

The Cottbus Declaration on Heritage Studies: The Need for a Holistic Understanding of Heritage

The *Cottbus Declaration on Heritage Studies* was passed by the participants of the “International Summer Academy: Constructing Heritage in the Light of Sustainable Development” from July 9 to July 21, 2012. The International Summer Academy was the contribution of the International Graduate School: Heritage Studies at Cottbus University to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The participants included diplomats, UNESCO experts, research chairs and young researchers on the topic of heritage.

The Cottbus Declaration on Heritage Studies strives to contribute to raising awareness for heritage as a key factor in sustainable human development and to express a broad international consensus for the need for research on heritage transformation processes under the condition of globalisation. Research is the proper domain of universities and the Cottbus Declaration on Heritage Studies therefore stresses the importance of the universities’ contribution.

Since 2010, the International Graduate School: Heritage Studies at Cottbus University has furthered the commitment of Brandenburg University of Technology to excellence in practical and theoretical research on heritage. Five consecutive International Summer Academies in the framework of the International Graduate School: Heritage Studies at Cottbus University are intended to develop a comprehensive understanding of heritage and to foster and deepen the academic discussion on current issues in Heritage Studies. The present *Cottbus Declaration on Heritage Studies* is the outcome of the first International Summer Academy.

The Cottbus Declaration on Heritage Studies

Recognising the efforts of UNESCO to raise awareness worldwide regarding the significance of heritage, most notably through the development of international standard-setting instruments such as the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the 1992 UNESCO Memory of the World Programme, the 2001 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the 2003 Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage and the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions,

Acknowledging that at different governmental levels, as well as in academic environments and among civil society, there exist multiple understandings of heritage and diverse means to enable its study, protection and management,

Considering that the processes of globalisation, though enhancing intercultural exchanges, may also trigger irreversible impacts on heritage,

The assembled participants declare:

The introduction of study programmes in Heritage Studies worldwide and a growing number of scientific journals focusing on heritage issues respond to the need of positioning heritage as an inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary nodal point of research. In this regard, Heritage Studies represents a platform that brings different disciplines together and creates links across different fields.

The study of heritage should identify holistically the diverse tangible and intangible aspects of heritage and their interrelationships.

The field of Heritage Studies encompasses diverse disciplines that approach research questions from different angles. In consideration of the increasing complexity of the globalized world, applying different theoretical perspectives and research methods in isolation is no longer adequate. Inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches are essential in order to understand and deal with heritage processes and manifestations.

The contribution of natural, social and technical sciences, as well as humanities and the arts, fosters a holistic vision of heritage within the multi-faceted field of Heritage Studies.

There is an urgent need for dialogue between academic and non-academic stakeholders with regards to the identification and communication of heritage. Universities play a prominent role in the development of practices and material innovations, as well as theoretical approaches, which provide the basis for decision and policy making.

Intercultural dialogue on heritage understanding is key to mutual respect and appreciation of different “heritages” and values through processes of contextualisation and negotiation.

The heritage of humanity has to be understood as a crucial factor in the processes of identity formation and as a fundamental resource for human development. The participation of communities in all heritage processes is essential.

Globalisation, which impacts heritage through processes such as increased migration, urbanisation, commodification, growth of tourism and the acceleration of communications, has to be reflected in a comprehensive approach to Heritage Studies.

The holistic understanding of heritage reflected in the Cottbus approach to Heritage Studies shall contribute to making heritage fruitful in contexts of human development.