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HERITAGE AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCT: PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION

Along with the extremely rapid development of the scientific, technological and social systems of society, the 20th and 21st centuries are also definitely characterised by a desire to preserve one's past and present day for future generations. The connection of our current society with heritage is not a simple belief, or an inevitable fact. Heritage is far from a fixed or objectively defined phenomenon, which is reflected in the lists of objects under protection. This is indicated by the fact that, today, the issue of values has become the focus for the treatment of heritage – this is especially remarkable at a time, when the world is faced with an economic crisis, as well as political and cultural instability in many regions, and extensive environmental changes. In this context, heritage can be part of the problem, as well as the solution – it all depends on how we use it. The utilisation of heritage primarily for the creation of national and communal identities, but also for state and transnational ones, inevitably connects it to questions related to politics and power. The management of heritage cannot be an undertaking that is separate from contemporary societal processes. It is unavoidably related to other cultural, economic and political processes in society. However, the practical management of cultural heritage is impacted by the various interpretations and treatments of values.

The objective of this article is to create a conceptual framework for dealing with the definition and management of heritage. Therefore, I

will provide a survey of the approaches to heritage, by dividing it into three groups – heritage as a set of valuable objects; heritage as a part of the environment; and heritage as a socio-cultural construct. In this article, I will focus on heritage based on the last meaning. I will use three dimensions for analysing the functioning of heritage, whereby, I will characterise heritage as a process taking place in society. Based on the analysis of the concept of heritage and the processes for defining heritage, I present some of the fundamental principles for the management of heritage in the article's concluding part. The examples related to the definition of heritage at various levels are based on the context of the Republic of Estonia.

1. THE CONCEPT AND DIMENSIONS OF HERITAGE

People perceive time and, therefore, are connected to the past and the future, as well as the present. It is culture that helps people to transcend time and it is thought that the ability to perceive time is the basis for the development of culture.¹ As the concept of “cultural heritage”² itself indicates, on the one hand, we are dealing with culture and, on the other, with heritage, bequeathing, handing over and cultural transmission. Therefore, cultural heritage is something that is connected to people, culture, the past and the future. In a very broad sense, cultural heritage is everything that is considered to be worthy of preserving in culture and that one wants to leave to subsequent generations.

The concept and meaning of cultural heritage is in the process of developing and changing historically, as are all ideas and concepts used by

1 About the connection between culture and time, see: Michael Tomasello, *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Jüri Allik, Endel Tulving, “Ajas rändamine ja kronesteesia”, *Akadeemia*, 5 (2003), 915–937.

2 In Estonia, the term “cultural value” (cultural property, cultural patrimony, cultural resources) is often used, although this has a narrow field of meaning. The term “cultural value” is more popular among collectors, dealers of cultural heritage, politicians and lawyers, and refers more to ownership relations compared to the term “cultural heritage”. See: Robert Lumley, “The Debate on Heritage Reviewed”, *Issues in Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Gerard Corsane (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 15–27. Also internationally various terms are used for cultural heritage. In Europe, the term “cultural heritage” is preferred; in North America, the preferred term is “cultural resources. Manlio Frigo, “Cultural Property vs. Cultural Heritage: A ‘Battle of Concepts’ in International Law?” *International Review of the Red Cross*, 854 (2004), 367–378. Historically, the term “cultural heritage” was adopted by Henri-Baptiste Grégoire, who published an essay in 1794 about the damaging and destruction of cultural heritage during the French Revolution. Joseph L. Sax, “Heritage Preservation as a Public Duty: The Abbe Gregoire and the Origins of an Idea”, *Michigan Law Review*, 88 (1989), 1143–1144.

people. After all, we are dealing with an ideological and symbolic construct, which is impacted by historical, political and social conditions, in the framework of which, cultural meanings, also including heritage, are created and interpreted.

1.1. APPROACHES TO THE CONCEPT OF HERITAGE

Heritage is defined in different ways, and one can freely say that it is quite a vague and complicated concept.³ The definitions of heritage tend to be either very general or very specific, focusing on a definite type of heritage or on a narrower interpretation of heritage.

Although the term “cultural heritage” did not come into wider use until the 1970s, the objects and phenomena that are defined as cultural heritage today naturally existed before, but other concepts were used to define them. The processes that we define as heritage today are inherently integral parts of all cultures.⁴ The introduction of the new concept also meant that very significant theoretical and practical changes took place in the approach to heritage. Structures, works of art and other outstanding objects did not start to be treated as cultural heritage in the current sense until the late 18th century. The current treatment of heritage did not develop until the 19th century, in Europe – primarily in Germany, Great Britain and France. The modern approach to heritage was very closely linked to the development of nations and nation-states, since heritage played an important role in the consolidation and harmonisation of the identities of states and nationalities.⁵ It could be said that specifying a common cultural heritage formed one of the bases for the development of nation-states.

3 See, for example: Brian Graham, Peter Howard, “Introduction: Heritage and Identity”, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, ed. Brian Graham, Peter Howard (Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 1–15; Graeme Aplin, *Heritage: Identification, Conservation, and Management* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 14.

4 David C. Harvey, “Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: temporality, meaning and the scope of heritage studies”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 4 (2001), 319–338.

5 Jukka Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2002), 16–18; Gabi Dolf-Bonekämper, “The Social and Spatial Frameworks of Heritage: What is New in the Faro Convention?”, *Heritage and Beyond* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2009), 70; Diane Barthel, *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (Newark, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Susan M. Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice* (London: Sage, 1998).

Approaches to heritage can be conceptually divided into three groups:

- heritage as a set of valuable objects;
- heritage as a part of the environment;
- heritage as a socio-cultural construct.

