

REVIEW

Cultural heritage and the teaching of local history

El patrimonio cultural y la enseñanza de la historia local

Dayanis Corvea Gómez¹

¹Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades. Universidad de Pinar del Río “Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca”. Pinar del Río, Cuba.

Cite as: Corvea Gómez D. Cultural heritage and the teaching of local history. Gentrification. 2024; 2:48. <https://doi.org/10.62486/gen202448>

Submitted: 13-06-2023

Revised: 02-11-2023

Accepted: 24-04-2024

Published: 25-04-2024

Editor: Prof. Estela Hernández-Runque 

ABSTRACT

Historical heritage is part of cultural heritage to the extent that humans have left legacies, inheritances, and testimonies that are inscribed in time as a result of their ongoing relationship with the surrounding environment. Cultural heritage is a specific set of tangible, intangible, and natural assets that are part of social practices, to which values are attributed to be transmitted and then reinterpreted from one era or generation to the next. This is the subject of the following research, which aims to demonstrate how cultural heritage can influence social development. It highlights local history as an important instrument for social development, with knowledge and preservation of our culture playing a fundamental role. The example used is the Viñales Valley, declared a World Heritage Site in 1999, which serves as a successful model of heritage education. Additionally, the study of cultural heritage and its relationship with local history seeks to contribute to the recognition, safeguarding, and social development of heritage. The main results identified show that the relationship between cultural heritage and local history is evident in how cultural heritage works should be used as sources of historical knowledge and can be employed as teaching content in the local history teaching-learning process.

Keywords: Heritage; Cultural Heritage; Historical Heritage; Local History.

RESUMEN

El patrimonio histórico hace parte del patrimonio cultural en la medida que el hombre ha dejado legados, herencias, testimonios que están inscritos en el tiempo como producto de la relación permanente del hombre con el ambiente al cual se ha visto rodeado. El patrimonio cultural es un conjunto determinado de bienes tangibles, intangibles y naturales que forman parte de prácticas sociales, a los que se les atribuyen valores a ser transmitidos, y luego resignificados, de una época a otra, o de una generación a las siguientes. Este es el tema de la siguiente investigación que se ha propuesto como objetivo general demostrar como el patrimonio cultural puede influir en el desarrollo social, donde se destaca a la historia local como un instrumento importante para el desarrollo social, dentro de la misma un papel fundamental lo constituye el conocimiento y preservación de nuestra cultura, para lo cual se toma como ejemplo el Valle de Viñales declarado Patrimonio Mundial en 1999, este constituye un exitoso referente de educación patrimonial. Asimismo, reflexionar como el estudio del patrimonio cultural y su relación con la historia local busca contribuir al reconocimiento y salvaguarda del patrimonio y al desarrollo social. Se identificó como principales resultados que la relación entre el patrimonio cultural y la historia local se evidencia a partir de cómo las obras del patrimonio cultural han de ser utilizadas como fuentes del conocimiento histórico, y por tanto se pueden emplear como contenido de enseñanza en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de la historia local.

Palabras clave: Patrimonio; Patrimonio Cultural; Patrimonio Histórico; Historia Local.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage refers to the set of tangible and intangible assets a society possesses that is considered valuable and significant from a historical, artistic, cultural, or scientific point of view. These assets represent a community or nation's identity and collective memory. They can include historical monuments, archaeological sites, emblematic buildings, works of art, ancient objects, historical documents, oral traditions, music, dances, festivities, gastronomy, and handicrafts, among other elements. These cultural assets are transmitted from generation to generation and contribute to cultural diversity and a society's sense of belonging.

Cultural heritage is important because it can preserve a community's history and roots, strengthen cultural identity, and promote intercultural dialogue. It can also be a source of economic and tourism development, as it attracts visitors and contributes to job creation in culture and tourism.

However, it faces challenges and threats, such as deterioration due to the passage of time, armed conflicts, looting, uncontrolled urbanization, and a lack of awareness of its importance. Therefore, it is essential to promote its protection, conservation, and dissemination through the implementation of appropriate policies and measures, education, and the active participation of the community.

