spontaneously undertook the same activities described in relation to the Pakistani initiative. Both felt the need to map the territory; they conducted their explorations independently, despite having received specialised guidance in relation to the contents; and they sought out direct sources of knowledge, identifying privileged informants to interview.

10.4.1 Grand Tour 2.0 of Tremezzina (Como): An Italian initiative

Target

The participants were 16 youths under the age of 18 years attending two secondary schools with three different curricula. Four students were from the Leonardo da Vinci Technical Institute in Carate Brianza who were assigned the task of producing the videos; three students took the languages curriculum at Liceo Teresa Ciceri, an academic-track secondary school; and the remainder were enrolled on the human sciences curriculum at the Liceo (Ciceri (Fig.10.3).

Objectives

The key objectives of this action project were getting the students to:

- a) enter into an equal dialogue with the cultural heritage sites in their local area;
- b) prepare for their future occupations by learning about the problems affecting the appreciation of cultural heritage;
- c) experiment with and learn the workings of developing instruments for interpreting cultural heritage, especially landscapes;
- d) engage in group work and learn to complete tasks to deadline;
- e) produce materials for presenting their work placement activities to the public;
- f) speak in public, clearly communicating their experience;

- g) organise and lead guided visits;
- h) reflect on the museum's current contents and suggest potential new contents;
- i) learn how to design and conduct an interview;
- j) begin to engage with autobiographic and ethnographic methods of heritage research;
- k) find out how to disseminate the new products that emerged from the work placement activities.

Themes and planning

Following a proposed method that was loosely informed by Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", especially in terms of problematising learning contents and offering opportunities for equal dialogue in educational action, the students divided themselves into four groups with a view to researching four themes they chose by themselves, albeit with supervision:

- a) the landscape as seen by children;
- b) the landscape as seen by locals;
- c) the landscape as seen by newcomers to the area;
- d) the landscape during the Festival of San Giovanni fireworks display.

Each group identified four tasks to be carried out, in keeping with the theoretical input received during an earlier phase of the work placement: shooting a video, communication, interview, and "backstage" coordination.

The products

- Journals, whose completion facilitated the inquiry process and helped the students to develop their self-narrative abilities.

- Metacognitive sheets, a cooperative learning tool that gave the students the opportunity to actively participate in the educational process by observing its strengths and weaknesses. More specifically, the participants were invited to express themselves using their preferred language, in that they could choose between drawing and responding in writing or orally to a set of questions designed ad hoc to invite the problematisation of the educational activities and elicit active suggestions for their improvement.

- Video-recorded interviews, kits, and materials underpinning an informal educational activity designed by Group a). Interestingly, the development of these products was informed by inputs received during the preliminary training phase of the work placement. The students used them as the basis for interviews they conducted with 4-to-7-year-old children attending a summer camp.

- Photographs, narrative accounts, sounds, and images collected by Group b), who even succeeded in recruiting the input of musician and storyteller Davide Van De Sfroos. We do not single out this informant on account of his celebrity status, but rather due to the large volume of material that he voluntarily and skilfully shared with the students.

- Posters designed by Group d) targeting the public attending the San Giovanni Festival fireworks display.

- Photos documenting the behind-the-scenes activities.
- A project logo designed and produced by the students, initially used as the Instagram profile picture.
- A poster advertising the final event, again designed and produced by the students themselves.



Fig.10.3 Youths exploring, interviewing, researching. They are using their preferred tools (drawings, video, photo storytelling), learned during the project, to interpret their heritage (source: Alessandra De Nicola, 2019)

The key outcome of the work placement was not so much the materials produced, which indeed were sometimes naive and unpolished, but rather the value of an educational process that elicited serious and mindful engagement from 90% of the students (only three of the sixteen participants displayed a low level of commitment to the project). The weak point of the project was the fact that it was conducted during the summer break. While the students proved themselves to be highly committed by willingly giving up portions of their holiday time to work on the project on the one hand, greater continuity would have been obtained by implementing the project during the school year on the other hand. Another issue being examined by the researchers is how best to assess educational experiences, from the perspective of the participating schools, that take place in extra-curricular settings.

The project’s strong points include the fruitful encounter between different subject areas and fields of knowledge, thanks to the fact that the participants were studying a diverse range of curricula. For the first time, these students had the opportunity to grasp the value of their own course of studies, based on exchanges with peers. They all undoubtedly had the chance to engage with their own landscape in a personal and authentic manner, which they tended not to perceive as a cultural heritage asset – previously only being aware of the generic need to take care of the environment. They came to understand the value and enormous potential of the landscape museum, which had been unknown to them. Based on these outcomes, they were assigned the further task of engaging in and sharing their discoveries with other audiences, an exercise the students variously defined as “interesting”, frustrating, or even transformational.