These are not approaches that appear in a temporal sequence, thereby, definitely, excluding each other. Although they do have a certain temporal sequence, today, they are all utilised depending on their context. Which definition of heritage should be preferred also depends on the objective of the approach. There are also many cases in which these definitions are used in combination with each other.

Let's take a closer look at the main approaches to heritage. In the first case, heritage is seen as a set of certain objects. This was, definitely, the first one to be utilised among the various approaches that exist. Initially, heritage was understood to mean structures, works of art and other objects from the past. They were called monuments, antiquities, and memorials. The definition of heritage was based on compiling lists of these objects. If we examine the historical development of this approach to heritage, then we immediately see that a characteristic trait is the constant expansion of the range of objects and phenomena that are included as heritage. This became especially extensive starting in the second half of the 20th century. The approach, which initially included only valuable buildings and works of art, has now become a concept that includes practically all the objects related to people, as well as to the natural environment. With the development of the information society, the digital cultural heritage and its preservation are becoming increasingly important. As of the early 2000s, emphasis started to be placed on the intangible aspects of heritage. The temporal dimension of heritage is also becoming all-encompassing. Heritage no longer needs to originate from the past; it can also include objects or phenomena from the present, which have properties inherent to cultural heritage, or which may potentially acquire them. One has become reconciled to the fact that heritage lacks temporal or meaningful (thematic) boundaries. Without hesitation, one can note that there is not a single object or phenomenon that could not be included in heritage. The main preservation measures in this conceptual framework are legal protection and conservation-restoration.

The other conceptual framework for dealing with heritage focuses on the connections between heritage and the environment. Heritage objects and phenomena are always located in an environment. On the one hand, the environment impacts the heritage objects, and on the other, the heritage objects are an indivisible part of the environment. Depending on the specific heritage, the environment can mean places, territories, landscapes, other objects, as well as the entire living environment more generally, in either the physical or intangible sense. Changes in the environment affect heritage, while heritage provides added value to the environment. The idea to study heritage as a part of the broader environment emerged in the 1970s, and found expression, for instance, in the Council of Europe's 1975 European Charter of the Architectural Heritage and, especially, the Burra Charter. This type of approach was based, to a great extent, on the paradigm changes that occurred in environmental protection, where the protection of individual species was replaced by a focus on the preservation of ecosystems and living environments as a whole. In the heritage field, the introduction of the concepts of landscapes and cultural spaces alludes to this approach. These refer to the physical environment, as well as its mental representations along with values and meanings, instead of the clearly defined archaeological or architectural areas that were used before. Heritage is simultaneously a part of the physical, social and also cultural world. In the context of the same meaning, the concept of heritage landscape was also introduced.⁶ By the mid-1980s, this approach had become predominant in the treatments of heritage. In regard to preservation, this approach is equivalent to preventive preservation and integrated conservation.

The third approach to heritage is related to the cultural and social aspects of heritage. In the second half of the 1990s, increasingly, emphasis started to be placed on the role of heritage in society's functional processes. Heritage is not "objective objects", along with their environment, but one is actually dealing with a socio-cultural construct. This approach to heritage that corresponded to this new concept, started to be called "new heritage".⁷ Just like the past, heritage is also something

6 Bill Boyd, Maria Cotter, Wave O'Connor, Dana Sattler, "Cognitive Ownership of Heritage Places: Social Construction and Cultural Heritage Management", *Australian Archaeology*'95: *Proceedings of the 1995 Australian Archaeological Association Annual Conference*, ed. Sean Ulm, Ian Lilley and Anne Ross (St Lucia: Tempus, 1996), 123–140.

7 Graham Fairclough, "New Heritage Frontiers", *Heritage and Beyond* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2009), 29–41.

people constantly redesign and recreate. This is an approach that stresses the heritage creation process at the given moment in time. Specific objects and phenomena, in which the values inherent to heritage are expressed, are of secondary importance. In this framework, the main focus has clearly shifted from the content or structure of the heritage to heritage as a process. Laurajane Smith states that there actually is no such thing as heritage. She bases her statement on the fact that nothing is intrinsically heritage, but only becomes heritage when we use it in a heritage discourse. The heritage discourse defines how we talk, write and think about heritage.⁸

These approaches are based on the presumption that cultural heritage is not a naturally existing phenomenon, and it is also not universal or eternal. It is a socio-cultural construct, which has developed in certain kinds of societies in a definite time period.⁹ Because of all of this, heritage is always an ideological and symbolic construct that is influenced by historical, political and social contexts.¹⁰ Heritage is an active process, through which people perceive and understand, as well as shape, the world around them. It is important how heritage is defined and managed, and which functions heritage fulfils in society. It becomes apparent that heritage is not uniform, since various societal groups have different approaches to heritage, and heritage can be approached differently, at different levels of society. From the viewpoint of preserving heritage, the concept of managing change comes to the fore.

Observing these approaches to heritage, we can see that there is a consistent movement toward a more encompassing approach. This is characterised by a movement from objects to objects and the environment, and thereafter, to the entire society. The first and second approaches deal with heritage in the ontological plane, as things and objects, even when this approach includes intangible heritage. For things, their physical existence is of primary importance, and therefore, things can also be apportioned in one or another way. Things can be possessed. The socio-cultural approach to heritage stresses the fact that heritage is not a “thing” but cultural practices that participate in

8 Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), 11.

9 Llorenç Prats, “Heritage According to Scale”, *Heritage and Identity: Engagement and Demission in the Contemporary World*, ed. Marta Ancio, Elsa Peralta (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), 76.

