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Differences Between Conventional and Value-Led Approaches in Heritage Management and Their Effectiveness in Contemporary Contexts

Heritage management involves the preservation and stewardship of cultural, historical, and natural sites. Two primary approaches have emerged in the field: the conventional (or traditional) approach and the value-led approach. Both have shaped how heritage sites are conserved, but they differ in philosophy, methodology, and effectiveness in addressing contemporary challenges.

Conventional Approach

The conventional approach to heritage management is often characterized by a focus on the physical and historical authenticity of a site. Rooted in the principles outlined by organizations like UNESCO and the Venice Charter (1964), this method emphasizes expert-driven decisions and technical preservation of original materials and forms (Jokilehto, 2006). Under this model, the primary goal is to maintain the site's historical integrity, often prioritizing architectural authenticity over other considerations. For example, the restoration of the Parthenon in Athens followed strict guidelines to maintain its ancient, original fabric, even at the expense of excluding modern interventions or adaptations.

However, the conventional approach has been criticized for being too rigid and for marginalizing the perspectives and values of local communities. It often assumes a universal, expert-defined value, which may not always reflect the diverse significances attached to heritage sites by different stakeholders.

Value-Led Approach

In contrast, the value-led approach, which gained prominence in the late 20th century, places emphasis on the multiple values that different communities and groups associate with a heritage site (Mason, 2002). Rather than focusing solely on material authenticity, the value-led model incorporates social, spiritual, economic, and symbolic values. This approach seeks to engage a broader range of stakeholders, including local communities, in the decision-making process, ensuring that heritage management reflects contemporary societal needs and diverse cultural perspectives.

A prominent example is the management of the Historic Centre of Santa Ana de los Ríos de Cuenca in Ecuador, where local community input influenced the conservation strategies to balance economic development, tourism, and cultural identity. The value-led model is more adaptive and inclusive, allowing heritage management to be responsive to change and more meaningful to a wider audience.

Effectiveness in Contemporary Contexts

In today's globalized and pluralistic society, the value-led approach is generally considered more effective. Contemporary heritage management must address complex challenges, including urban development, tourism pressures, and the need for social inclusion. The value-led model's flexibility and emphasis on stakeholder engagement make it well-suited to mediate between competing interests and to ensure that heritage remains relevant to current and future generations (Waterton & Smith, 2010). While the conventional approach remains important for technical conservation, integrating value-led principles can lead to more sustainable and socially just outcomes.

Conclusion

While both approaches have merit, the value-led approach is more effective in contemporary heritage management due to its inclusivity, adaptability, and recognition of diverse values. It enables heritage sites to thrive as living entities that resonate with people today, rather than as static monuments preserved solely for their historical authenticity.

References

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