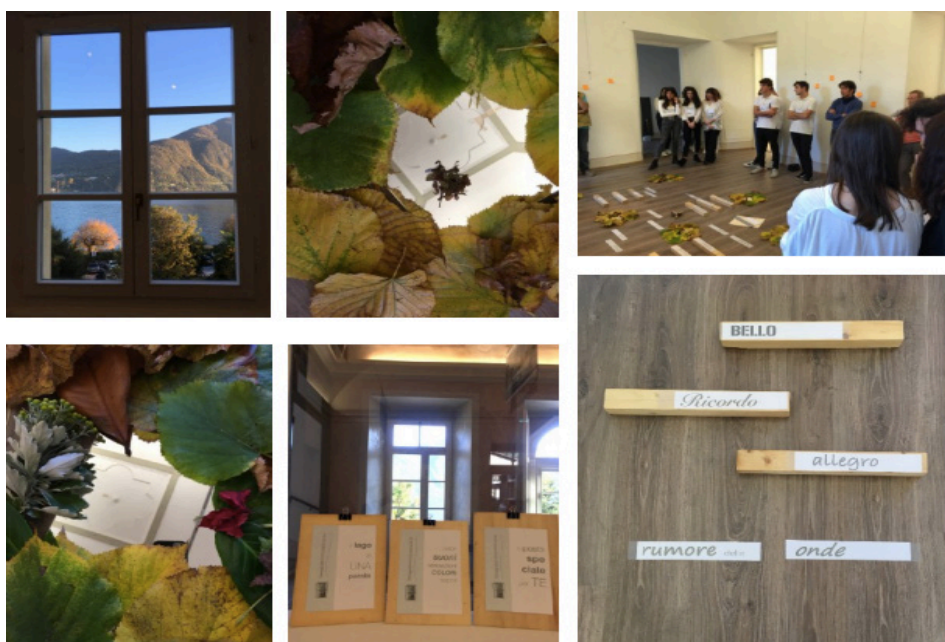


Fig.10.4 Some installations designed by teenagers to tell the story of their landscape in the Lake Como Landscape Museum (source: P. Berera, 2019)

10.5 Conclusions

The two case studies we have briefly presented here feature very different geographical areas, cultures and landscapes. Yet they also share a similar need, initially identified in the fields of art and culture, to help communities find, or rediscover the identifying marks of the places where they live, by developing their capacity to produce narratives about them themselves. The reported initiatives also show that heritage education can be based on the exploration of places. Both case studies offered educational experiences with a major sensory component, albeit via different formats. In both countries, the entire process was underpinned by dynamic observation, in extra-curricular settings, based on drawing. Let us consider the argument - advanced by South African artist William Kentridge (2014) in the first of his “Six Drawing Lessons”- that “seeing is the metaphor through which we comprehend the world” to put this approach into context.

Kentridge understands the act of seeing to be the involuntary suspension of incredulosity. He clarifies this concept further by placing scraps of black paper on a white sheet and then to declare that it is impossible not to see a horse in them. A similar phenomenon affects the cultural heritage sites which we have discussed in this chapter. When we report that we can see traces of how they were in the past, this is an insight into “we did not know we knew”. “We can recognise it without knowing it” (Kentridge, 2014, p. 20). According to Kentridge, seeing contains in itself the need to know, or to find meaning, and throughout this process of inquiry, drawing and narrative can become the “membrane through which we enter into contact with the world. [...] The sheet of paper is simply a visible extension of the retina, an emblematic demonstration of that which we know but cannot see. Our projection, our moving out toward the image, is an essential part of what it is to see, to be in the world with our eyes open” (Kentridge, 2014, p. 22). From this perspective we might say that drawing is a means of systematising primordial knowledge.



Fig.10.5 Young people learn what is their own landscape through the education of the eye, then through drawing. They walked around to explore and understand their heritage. Left: Karachi Chowk (PCCC, 2019). Right: Tremezzina (Como) Garden (source: Alessandra De Nicola, 2019)

“Only by seeing and seeing in abundance is it possible to develop refined taste and precise knowledge of the ways in which art may be applied to a given industry; memory initially and imagination later will be the richer for it and, together with imagination, our innate originality will come to light little by little”. These are the words of the architect and restorer Camillo Boito addressed to student architects and engineers in relation to the importance of seeing (in Selvafolta, 1998, p. 65).

However, in more recent times the role of the gaze and its intellectual function has shifted to accommodate a more physical dimension. As we move beyond postmodernism, the body is gaining prominence and its newfound importance is beginning to be reflected in educational approaches to cultural heritage, as well as in certain participatory practices. Hence the proliferation of opportunities for exploration and walking as a cultural practice, because “walking is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord.” (Solnit, p. 10). This new harmony means that lived space is acquiring new prominence vis-à-vis the mathematical space of maps. In the words of Gilles Tiberghien “walking has always generated architecture and landscape and this practice, all but totally forgotten by architects themselves, has been reactivated by poets, philosophers and artists, capable of seeing precisely what is not there, in order to make something be there” (Careri, 2006, p. VIII). As Kentridge teaches us in his fourth

lesson on drawing, “walking is the prehistory of drawing” (ibid., p. 104).