10 Flora Kaplan, „Making and Remaking National Identities“, *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 152–169.

the creation and ordering of values and understandings.¹¹ Therefore, heritage can definitely not be reduced to a list of things in the world. Why and for what these things exist is that which is important to people. The socio-cultural approaches to heritage challenge the current cultural hierarchies, as well as focus on the diversity of the values related to heritage, and upon the dependency on the users of heritage. Different people have different ideas about heritage and the values heritage is associated with. There is no single and correct approach to heritage that has been presented by experts and legitimised by the state. Heritage is intertwined with all aspects of culture and society. This, in turn, means that heritage must be taken into account when dealing with all aspects of social life. And this, not only because of heritage itself, but also because of the opportunities and income that it provides.

1.2. THE DIMENSIONS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

It is important to keep three dimensions in mind when dealing with cultural heritage:

- What is treated as heritage (objects and phenomena that could be heritage);
- Who is dealing with heritage (the level of social organisation);
- What are the bases for defining heritage (values).

Below, let us take a closer look at these dimensions.

1.2.1. OBJECTS AND PHENOMENA TREATED AS HERITAGE

The most diverse objects and phenomena can be included in cultural heritage. Heritage is a very wide-ranging concept and can include anything that people consider to be heritage.¹² Heritage depends, to a great degree, on the context. What is included in heritage differs significantly, if we consider different cultures, time periods, or even the different levels of society. Both Estonians and Australian aborigines have cultural

¹¹ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 11.

¹² Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen Publishing Ltd, 1987), 32.

heritage, but these are quite different. For people today, cultural heritage, apparently, means something totally different than it did for people in medieval times. And the official heritage of the Estonian state does not correspond to the heritage approaches of all the people living here.

Naturally, some of the objects – artefacts – produced by people are a part of cultural heritage. However, artefacts comprise only a small part of culture; a larger part of culture is connected to the intangible, or intellectual, aspect. Thus, languages, experiences, behaviour, memory and narratives comprise a significant part of cultural heritage – in other words, everything that is known as intangible cultural heritage. People are also part of cultural heritage. After all, intangible cultural heritage cannot exist without the people that carry it – be they artisans, musicians, actors, witches or the ordinary people living on Kihnu Island.

Cultural heritage also includes nature, just like natural heritage, inevitably, encompasses objects created by people. Differentiating between natural and cultural heritage is very questionable. Natural heritage has been defined as an environment unchanged by people.¹³ However, firstly, it is impossible to find an environment that has not been impacted by people, and secondly, nature, which we treat as a natural heritage, has previously undergone a process of culturization. It has been given a definite meaning, as well as a definite function in culture. Nature itself is a cultural artefact – an environment that has been changed and shaped by people.¹⁴ The objects and phenomena that are considered to be natural heritage are shaped and defined by people in exactly the same way as cultural heritage. Therefore, it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw a line between cultural and natural heritage. Heritage forms a connective link between culture and the environment. Both nature, and the culture that surrounds us today, are based on the past, and are its creative results. In this way, heritage reflects the indivisible connection between nature and culture – a very important concept in today's world. To sum up, it can be said that, although everything is not heritage, there is still much more of it than most people think.

13 See for example: *Understanding Heritage in Practice*, ed. Susie West (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 315.

14 Kurmo Konsa, *Maailm 2.0: Looduse, inimese ja kultuuri tehislikustumine* (Tartu: Kleio, 2009), 101–108.

1.2.2 LEVELS OF SOCIETAL ORGANISATION

Society is organised as levels that encompass each other – starting from the family and ending with the world as a whole. Heritage management is one of the most significant dimensions of the organisation of society, which must definitely be taken into account. For instance, some object or phenomenon may be heritage for a community, but at the state level, may not be considered as heritage. The definition, function and management of heritage differ at various levels of society. Every level of society has its own characteristic heritage discourse, i.e. the way in which heritage is comprehended, spoken about, as well as how heritage is approached in social practices. In addition to the heritage discourse typical to each level, individuals also perceive heritage differently. When dealing with heritage, it is important to define whose heritage is being dealt with, since heritage can only be someone's heritage.¹⁵

When dealing with heritage issues, it is important to differentiate the following societal levels:

- Individual and family
- Community
- Local government
- Nationality / state
- Association of states
- World heritage

Individual and family level. Personal heritage can include family photos, musical recordings, things, souvenirs, the place or house where they were born, landscapes, some important family members, family traditions, and, for instance, family structure and relations. At this level, the evaluation of the heritage and transmission, from generation to generation is the responsibility of every person and family. Generally, the higher levels usually do not intervene directly in the heritage at this level. However, if a building belonging to an individual's personal heritage has been recognised as a monument, i.e. cultural heritage at the state level, the state regulates its management based on the law.

15 Gregory Asworth, John Tunbridge, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester: Wiley, 1996), 21.

Community level. Communities are groups of individuals in permanent mutual relationships. In communities, social roles are fulfilled on the basis of social standards, interests and values, and common goals are aspired to. Especially important are the personal relationships between specific individuals and the other members of the community. Communities can be defined on a geographic, ethnic, cultural, religious, social or economic basis. Examples of communities include schools, universities, churches and religious communities, neighbourhoods, sports clubs, student organisations, various clubs and hobby groups. There are very many different communities. All of them also deal with heritage, to a lesser or greater degree. And such communities themselves already form part of the cultural heritage.

The heritage of such communities is very closely linked to the traditions, customs, rituals and ways of acting inherent to the given group. These groups consider the endurance of their traditions to be extremely important, since, in turn, they form the basis for the preservation of the whole group identity.

The objects that are included among a community's heritage may simultaneously belong to the heritage of the state or local government. In this case, their use by the community is regulated by the governing legislation.

