



Topic:

How can culture change the world's tempo?

A perspective of the role of the living heritage

Introduction

The dignitaries, sponsors, organizers and delegates of the 6th edition of the culture Summit Abu Dhabi, I bring you greetings from Africa and the global network of culture sector fraternity in the framework of UNESCO ICH Convention.

By the theme of this summit, we are persuaded to reflect on what this tempo is and it needs to be changed from what to what? Why does it need to be changed and what is the power, role and capacity of living heritage and culture in general to effect this change?

Time is the measured and measurable period during which an action, process or condition exists or continues.

Living heritage manifests itself in oral traditions, performing art, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe as well as skills to produce and use crafts.

The relationship between time and the peoples' living heritage

Transmission and practice of living heritage in itself is an expression of time. It is how people organize and co-create themselves along the rhythm of their natural being. Time therefore is both a natural and social construct and that harmonious point where culture and nature meet. The transmission and practice of living heritage guarantees that harmony, continuity and stability between people and the ecosystem.

The transmission and celebration of living heritage must match in harmony with the natural rhythm of time.

"Time is both a natural and social construct and that harmonious point where nature and culture meet"

Transmission and practice of living heritage guarantees harmony along the continuum of the past, present and future.

Transmission of living heritage is a string of connectedness that guarantees harmonious and balanced continuity from the past to the present and future. Practicing heritage is indeed a celebration of the legacy of the past but with inbuilt principles of adaptation and integration, the past doesn't dictate neither impose itself on the present. It is a practice of ensuring interconnectedness of the past, present and the future.

In practicing living heritage, the past provide foundation, meaning, justification and inspiration to the present as well as reclaim ancient skills, values and resources to bear on the needs of the present and the future. For instance, in all rituals, practices and expressions, originality and authenticity are emphasized and ancestry is enacted in the present.

"Practicing heritage is indeed a celebration of the past legacy but with inbuilt principles of adaptation and integration, the past does not dictate neither impose itself on the present nor the future"

Practicing of living heritage is adapted to immediate rhythm of time

While the current mechanical human activities are artificially allocated time, living heritage practices are naturally aligned to the natural rhythm of time. They are practices observed in morning, afternoon or night and those observed daily, weekly, monthly, annually or after a couple of years and have to be as such. For instance, among the Batooro of Western Uganda, if annual royal rituals are not performed, that omission signifies collapse of the kingdom with associated mental, spiritual and social breakdown among subjects who also believe that natural calamities like floods, storms, drought and earthquakes must follow as resultant reactions from nature.

Critical transmission and practice of living heritage take place along time stages of a person and hence birth, initiation, marriage and death associated ceremonies as epicenters of manifestation of living heritage.

Specific practices are aligned to specific natural seasons of the year and time stages of human activity and economic production, hence they are planting, harvesting and achievement celebrations as epicenters of manifestation of living heritage.

"Celebration of living heritage guarantees harmony, stability, balance and vitality in people and the ecosystem".

Emergency of mechanized time and its adverse effects

Through the process of industrialization, people created multiplicity of actions, processes and conditions against fixed time periods which must then be sub divided and allocated artificially. Mechanical time was created which is associated with high velocity and acceleration in the worlds' tempo. The excessive desire for people to increasingly become products of themselves than rhyming with nature has increasingly undermined the necessary equilibrium.

The result has been increasing hostility between humans and their natural environment. Nature shifting from being a companion of human beings to victim of human action which provokes violent forms of protest from nature where human beings in turn equally become victims.

The mechanisms of transmitting and practicing living heritage which were aligned to the natural rhythm were weakened by the mechanical time, creating omission, generation gap and distortion in the living heritage. The role of living heritage to ensure stability, harmony, creativity and balance in society was weakened leading to conflicts, loss of critical thinking and ill health in people and ecosystem.

An opportunity to re-think

The COVID - 19 pandemic of 2019 - 2021 imposed on all human beings of our time, unprecedented universal pause (*stop where you are!*) creating an opportunity to re-think our relationship with time.

"From the current mechanical time, we must emerge a balanced notion of time which is re-aligned to the rhythm of human awareness and nature".

"Innovations which do not build from the known, create a hanging leap than progress".

2003 UNESCO Convention; An opportunity for collective policy and global cooperation for safeguarding living heritage

The convention for safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, now 20 years in force and ratified by 181 states is a strong policy reference and institutional framework for safeguarding living heritage. It creates opportunity for global cooperation on policy and action. As a safeguarding tool, it supports communities to rebuild the transmission and coping mechanisms which are weakened in the contexts of industrial area and mechanical time. In the last 20 years, the focus has grown from merely strengthening safeguarding to adapting living heritage to solving emerging problems like climate change, conflicts and natural disasters among others.

Lessons from indigenous people

Indigenous people from all over the world stand out as the most resilient and resistant custodians and practitioners of living heritage. Despite vicious aggression from the industrial thought that include forced assimilation into the dominant labor class, destruction of material heritage and industrial displacement, they remain a reference for resilience of living heritage.

"The life experience of indigenous people cautions us against 'running to nowhere' in the name of quick transformation and quick profits".

They do not only resist blind transformation of their territories, but also the notion of the mechanical time imposed on them. They resist to be controlled by that time measured on a machine called a clock and prefer the time as *"when things happen"*. In the traditional thought of African Communities for instance, it is inappropriate to make human beings subjects or slaves of erithematics. The essence of a human being is superior than erithematics. So one would not say for instance, ***"I have three children"*** instead *"my children are John, Mary and Peter"*

While the thinking of indigenous people is dismissed as retrogressive conservatism to allow mechanical time as a form of human progress, currently we have to retreat and borrow a leaf as we struggle to build resilience in the crisis of climate change which is essentially a result of unsustainable practices and unbalanced velocity inspired by mechanical time. We have to consult indigenous people in effort to reclaim and revitalize the living heritage, restoring peaceful co-existence with nature and balancing ecosystem and also seek their intercession to reduce the wrath from the protests of nature.

The artisan economy; A model case study in demonstrating balanced notion of time and harmonious human progress

A well-developed artisan heritage demonstrates evolutionary process of skills, materials, tools and designs, building on the ancient as you adapt to the changing circumstances. There is balance and harmony connecting the past, present and future. The ancient skills and designs are brought to bear on the current and future needs and problems to the extent they can, instead of being completely ignored and forgotten. Connections across the past, present and future are emphasized.

The artisan economy; A model case study in demonstrating balanced notion of time and harmonious human progress (Continuation)

Consequently, it is amazing to note the growing spiritual and social connectedness of people to handmade products as compared to the counterpart products from mechanical industries. Beyond a practical purpose, handmade products serve social and spiritual purposes. They enhance intra and inter-people harmony and that is, one being at peace with one self and at peace with other people, communities, nations and the ecosystem. Handmade products demonstrate direct and natural human touch and their process of production do not launch any attack on human beings neither the environment through exploitation of labor and materials and processes which generate poisonous emissions. This is why in people's consciousness, handmade products are symbols of peace and harmonious co-existence.

Conclusion

On the whole, living heritage is an expression of peoples' consciousness and continuous co-creation in their natural rhythm and hence in itself is a matter of time. The transmission and practice of the living heritage guarantees harmonious and balanced human progress and continuity and is a string of connectedness along the past, the present and the future.

Contemporary people need to address the unbalanced velocity and acceleration born of the over ambitious industrial mind and causing increasing loss of critical thinking and polarity in the ecosystem with its associated adverse effects.

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