In the first article of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its 17th session held in Paris on November 16, 1972, a classic definition of cultural heritage is outlined: Monuments: architectural works, monumental sculptures, and paintings, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, caves and groups of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science. Sites: groups of buildings, whether isolated or together, which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity, or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art, or science. Places: works of man or joint works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological, or anthropological point of view (Unesco, 1972). As a complement to this treaty, on October 17, 2003, Unesco approved the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which defined that Intangible cultural heritage is understood to be the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, which is transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups by their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history, instilling in them a sense of identity and continuity and thus helping to promote respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (Unesco, 2003).

Issues related to cultural heritage and its potential to promote cultural identity are increasingly relevant. The relationship between local, regional, and national history is vital in Cuba. Greater use of cultural heritage, if we consider all its components, is necessary since, in the first instance, it must be promoted as content for teaching local history and as a source of historical knowledge. Law No. 1, Law for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Cuba of August 4, 1977, establishes in article 1 that its objective is: (...) the determination of the assets that, due to their special relevance about archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, education, art, science and culture in general, make up the Cultural Heritage of the Nation, and to establish suitable means of protecting them (Mincult, 1977).

Martha Arjona (1986) states: (...) We recognize as cultural heritage those assets that are the expression or testimony of human creation or the evolution of nature, and that have a special relationship with archaeology, history, literature, education, art, science and general culture, such as documents and assets related to history, including those of science and technology, as well as to the lives of the forgers of nationality and independence; rare species and specimens of flora and fauna; collections or objects of scientific and technical interest; the products of archaeological excavations; property of artistic interest such as original objects of fine, decorative and applied arts, ethnological or folkloric objects and documents; rare manuscripts, incunabula and other archives, including photographic archives; original and printed musical scores and musical instruments; historic urban centers; buildings or sites that deserve to be preserved for their cultural, historical or social significance; urban and rural folk traditions and geological or physiographic formations of the past or outstanding testimonies of the present, which make up the evidence by which the national culture is identified (Arjona, 1986).

At the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies, UNESCO (1998) raised the need to (...) Renew the traditional definition of heritage, which today has to be understood as all-natural and cultural tangible and intangible elements inherited or recently created. Through these elements, social groups recognize identity and submit to passing it on to future generations in a better and enriched way. (Unesco, 1998). It is evident that the concept is dynamic and broad and encompasses diverse ideas and fields, includes intangible aspects, and does not forget its essential value and how it contributes to the identity of each society. Its integral and multidisciplinary character has been broadened, and new contents and appellatives are introduced to define new forms of heritage, such as natural, documentary, bibliographic, landscape, paleontological, ethnographic, and archaeological (Rubio, 1999).

The Cuban researcher Álvarez de Zayas defines cultural heritage as: “(...) a historical-natural-cultural complex, which is expressed in certain spaces and in which we are involved, both our ancestors and ourselves, through a temporal process, in which we manage to safeguard unique, tangible and intangible examples, which constitute the idiosyncrasy that identifies us as social beings” (Álvarez de Zayas, 2004). The scholar shows a broad definition that brings us closer to the real integral phenomenon, understood in its historical and identity relationship. The evolution of the concept of heritage and its relationship with history until the end of the 19th century was distinguished by the need to preserve the legacy of past generations, based on history as the past and linked to the inheritance that must be passed on from generation to generation. Local history plays a central role in this process. By rescuing and sharing local stories, the social fabric is enriched, collective identity is strengthened, and respect for cultural diversity is fostered. In addition, local history is often closer to people’s daily lives, which makes it more relevant and personal.

Regarding the meaning and significance of local history, it is understood that (...) the local refers to the locality. A locality, from the point of view that interests the research, is considered as a territory, more or less extensive, with a stable, historically constituted population, with a socio-economic and political organization, culturally defined, which forms part of and is subordinated, in some way, to a more significant, superior or more complex structure (...) (Acebo, 1991).