Local government. In Estonia, the units of local government are rural municipalities and cities, which comprise the first level of the public administration system. According to the Estonian Constitution, the local governments make decisions and organise all the issues related to local life, and do so independently, in accordance with the law.

The local governments are responsible for the following areas: education, culture and sports, social welfare, health care, utilities, maintenance of the infrastructure, waste management, planning activities etc. And heritage at the state and local level is also included among their responsibilities. Local governments exercise supervisory control over the monuments located on their territory and are responsible for the fulfilment of heritage conservation requirements.¹⁶ Rural municipalities and city governments can fulfil their responsibilities related to heritage conservation based on an administrative agreement

16 "Heritage Conservation Act" (in Estonian), *Riigi Teataja*, I (2002), 27, 153, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/738898?leiaKehtiv> (accessed 29.6.2013).

concluded between the National Heritage Board and the local government council. Currently, this delegation of responsibilities has occurred in the larger cities (Tallinn, Tartu, Pärnu, Narva and Haapsalu). The local government can define local-level heritage in the form of building environments or natural objects.

Nationality/state. The best known heritage is that of a nationality or state. This was also the first level at which heritage, in the modern sense, started being dealt with. Nationality is an important category when it comes to heritage, since ethnicity is related to cultural differences, and therefore, directly to cultural heritage. The idea of heritage at the state level first emerged with the development of nation-states.¹⁷ Heritage at the state level is very clearly a political idea, and expresses the primacy of public interests over private property. The state defines cultural heritage through legislation and institutions.

Associations of states and regions. The concept of supranational heritage started to develop after World War II. On the one hand, expression is found for the heritage inherent to a group of countries, and, on the other hand, for world heritage.

For instance, the European Union is surely an association of states that very actively deals with cultural heritage. The European Union, as a political, economic and military alliance, needs more to survive than just a uniform bureaucracy, a concept of political goals and common economic interests. In fact, the need for creating a common European culture, history and identity is being spoken about, in which cultural heritage plays an extremely important role. In the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the following is stressed: "The Union shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore."¹⁸ The European cultural heritage reflects the values and standards inherent to European society, and consists of "all forms of cultural heritage in Europe which together constitute a shared source of remembrance, understanding, identity, cohesion and creativity, and the ideals, principles and values, derived from the experience gained through progress and past conflicts,

17 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991); David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (London: Viking, 1996).

18 *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:083:0047:0200:en:PDF> (accessed 16.11.2013).

which foster the development of a peaceful and stable society, founded on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.”¹⁹ In this connection, the common European cultural heritage could be treated as a category of world heritage, and also as a category of nationality or supranational heritage.²⁰

Supranational heritage is also becoming more important when it comes to other countries that are in common cultural and natural regions. The cultural heritage in the Mediterranean is an example of this type of regional cooperation.²¹

World heritage. This is a global heritage that encompasses the entire world, and is characteristic of humankind, as a whole. The basis for world heritage is the idea of cultural heritage that crosses all ethnic, state and local boundaries and characterises humankind as a whole. The idea of world heritage is related to the activities of UNESCO, and especially to the UNESCO World Heritage programme. The UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage was passed in 1972. This confirmed the existence of international heritage and created a system for defining it. The concept of world heritage is based on a broad anthropological approach to culture and on the recognition of common and universal values.

1.2.3. VALUES

The third dimension that helps us deal with heritage more lucidly is values. The concept of values is inseparably associated with heritage, since the way that heritage develops is that people choose only some of the infinite quantity of objects and phenomena to be treated as heritage. The choice is always based on the values that are attributed to these objects and phenomena.

The question of heritage values can be approached in two fundamentally different ways. Firstly, one may recognise that heritage has a unique and true intrinsic value, which these objects and phenomena possess,

19 Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (2005), <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/199.htm> (accessed 29.6.2013).

20 Roel During, “European Heritage Discourses, a Matter of Identity Construction?”, *Cultural Heritage and Identity Politics*, ed. by Roel During (Silk Road Research Foundation, 2011), 17–18, <http://slkrd.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/978-94-6173-076-3-cultural-e1.pdf> (accessed 29.6.2013).

21 Report on the preservation and enhancement of cultural heritage in the Mediterranean, <http://cor.europa.eu/en/activities/arlem/Documents/report-on-cultural-heritage/EN.pdf> (accessed 29.6.2013).

due only to their existence. This approach dates back to the time when the modern approach to heritage developed in the 19th century, when heritage embodied the true intrinsic nature of the given nationality. Self-worth, or intrinsic value, is a value that the object or phenomenon possesses only because it exists. According to the second approach, the values are attributed by the people themselves and are therefore dependent upon a definite historical context. We prefer the second approach, and this, primarily, based on the needs of heritage management.

Today, values have become a central theme of heritage. The reason is that there is nothing in the objects or phenomena themselves that would help us define them as heritage. Actually, their significance lies in the values and meanings that people attribute to them. Objects or phenomena are considered to be heritage only when they have acquired certain values. These may be historical, scientific, aesthetic, artistic, social or some other values. It is values that change objects and phenomena into heritage. Only people can assign values to objects and phenomena. Therefore, heritage reflects the values that predominate at certain levels of society at some point in time. One and the same object can carry various values, depending on the moment when the values are assigned, and which values are considered to be important.

In this sense, values are conditional – they are not objective like the weight, colour or chemical composition of an item. We cannot find or fix them or hope that they will remain unchanged in the future. Values appear as the result of the interaction between the object, the context and people. This means that the values can be dealt with only in a definite context, which is comprised of who, when and where they have been defined.²² However, values are not totally autonomous of objects – a building is old and related to history, therefore it has historical value. But the definition of this value takes place “outside of” the object – it is assigned by society and people. Values are socially constructed and change constantly based on the changes in society. Some values persist in new situations; some are redefined; and new values also appear.