Besides similar projects of learning by seeing, walking, talking the Pakistan Chowk Community Centre initiatives aimed also at a more structural approach to heritage advocacy. This is due to their awareness of the struggles of South Asian developing cities with preserving and valorising their rich heritage hampered by their fractured infrastructure. Here civil society intervention and local activism become a crucial part of heritage infrastructure preservation. The case studies engaged in working closely with the community when learning about the old town and its by now intangible heritage to incorporate this experience into grass root level change to develop and preserve and bring the past back as part of today’s conversation. This is an important intervention for the next generation. Research can shape the future of historic landscapes in cities by addressing the root causes of mismanagement that fail to preserve and protect the historic urban landscape and help emerging cities from further loss of their historic built environment. (Krishna, 2014). This is where research and citizen movement can act together and bring change through research and constant advocacy towards preservation.

All these new ways of resorting to seeing, sensing, drawing, narrating and walking to generate meaning have inspired the strategy shared by the Pakistani and Italian case studies, which drew on an artistic and therefore sensory approach, as a means of filling a “terrain vague”⁵ with meaning. In response to the social need to be able to attribute meaning to local heritage assets, the creators of both projects sought to eliminate knowledge-related barriers to accessing heritage. In places that seemed empty because they had been emptied of meaning, they found ways of engaging the community to replenishing them with meaning. The aim in both countries was to raise awareness and support the community, so that its members would be empowered to become activists - that is to say, active subjects, sovereign citizens, and custodians of their own heritage. This goal was pursued via the practices of walking and drawing.

5 On this topic, see Ignasi de Solà-Morales, 1995, *Urbanité Intersticielle*, *Inter Issue* 61, Hiver 1995, p. 27–28

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Judith Ryser

jryser@dircon.co.uk

Qualified architect and urbanist with a social sciences MSc, Judith's cosmopolitan professional life in London, Paris, Berlin, Geneva (United Nations), Stockholm and Madrid is focusing on built environment sustainability and researching, reviewing, writing on cities in the knowledge society. She is a life member of ISOCARP (International Society of City and Regional Planners), ex-Vice President, General Rapporteur of the 50th anniversary congress 2015, editor and writer of several publications (e.g. "ISOCARP, 50 Years of Knowledge Creation and Sharing"; with Teresa Franchini 5th & 6th editions of the International Manual of Planning Practice) and member of the Chartered Institute of Journalist. She is senior advisor to Fundacion Metropoli, author and editor of many books and participant in urban projects; senior adviser, book co-editor and co-reviewer of Silk Cities; co-editor and coordinator of CORP (International Conference on Urban Planning and Regional Development in the Information Society); editorial board member, reviewer and topic editor of the Urban Design Group and has written and edited numerous books and articles. She taught at University College London and other universities, is on various scientific committees and mentoring mature students and young planners.

Fatemeh Farnaz Arefian

farefian@silkcities.org

Farnaz is an experienced interdisciplinary expert in disaster management and reconstruction, urban design and planning, and architecture. Her professional life combines extensive experience in academic research and education with practice-based experience, knowledge exchange and engagement in the Middle East, UK, and Southeast Asia. Farnaz is the founding director of Silk Cities initiative, concerning urban challenges in countries along the historic Silk Roads with a focus on the Middle East and Central Asia (silk-cities.org). She has delivered largescale urban development and architectural projects, including various post-earthquake reconstruction projects in the historic city of Bam, e.g. participatory housing reconstruction and post-disaster urban design projects. Those first-hand encounter with urban development challenges and disasters, in the context of historic cities motivated her to return to academia and pursue her multi-disciplinary Ph.D. research and further academic activities at the Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU), University College London (UCL), where she is also associated with. Her post-disaster reconstruction experience was featured in a guidance for humanitarian organisations. Farnaz is an invited speaker for international conferences and workshops. She published papers and books, including Persian Paradises at Peril (2021), Urban Heritage Along the Silk Roads (2019), Organising Post-Disaster Reconstruction Processes (2018), and Urban Change in Iran (2016).

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Post-disaster reconstruction, disaster management, risk reduction and urban resilience form important themes of Silk Cities activities as the initial geographic focus of Silk Cities is the Middle East and Central Asia which during recent decades have suffered a variety of destructive incidents, ranging from natural hazards to conflicts and wars...

-Preface, IV



Silk Cities is an independent professional and academic initiative for knowledge exchange, research, engagement and raising awareness on under-explored contextual and global challenges and opportunities. Its initial geographic focus was on those countries along the Silk Roads in the Middle East and Central Asia. This region is the home of long lasting urbanism and civilisations, therefore enjoys rich tangible and intangible heritage built over millenniums and centuries of history. However, the region also suffers from contextual and global challenges affecting societies and cities. Additionally, it has suffered from a variety of destructive incidents especially in recent decades, ranging from natural hazards to human induced origins, from earthquakes to wars.

Fostering international dialogue and knowledge sharing, the geographic coverage of Silk Cities reaches out further to other cities, regions and countries which are prone to similar issues and global challenges.