We particularize the relationship between cultural heritage and local history based on how the works of cultural heritage should be used as sources of historical knowledge and, therefore, can be used as teaching content in the teaching-learning process of local history. In this sense, we highlight:

- Monuments, sites, and places, especially those declared national monuments, due to their invaluable historical, cultural, or social value, are closely linked with specific historical events in our country that have a major local impact.
- Intangible cultural heritage.
- Documents, manuscripts, and photographic archives.
- Historic urban centers

Sites declared as World Cultural Heritage, including the Viñales Valley in the province of Pinar del Río. Located in the central and northern part of the province, the municipality of Viñales is bordered on the north by the Caribbean Sea, on the east by the municipality of La Palma, on the south by the municipalities of Consolación del Sur and Pinar del Río and the west by the municipality of Minas de Matahambre. It has a total surface area of 692,90 square kilometers, of which 682,60 are mainland, 10,30 are adjacent cays, and 26 kilometers are coastline.

DEVELOPMENT

History and tradition

Viñales is an enigmatic town with colorful houses, sublime mogotes, and armchairs in all the doorways. Its vernacular tradition distinguishes it: its music, poetry, and song. It is a town of hospitable, good-natured people with honest smiles.

Here you will find the secrets of the oldest region in Cuba, which is why it is considered a living portrait of our history, treasuring valuable evidence of the aboriginal presence and the maroons in caves and palenques, coinciding extraordinary natural, historical, and cultural values and a biological, geological and paleontological wealth, which is why the Viñales Valley was declared a National Monument in March 1979 and in 1999 it was granted the status of World Cultural Landscape, emphasizing an idea of heritage where for the first time anthropic action and nature did not oppose each other but instead joined together as qualifying elements of the exceptionality and universality of the same place.

Visitors to the Garden of Cuba, as Viñales is known, understand that nature can leave bits of magic everywhere. If we talk about the things that distinguish this National Park in Cuba, we must mention three main elements:

The mosaic landscape

The landscape that makes up Viñales cannot be seen anywhere else. Its mogotes are unique, considering that the only other geological formation similar to these, located in Vietnam, emerges from the water instead of rising above the land. In this landscape, plants endemic to these mogotes stand out, such as the saw palm and the beautiful saw palm. Viñales also boasts the cork palm, a National Natural Monument, for having survived from the Jurassic period to the present day.

The capital of the karst

The valley is a feast of possibilities for lovers of caving, nature and adventure tourism, hiking, and bird watching. It has more than three hundred caves, including the second largest in Latin America: the Great

Cavern of Santo Tomás, 46 km long and with a seven-level cave system.

The Viñales Valley is an exceptional example of a cultural landscape where traditional forms of agriculture (mainly tobacco) are inserted into a karst relief characterized by its rare geomorphological expression, paleontological content, and scenic beauty. The tobacco culture of the Valley, which has persisted from the 19th century to the present day, is accompanied by a peculiar vernacular architecture composed of a small village, a rural housing system, and tobacco drying sheds. In the peasant dwellings, the “taburete” (a chair made of wood and cattle leather), the stone filter for drinking water, and the wooden mills for processing grain, among other furniture and household utensils, are still in use. The attachment to the secular ways of growing tobacco has also determined the persistence of traditional means of labor that avoid mechanized methods, such as the yokes of oxen and American or Creole plows with which the land is tilled. Added to this is a vernacular construction infrastructure comprising wooden buildings and guano (palm leaves) for drying the tobacco leaves. The small village that forms part of the site maintains its original layout based on a main street. Its architectural typology is popular, inspired by a late neoclassical style, which is expressed in the continuity of portals and columns and the sloping roofs of clay tiles, features that respond to the climatic conditions of the place and are integrated into the natural environment. In the way of life of its inhabitants, manifestations of Creole culture are preserved, such as peasant songs, typical musical instruments, oral narratives, popular festivals, and utilitarian handicrafts. In short, the authenticity and integrity of the Viñales Valley lie in conserving traditional agricultural methods of cultivation and the associated infrastructure, patterns of land use and tenure, vernacular architecture, traditional habitat, and intangible heritage. The Viñales Valley is legally protected by Resolution 4 of 1979 of the National Monuments Commission. The bodies responsible for its management are, as entities responsible for the preservation, the local government bodies of the province of Pinar del Río, the Technical Office of Monuments and Historic Sites, and the National Council of Cultural Heritage, which has two precise instruments: Law No. 2 on National and Local Monuments and the Management Plan for the site approved by the Municipal and Provincial Administrative Councils.