The values and meanings of objects depend on the interpreters. We must apparently reconcile ourselves to Eric Wainwright’s realisation

22 William Lipe, “Value and Meaning in Cultural Resources”, *Approaches to the Archaeological Heritage*, ed. Henry Cleere (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2.

that an object is valuable when someone thinks it is.²³ Value systems also differ, starting with individuals, and ending with entire humankind. Value systems are based on time, and therefore, are always changing. Values are constantly being redefined in culture; some values become more important, while others become less significant.

Thanks to the values that are associated with heritage and the impact of these values on society, heritage is always discordant, disputable and constantly changing. Several other heritage discourses exist alongside the official state discourse. A constant competition occurs between these heritage discourses for the dominant position.²⁴ Since heritage is associated with various values, the ways of using heritage and the meanings associated with heritage can be different and even contradictory.

In culture, there are very different values and meanings that can be attributed to heritage. Making the choice among them depends on the particular social and political system. Choices can be made by those who have sufficient power. The meanings and values that are chosen legitimize and confirm the established system.

At all levels of society, heritage is directly related to power. For various reasons, certain individuals, groups, communities, peoples and states always have more opportunities than others for establishing values and meanings typical of them. Therefore, heritage is related to power and politics already by its nature.

1.3. HERITAGE PROCESS

The people and societies that exist today are not passive recipients, keepers and transmitters of heritage, but rather, active creators and shapers of their heritage. Therefore, heritage is always based on the wishes of people and the needs of society in the present day.²⁵

Heritage is something that people produce, and therefore it is better to treat it as the heritage process.²⁶ It is a cultural process that is

23 Eric Wainwright, *Culture and Cultural Memory: Challenges of an Electronic Era*, Conference paper at 2nd National Preservation Office Conference: Multimedia Preservation – Capturing the Rainbow, in Brisbane, 28–30 November 1995, <http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/nlasp/article/viewArticle/953/1228> (accessed 29.6.2013).

24 Elsa Peralta, “Public Silences, Private Voices: Memory Games in a Maritime Heritage Complex”, *Heritage and Identity*, 114–115.

25 Brian Graham, Greg Ashworth, John Tunbridge, *A Geography of Heritage, Power, Culture and Economy* (London: Arnold, 2000), 2.

26 Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 44–45.

differentiated from other cultural processes by a specific connection to the past and memory. Therefore, heritage can be treated as the objective-based use of the past in the present. By emphasising the creation aspect of heritage, instead of the preservation aspect, the focus is placed on current activities, by clearly advancing the fact that heritage is not only created in the past, but that our current generation is also creating heritage.²⁷

The heritage process could be imagined as follows. Objects always have values. When heritage is defined, the objects that already possess suitable value are examined, and the corresponding values are also assigned to objects. The objects that are chosen as heritage do not need to have specific qualities or traits, but very often, they differ from other objects in some sense. Be it their age, material, frequency or other so-called physical trait. In the case of most heritage objects, their becoming heritage is not based, in any way, on their characteristic physical traits. The heritage process could be imagined as follows (fig 1).



Fig. 1. Heritage process

The definition of heritage is comprised of the reciprocal impact between objects and people through a prism of values. In the course of this process, the corresponding heritage discourse develops. In other words, the way that heritage is talked about and how it is understood eventually falls into place. The heritage discourse determines which objects are included in heritage; the values that these objects express; and the ways for interpreting and presenting these objects. There are many heritage discourses; they are consensual, hierarchical, partly overlapping and constantly changing. They justify definite practices and ways of dealing with heritage. The heritage objects and phenomena actually exist, but they lack values and meanings outside of the discourse. In this sense, by nature they do not differ from all other objects and phenomena. What is

²⁷ See for example: Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995).

specific to heritage is the heritage discourse through which the values and meanings are attributed to the objects and phenomena.

The process of defining and managing heritage itself confirms the idea of heritage and makes heritage important for society. In this sense, heritage is a self-indicative phenomenon.²⁸ The practice of heritage includes all the ways of dealing with heritage, which find expression in the corresponding procedures, techniques and guidelines. This also includes the activities that are related to interpreting and giving meaning to heritage. The practice of heritage is defined by the heritage discourse. On the one hand, heritage discourses form the bases for the corresponding practices; however, on the other hand, they reflect these practices.

Laurajane Smith calls the hegemonic heritage that predominates at the state level “authorised heritage discourse”. This is a discourse that is institutionalised by various cultural agencies and state institutions and which is based on the knowledge of scientists and experts. Since the beginning of its development, heritage discourse at the state level has been based on the idea of nationalities and nation-states, and on a scientific worldview.

The creation of heritage is always a process of selection. Certain cultural phenomena from the past and present are selected and interpreted. Some are cast aside and some are ignored from this aspect. Therefore, it can be said that heritage is always political. Choices are always made and these choices are made in someone’s interests. Someone has the power to choose the ideas, values and knowledge that is expressed in the heritage discourse and narratives.²⁹ Societal power relationships are also not fundamental, but are developed through social and cultural meanings, and they are created within the framework of a specific discourse.

Since heritage is created in the given moment in time, the current situation and needs are considered in the defining process. Heritage is created in order to justify a specific interpretation of its time as well as a perspective of the future. Specific objectives are kept in mind – either consciously or subconsciously – when defining heritage.

Naturally, the relevant, actual past, or the events that have taken place before this moment in time, has existed. The events that have taken place in the past are reflected to a certain degree in the docu-

28 Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 3–4.

