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## The many horizons of cultural heritage: Part I

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The government began consulting the public Friday on the proposed amendments for the "Cultural Heritage Protection Law" where four aspects, including the preface, objectives, policy and method, were introduced. The changes aims to protect the values of the Macau historical area, and the government is also aiming to engage the public in heritage protection works.

As such, local architect Mario Duarte Duque, sent the Macau Daily Times his perspective on the "Many Horizons of Cultural Heritage," which will be published in two parts, with the second being published tomorrow.

by Mario Duarte Duque, architect ( [mdduq@mdduq.com](mailto:mdduq@mdduq.com) )

Present day perception of cultural heritage

One explanation that carries weight for heritage artifacts to often shift from their original meaning, relates to the fact that, they end up serving different purposes and targeting mostly people who haven't participated, or aren't even related to the generation of that same heritage.

The percentage of participants directly related, by education or by up bringing, to a specific heritage can only be but too significantly small in a growing universal interest and participation in cultural heritage.

Therefore one can only but accept that heritage is not likely to be perceived in global terms with the same motivations and at the same level of commitment, given that even within the same cultural community this commitment may vary.

However there is the great achievement that, in the global era, we are better prepared to recognize and safeguard value regardless of who generated, directly benefits or administrates that value. This much in the understanding that the counterpart, directly or indirectly, is also to be global, reinforcing in this way cooperation and global solidarity towards human valued accomplishments.

Presently many regard heritage as a resource, which it unquestionably is.

A resource to provide for the enrichment of expertise, a resource to provide for the demand of an evolving life style and a resource to provide for the economic opportunity presented by the demand itself.

In respect to resource management, cultural industries are to be regarded as most sustainable industries because not only are they likely to extinguish their raw material but the final outcome is itself a resource to feed back and enhance the very own original resource.

However, known results are far from living up to these expectations and often not too different from the same misuse that is known to operate upon natural resources, which is: to relinquish a long run sustainable strategy for fast and easy gratification.

Among the many shifting factors at play in heritage, nostalgia is probably the one that most shapes the impulse of gratification.

Humans occasionally tend to deal with displacement issues at rather intimate conditions. Conditions that normally dwell in the mists of Saint Elsewhere's, other times, better lives, and are often orientated to not so objective realities.

Nostalgia became a bad word for a mood that stood in the way of twentieth century futuristic utopianism. Nostalgia was at that time to memory what kitsch was to art- a temptation to relinquish critical thinking for emotional bonding.

A form of history without guilt, much as heritage today is something that suffuses us with pride, seldom with shame.

A guilt-free homecoming with considerable abdication of direct ethical and aesthetic responsibility.

A time that is often configured as a time of childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams and, in a broader sense, configured as a rebellion to the positive idea of time, history and progress.

This is to say, a collective heart frame, very much triggered in the momentum, which psychologically shapes a cultural mood and decides what is there in cultural heritage to recover, and what is there to dispose of. Nostalgia even sets priorities in value to which, in history, as well as in art, the intellectual community is not supposed to condescend.

History and nostalgia are driven by different motivations, value different aspects of the same substance and, therefore, can only bring out different manifestations of the same content.

But the truth is that the progress didn't cure nostalgia, rather acerbated it and it is so strongly imprinted in the mood of this turn of century that we can only but build the suspicion that the positive mind itself may have condescended to nostalgia after all. If only for the nostalgia of the time when people weren't nostalgic.

But memory is never permanent, neither in history nor in nostalgia. In nostalgia we continue to intervene with our contemporary dispositions. In history we continue to intervene with present day outcomes of those memories.

### Operating Culture

The present situation is no longer that we may be neglecting culture for ignoring cultural heritage, since we unquestionably acknowledge and extensively use cultural heritage as a resource. It is rather the misuse of that resource, via imprudent instrumental use, that may jeopardize what is structurally resourceful in heritage.

This for neglecting the resourceful link between wealth and culture, for engineering appeal, for reducing relevance, for exhausting significance, for serving gratification, for not generating any substantial contemporaneity or civilisational meaningful contributions and, most of all, for inspiring appeal but not necessarily commitment.

During the 20th century we experienced culture management in the pursuit of public policies. The reason was not only because most of

the culture offer was not configured in a way that corresponds to the way private initiative operates, but also because, in designated periods of the past century, much of culture management was committed to ideological strategies to shape culture identity, group cohesion and national self-esteem.

By present day, culture management very much follows the global tendency of public goods privatisation such as health, education and urbanization. Culture itself has been released from the expectation of governments in pursuing ideological or political strategies.

This also means way for culture heritage to become a commodity, which is, anything for which there is demand, but which is supplied without qualitative differentiation across a given market.

Regardless how extensively administrations may release public goods to private initiative, it still remains public administrations exclusive obligation to assure public goods reach their beneficiaries in adequate terms. The favourable result in the transference of these obligations can only emerge if this is to mean that the public role is to be less centered in the performance of these tasks and more committed in setting guide lines within which entrepreneurs are to perform. This is to reserve the capacity to evaluate results and to correct guide lines, whenever resources may be at risk or qualified results in the present are not being accomplished or expected in the long term.

In this framework, individual reassurance and criteria is also essential so that consumer behaviour may at the same time relevantly and sustainably shape the cultural offer, within a desirable context of freedom and choice.

The same kind of reassurance as in the known slogan in campaigns for real beauty for the sake of self-esteem, "Talk to your children before the beauty industry does", could eventually be also of use for public administrations to talk to their communities before the culture and tourism Industries do, also for the sake of community self-esteem.

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