Cultural Heritage of Humanity in Cuba

Cultural Landscape was inscribed on the World Heritage List on December 1, 1999, during the 23rd Session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, held between November 29 and December 4 in Marrakesh, Morocco.

This site, located in the Sierra de los Órganos, part of the Guaniguanico mountain range in the province of Pinar del Río, the westernmost part of the island, is included in the proposal for a National Park.

The Viñales Valley is one of the best-known and most attractive areas of Cuba, presenting an exceptional scenario characterized by the fusion of its spectacular natural beauty, conservation of the environment, the harmonious action of man, whose traditional methods of cultivation and production achieve universal recognition of the Habano as one of the best quality cigars in the world.

There are also constructions in the valley with Indigenous patterns, such as the so-called tobacco house, the well-known vara en tierra (a kind of hut), and the typical Cuban bohío (a kind of hut), which, when integrated into its natural values, mogotes, relief differences, the contrast between the red of the soil and the green of the crops, make up an exceptional aesthetic and socio-cultural value. All this together forms the basis of the criterion of an evolving cultural landscape where its social activity is evident, linked to a way of life with an evolutionary process and, simultaneously, showing significant material evidence of this evolution over time. There are tourist facilities, roads for touring the area, viewpoints and a national speleological center.

The socio-historical development of the Viñales Valley boasts features and sites characteristic of the culture of the Cuban people (aborigines, enslaved people, peasants) that have shaped it into this exceptional cultural landscape.

Economic and socio-cultural activities began in the 17th century with the rise of livestock farming. The development of agriculture in the Valley is one of the activities that enrich the landscape the most, specifically the rotation of tobacco and fruit crops and their contrast with the reddish soils typical of the territory during the different seasons of the year, which give great color to its visuals. Similarly, the picturesque village of Viñales, absent from the valley since the 17th century, with its low buildings, gabled clay tile roofs, modest proportions, and perfectly integrated into the landscape, contributes to the dialogue between man and nature.

Later, forestry exploitation began with the sowing of minor crops until the introduction of tobacco, which became the main economic activity in the territory until the present day.

Furthermore, the town of Viñales, located in the valley, preserves the traditional setting of a farming settlement, represented by its main street, galleries of columns on either side, and red-tiled houses that favor its climatic conditions, giving it a unique and pleasant appearance.

Among the relevant natural values of the Valley is its wonderful karst elevations, known as mogotes, which define the cultural landscape with very atypical forms only comparable to those located in China and the Malacca peninsula.

The site's cave system includes Palmarito, listed as the largest in the Caribbean and the third largest in Latin

America. Here, different manifestations of cave paintings can be observed.

It is an outstanding example of the ecological and biological processes of terrestrial evolution and development, including waters, coasts, ecosystems, and plant and animal species.

Its flora is classified as having undergone an atypical evolution, mainly varied in terms of species with characteristics of relics of the past; 17 endemic botanical species are not found anywhere else in the world.

The Viñales Valley is a unique place of singular beauty, where the interaction of nature and man over centuries in harmonious harmony delights us with its work. It features unique karst landforms such as the mogotes, geomorphological formations that are extraordinarily remarkable on the planet; the elevations known as Alturas de Pizarras, formed by the oldest rocks in Cuba that delimit the valley, which, together with the valley itself, which is where the agricultural production systems and human settlements are developed, make up the most significant elements that have given rise to this cultural landscape.

The interaction of geology, relief, and climatic changes over millions of years defined its physiognomy of steep slopes, abundant caves, underground rivers, rocky shelters, fertile soils, and various endemic species of flora and fauna.