29 Marta Anico, “Representing Identities at Local Municipal Museums”, *Heritage and Identity*, 67.

ments, objects and natural environment that have survived. Only a small part of the past events reflected therein are used for the creation of the current interpretations of the past. A natural selection occurs in the preservation of information – what survives and what does not. This is greatly incidental. There is also a conscious selection of which information to preserve, and how to present it. In this case, heritage is the selection of objects and phenomena, which, at the current moment, best present and represent history, culture and places for individuals, groups, nationalities, states and entire humankind.³⁰

Heritage is a natural part of culture, and is associated with all spheres of life and all levels of society.³¹ Heritage is developed, and develops, by actual historical practices. Therefore, the nature, values and meanings of heritage depend on the socio-cultural context, and are inevitably period-specific.

If we tried to present a general definition of heritage, it could be the following. Heritage is a set of values connected to objects, phenomena and people, which express the link between the present, past and future. Heritage is characteristic of a specific cultural period and level of society.

1.4 PERCEPTION OF HERITAGE

In addition to their personal heritage, people also perceive another level of heritage, although mostly through their own identity, culture and experiences. Every person interprets his or her own heritage, regardless of whether it is a personal, community, nationality/state or world heritage. Giving meaning to heritage is always personal. For people, there is no heritage as such, but only a very specific personal heritage that he or she can accept and understand. Heritage participates in the development of people as individuals, and people, in turn, influence heritage. In this sense, heritage is a complicated and complex concept, being both personal and close, and political and distant. Everyone has his or her own idiosyncratic approach to heritage, which is not limited to one's personal heritage, but also embraces heritage from other

30 Graeme Aplin, *Heritage: Identification, Conservation, and Management* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 15.

31 Graham Fairclough, "New Heritage , an Introductory Essay – People, Landscape and Change", *The Heritage Reader*, ed. Graham Fairclough, Rodney Harrison, John H. Jameson Jr, John Schofield (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), 301.

levels. Everyone defines the heritage and the objects and phenomena it embodies by themselves. Naturally, this all takes place in a specific historical and cultural context. It is important to everyone for whom its preservation and passing down to future generations is important and significant. Therefore, heritage is perceived differently, depending on nationality, gender and socio-economic class, age, education, religion, political preferences, prior experiences, beliefs and fundamental life convictions. On the one hand, heritage is more personal and local, but on the other hand, considerably more global. Today, it is not strange at all if an Estonian considers the Amazon rainforest to be more significant as heritage than Tallinn's Old Town, and that he or she contributes considerably more to its preservation.

Heritage helps to define all the various communities and groups that people belong to, starting with families and ending with humankind. It is at the personal and community level that people's daily lives and activities define heritage, ensure its existence and use. The heritage at these levels is also reflected, primarily, in the context of daily life.

The collective heritage discourses at the individual (personal) and higher levels are closely related, but certain tensions also exist between them. People often create their personal heritage discourse in contrast to the collective discourse, while, in some part, it still coincides with the collective heritage discourse. In totalitarian societies, individual heritage discourses are often separated from that of the power institutions and are part of the private sphere. Collective and individual heritage discourses exist simultaneously and function reciprocally, as do the community and state heritage discourses.

There are often different groups, whose approach to heritage differs from the official heritage discourse. These groups can be ethnic minorities (for example, the Native Americans in the U.S.), groups of immigrants (Estonians in Russia), and religious groups (Moslems in Germany). They define their personal, community heritage, as well as the heritage of the given state, differently than the heritage of the dominant groups.

In reality, heritage occurs only in a fragmentary form – objects, places and stories are always individual. People associate them with a common narrative. Heritage objects and phenomena, being intertwined with narratives, form a distinctive confirmation of these narratives.

2. DEFINITION OF HERITAGE

The definition of heritage is comprised of a very complicated set of issues, which relate to the functioning of society in a broader manner. It takes place at every level of society, and depends on the historical, cultural and social context and the political system. The definition of heritage occurs through specific historical practices, which vary according to cultural and social contexts.

On the one hand, the definition of heritage can be based on concepts and approaches which exist in the given culture. The idea of what culture is; what it does and does not include; and who belongs to it also determines what can potentially be included among heritage. Secondly, the existing objects and from which the selection is made, are also important. Defining heritage always means making a selection, which is done in accordance with values. Therefore, the definition of heritage consists of creating a system of meanings that is based on certain values. However, the creation of such a system is always based on including certain meanings in the system, and excluding others. However, exclusion is always and inevitably connected to power. Therefore, power is always present in the heritage process right from the start. The analysis of these power relationships forms the basis for understanding the process of defining heritage.

In order to establish the heritage discourse, the establisher must possess sufficient power. In the case of personal heritage, this power is related to the specific individual or family. At the local, and especially, the state and international level, political power becomes important. Power relationships determine which institutions and experts have the "right to speak" on behalf of heritage.³²

In modern Western societies, science plays the most important role in the definition of heritage. In contemporary societies, scientific knowledge is the greatest authority, and therefore, has the greatest power. To a great extent, the construction of heritage is based on science. In the heritage discourse, this is reflected, primarily, through the agency of experts. In the process of defining heritage, methods originating from the humanities, as well as the natural sciences, are used.

32 Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 12.

Of course, scientific opinions and views are not absolute. They are also results of discussions and social consensus. Specialists and experts with various backgrounds participate in defining heritage, for instance, historians, archaeologists, architects, artists and preservationists. Thanks to their corresponding educational backgrounds and jobs, all these groups of people possess different competences, and therefore, have different views of heritage.

The defining of heritage is always accompanied by political, legal, economic and social influences. Questions always arise about who this heritage belongs to, and to what extent. The right of an individual to dispose of his or her property is legally restricted, if one is dealing with a monument. The concept of world heritage suggests that, at least culturally, its owner is all humankind. Since heritage is extremely important for shaping and preserving group identities, people must have the opportunity to make decisions related to their own heritage. This means that, when defining heritage, its value and management, it is primarily the people, and groups of people for whom the given heritage is important that should have the right to do so. Achieving a consensus in the corresponding community is also important when defining heritage. Naturally, consensus is never absolute. At the state level, institutionalised methods for achieving consensus have been established (the democratic form of government). The utilisation of definite classification systems for defining heritage significantly increases at the state and international levels. For instance, the selection of world heritage objects is very clearly defined. At the personal and community levels, this is a more intuitively and informally evolved process.

2.1. PERSONAL AND FAMILY HERITAGE

In most cases, people do not consciously deal with defining and creating their personal heritage. They observe customs and traditions, and keep the items and memories that are dear to them. They visit childhood places and the graves of their forebears. A very strong emotional attachment is typical of personal heritage. Personal heritage is very important and dear to people. The creation of personal heritage occurs through various events, such as birthdays, weddings, jubilees, funerals, family get-togethers, etc. At these get-togethers, the older family members

tell their stories and recount their memories; visits are made to places that are important to the family history and to the graves of departed family members. At the get-togethers, family heritage is updated and created; memories, experiences, and associations are shared; and family relations are strengthened. Stories are told about certain places and people. Every family has its own “treasury of tales” that are told over and over again. Usually, these stories are related to the past, to how people used to live, what they did and thought. Stories, shared memories and experiences can be associated with items, buildings and places. At the same time, these stories can also speak of places or things that no longer exist. However, the objects that are preserved are almost always related to a story. There must be a reason for preserving objects, and these reasons are expressed in the stories related to the things. In today’s rapidly changing society, work-related skills that are passed down in families are less common, in comparison to earlier times, but they have definitely not disappeared completely. Personal heritage can be dealt with consciously and purposefully, by collecting memories, as well as by compiling family histories and genealogies.

2.2 COMMUNITY HERITAGE

Every community defines its own unique heritage. This can be comprised of buildings, parks, traditions, archives, landscapes, people’s personal collections, people with skills, people who are carriers of oral heritage, the customs and traditions that are typical of the community. Traditional communities do not deal consciously with the definition of their heritage. Heritage is part of the daily organisation of life, and there is no need to deal with it separately. Today, practically all communities in Estonia deal with heritage management. This includes both traditional communities (e.g. the communities in Southern Estonia, the islands, Russian Old Believers) and religious communities, but also the “new communities” that have developed in urban environments (e.g. various neighbourhood associations).

Primarily, it is the community itself that participates in the definition of community heritage, especially its most active members and local organisations. In addition to this, the process also involves the local governments, and state authority, which must often approve the

decisions of the local government, along with heritage specialists and outside experts, who prepare development plans, provide advice, etc. Outside influences may have a discernible impact on the definition of community heritage.

The importance of community heritage clearly rises to the fore when it is threatened. There are many examples of this in Estonia. Most of these examples are related to natural sacred places.

2.3 HERITAGE AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL

Local governments can define the built-up areas with cultural and environmental value and the natural objects under conservation. In this way, local governments define heritage at the local level. Heritage at the local level is defined by planning. The corresponding amendments were made to the Planning Act in 2002, and these are related to both cultural and natural heritage. Built-up areas with cultural and environmental value are areas of land that are defined by general and detailed planning, the entire atmosphere (environment) of which are to be preserved because of their historical networks of streets, landscaping, uniform and unique architecture, or some other reason of the public's interest.

The objective of natural conservancy at the local government level is to have the local government define the conditions for the protection and use of the landscapes or of some individual elements thereof that represent some distinctive features of the area's nature, culture, general settlement and land use. Natural objects that can be protected at the local government level can include the landscape, valuable agricultural land, valuable natural communities, individual landscape elements, parks, landscaping and the individual landscaping elements, which are not under protection as individual natural objects, or are not located in protected areas.³³

2.4 STATE HERITAGE

Defining objects or phenomena as heritage, at the state level presumes that there is public interest in their preservation. Heritage at the state

33 "Nature Conservation Act" (in Estonian), *Riigi Teataja*, I (2004), 38, 258, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/745306> (accessed 29.6.2013).

level is defined through the legal system. The law is a collection of behavioural rules (standards), which is established or sanctioned by the state, and the fulfilment of which is ensured by the coercive force of the state. The main form of expression for the law is legislation. Most countries define heritage at the state level with the corresponding legislation.

The first laws that regulated the definition of state heritage were enacted in the second half of the 19th century. For example, a law dealing with cultural heritage (Ancient Monuments Protection Act) was enacted in Great Britain, in 1882. The first law defining natural heritage was enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1872, and it created Yellowstone National Park.³⁴

Legislation regulates:

- the definition of heritage (what cultural heritage is);
- the management of heritage (what can or cannot be done with the heritage);
- the utilisation of the heritage (how to use the heritage).

In the Republic of Estonia, heritage at the state level is defined by the following laws:

- Heritage Conservation Act – monuments and heritage conservation areas;
- Museums Act – objects in museums;
- Compulsory Copy Act, National Library of Estonia Act – publications to be permanently preserved;
- Archives Act – archival documents;
- Nature Conservation Act – nature objects.

2.5 INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

World heritage is defined by international organisations, primarily UNESCO, and is expressed in the lists of world heritage. These organisations, relying on experts, determine which heritage is internationally significant, and how it should be managed and used.

34 *Understanding Heritage*, 34–35.