Therefore, studying cultural heritage and local history involves in-depth research and documentation of a community's cultural, architectural, social, and historical aspects. This compilation of information provides a solid basis for understanding society's identity and evolution over time. It also recognizes cultural diversity and values the plurality of community experiences, traditions, and perspectives. This fosters respect for diversity and promotes social inclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

Cultural heritage is an invaluable treasure that significantly influences social development. Cultural heritage, including local history and the preservation of culture, strengthens a community's identity. It allows people to learn about their roots, traditions, and values, fostering a sense of belonging and social cohesion. It also attracts tourists and visitors interested in a region's history and cultural richness. This boosts the local economy through tourism, creating employment and commercial opportunities. Access to cultural heritage promotes public education and historical awareness. It helps future generations understand their past, learn valuable lessons, and appreciate cultural diversity. Preserving and disseminating cultural heritage can inspire creativity and innovation in the arts, architecture, technology, and other fields.

Studying cultural heritage and local history makes people aware of the importance of preserving and protecting their cultural legacy. Through education and the dissemination of information, awareness of cultural wealth is raised, and the community is involved in heritage conservation. The knowledge generated through the study of cultural heritage enables the development of effective policies and strategies for preserving and safeguarding heritage. Protection, conservation, and sustainable management measures are implemented to guarantee cultural assets' integrity and authenticity.

Ultimately, the study of cultural heritage and its link to local history plays a fundamental role in the recognition, safeguarding, and promotion of cultural heritage and in contributing to sustainable social development. By understanding the importance of our cultural legacy and working towards its preservation, we are building a richer, more inclusive, and vibrant future for generations to come.

In short, cultural heritage, focusing on local history and preserving culture, is a key catalyst for social development by strengthening identity, promoting education, boosting the local economy, and fostering creativity and innovation. A true jewel that we must cherish and protect.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

1. Acebo MW. Apuntes para una metodología de la enseñanza de la historia local en su vinculación con la historia patria. La Habana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación; 1991.
2. Arjona M. Patrimonio Cultural e identidad. La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas; 1986.
3. Ávila-Maldonado LI. El Patrimonio Cultural y la enseñanza de la Historia Local en la formación del estudiante universitario. Revista Electrónico para maestros y profesores. 2016.
4. Educación patrimonial en función del desarrollo social. Revista Estudios del Desarrollo Social: Cuba y América Latina. 2018;6(1):91-110.
5. González Henriquez E, Pacheco Suárez Y, Yáñez Pérez L. Educación patrimonial en función del desarrollo social. Revista Estudios del Desarrollo Social: Cuba y América Latina. 2018;6(1):91-110.
6. Mincult. Ley no. 1 de 4 de agosto de 1977, Ley de los Monumentos Nacionales y Locales Decreto no. 55.

1977. Disponible en: <http://www.cnpe/legisl/decreto55>.

7. Unión de Historiadores de Pinar del Río. Provincia Pinar del Río: Viñales y su historia. Periódico Guerrillero. 2022 Febrero 7.

8. Potter R. Valle de Viñales Patrimonio Cultural de la Humanidad en Cuba. Mi patrimonio. Disponible en: <https://mipatrimonio.wordpress.com>.

9. Rubio AL, Pérez I. ¿Qué distingue a Viñales como Patrimonio de la Humanidad? Cuba Debate. 2017.

10. Rubio DA. El Patrimonio como laberinto y paradoja. PH. Boletín del Instituto Andaluz de Patrimonio Histórico. 1999;25(6):22-33.

11. Sitios patrimoniales Cuba. El Valle de Viñales Patrimonio. Disponible en: <https://sitiospatrimonialescuba.cult.cu>.

12. Unesco. Informe final Conferencia Intergubernamental sobre políticas culturales para el Desarrollo. 1998. Disponible en: <http://www.todopatrimonio.com/politicasculturales>.

13. Unesco. Convención para la Salvaguarda del Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial. 2003. Disponible en: <http://www.todopatrimonio.com/patrimonioinmaterial>.

14. UNESCO. Patrimonio mundial. Disponible en: <https://www.unesco.org>.

FINANCING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORSHIP

Conceptualization: Dayanis Corvea Gómez.

Formal analysis: Dayanis Corvea Gómez.

Research: Dayanis Corvea Gómez.

Writing - original draft: Dayanis Corvea Gómez.

Writing - revision and editing: Dayanis Corvea Gómez.