World Heritage List. The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which was adopted by UNESCO in 1972, provides the definitions for cultural and natural heritage of global significance, which is characterised by outstanding universal value.³⁵ Outstanding universal value is determined by the selection criteria for the World Heritage List. The convention reflects the thinking and attitudes that prevailed in the 1960s. The rapid social and cultural changes that accompanied Europe's post-war reconstruction were threatening to destroy or redesign the environment. The objectives of the convention were to raise awareness about and to protect significant values. Since 1997, the list has included the Tallinn Old Town, and since 2005, the surviving stations of the Struve Geodetic Arc, which were collectively submitted by ten countries.

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted by UNESCO in 2003 and ratified by Estonia on 27 April 2006. Based on the convention, UNESCO established an Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. In order to ensure the better visibility of intangible cultural heritage and better awareness of its importance, as well as to promote dialogue that honours the cultural diversity, the committee compiles and publishes a representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humankind and updates it. The representative list contains 166 cultural phenomena, including the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian song and dance festival tradition, the Kihnu cultural space, and Seto leelo singing.

The UNESCO Memory of the World Register. UNESCO's Memory of the World programme was started in 1992, with the aim of protecting documentary heritage and humankind's historical memory. This program has been an important tool in the preservation of valuable archival materials and library collections throughout the world. One of the aims of the programme is to ensure that these materials are as widely available as possible, including digitally.

The Memory of the World Register, created within the framework of this programme, consolidates the documentary heritage with international significance. The Register was established in 1995, and the first entries were made in 1997. The documentary heritage entered into the

35 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/convention-en.pdf> (accessed 16.11.2013).

register conforms to UNESCO selection criteria, and possesses outstanding universal value. As of 2011, there were 245 entries from all over the world, including the documentation related to the Baltic Chain.³⁶

3 SUMMARY

In connection with the development of society, issues related to heritage have become increasingly important. Heritage has always existed; but people are now aware of its existence, examine it, and try to consciously shape it. This has entailed an increased political interest in heritage. The visibility and importance of heritage in modern societies is growing. As a result, heritage also plays an increasingly important role in cultural policies, and this, at various levels of society. Heritage can be used for very different objectives and in very different ways.

Three dimensions are important to consider when dealing with cultural heritage. First, the possible range of heritage objects and phenomena; secondly, the level of the society at which the heritage is being dealt with; and thirdly, what values are being considered, when defining heritage. The approach to these three heritage dimensions helps to create the framework of a procedural modelling of heritage. The procedural approach focuses on the fact that people and societies of today's age are not passive recipients, keepers and transmitters of heritage, but active creators and shapers of heritage. The heritage process forms the basis for the practice of defining heritage based on various societal levels. Heritage is affected by a whole series of processes, and therefore, heritage is constantly undergoing change. These changes can be caused by natural processes, as well as by people, and it is impossible to stop them. Therefore, the management of heritage can try to administer these changes. Changes can be beneficial for heritage, but can also have a negative impact. When managing heritage, one tries to promote the positive effects, and to prevent the negative ones as much as possible.

The management of heritage involves the following activities: defining, preserving, interpreting, and utilising heritage. The management of cultural heritage is essentially an administering process, which has a technical, as well as a broader socio-political context. It is not a neutral

36 *Memory of the World*, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/flags-hip-project-activities/memory-of-the-world/homepage/> (accessed 29.6.2013).

technical activity, but rather, a social process, in the course of which values and meaning are created, changed and preserved. When managing heritage, it is important to consider both the cultural heritage itself, as well as the social level at which that management occurs. The management of heritage occurs at all levels of society, starting from individuals and ending with global international organisations. At various levels different resources and methods are used for the management of heritage. Just like the specific management activities are very different for buildings and digital documents, they are also different in regard to personal heritage items and objects under state heritage conservation.

Heritage is simultaneously a part of the physical reality and an intangible phenomenon. In this article I made an attempt to unite both poles of heritage, and to consider the utilisation and context of heritage. Heritage links people to each other, and to the environment, and is one of the forms of expression for our humanity. By relying on heritage, recreating it, and by loading it with significant meaning, people shape the way that societies function.

KURMO KONSA: *HERITAGE AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCT: PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION*

KEYWORDS: CULTURAL HERITAGE, SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCT, HERITAGE PROCESS

SUMMARY:

The 20th and 21st century society is definitely characterised by the extremely rapid development of science, technology and social systems, but also by a desire to consciously preserve the valuable part of our past and present for future generations. Heritage issues related to the development of society have become increasingly important. Heritage has always existed, but people are now aware of its existence, it is being researched and attempts are being made to start consciously shaping it. The increased political interest in heritage is related to this. The visibility

and significance of heritage in contemporary societies is growing. In this respect, heritage has become an increasingly important factor in culture politics and this is true of all the various levels of society. Heritage can be used for very different objectives and in very different ways.

When dealing with cultural heritage, it is important to keep the following three dimensions in mind. Firstly, the possible range of heritage objects and phenomena; secondly, at what level of society heritage is being dealt with; and thirdly, what are the values on which the definition of heritage is based. The approach to these three heritage dimensions helps to create the framework for the procedural modelling of heritage. Namely, the procedural approach stresses the fact that the people and societies that exist today are not passive recipients, keepers and transmitters of heritage, but rather, active creators and shapers of their heritage. The heritage process forms the basis for defining heritage based on the various levels of society. Heritage is simultaneously a part of the physical reality and an intangible phenomenon. The article makes an attempt to unite both poles of heritage, and to consider the utilisation and context of heritage. Heritage links people to each other, and to the environment, and is one of the forms of expression for our humanity. By relying on heritage, recreating it, and by loading it with significant meaning, people shape the way that societies function.

CV:

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