

# Influences of local socio-political context on the management of preservation training centres in developing countries: Brazil as a case study

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates strategies to strengthen regional capacities by exploring the influence of the local context on the management of cultural heritage conservation training programs in developing countries, such as Brazil. It inquires into challenges that need to be overcome in order to guarantee appropriate performance and continuity of training programs within contexts where heritage preservation is not usually seen as an essential component of the urban development process. In the face of poverty and social inequality, this study discusses: (1) the influences of the local socio-economical and political contexts on the management of preservation training centres aiming qualify local labour force, and (2) the extent to which current governmental policies impact on those preservation education training programs. This paper addresses these issues by analysing preservation- and educational problems highlighted through an exploratory study conducted at world heritage cities in North-Eastern Brazil.

## **Keywords:**

Preservation education  
Developing countries  
Training programs  
Cultural management

## Introduction

This study is set within the context of world heritage sites in North-Eastern Brazil and investigates the performance of cultural heritage preservation training programs qualifying local labour force. It draws on findings from ethnographic research conducted in 2010-2011, under a post-positivist paradigm, which employed mixed methods including literature review, archival research, direct observation, and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis identified issues which might help heritage practitioners understand and reflect on their own practice (Erlanson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993).

Throughout this research experience it was possible to observe the difficulties involved in achieving successful management practices at training centres due the strong influence of the harsh socio-economic and political contexts. Issues such as environmental preservation and sustainability, inequity, meeting basic needs such as food and shelter, lack of medical care and lack of access to education are ever present. At the same time, environmentally unsustainable economic expansion which is widespread in developing countries leads to a dangerous depletion of the natural and built environment resources on which those in poverty depend for their survival (King, 1999).

Working on heritage sites in developing countries is not an easy task. In addition to poverty-related issues, there is great concern regarding the lack of qualified specialists ensuring a site's conservation and sustainable use of resources (Albert, Bernecker, Perez, Thakur, & Nairen, 2007). Preservation demands trained people with appropriate skills to lead interventions and decision-making processes taking into account the complexities of the field. It is not just about natural and cultural heritage preservation within poverty contexts; there exists also a "living heritage", people who live, work, and use historical sites in their everyday lives (Thakur, 2007). Furthermore, world heritage sites have to adhere to demanding and inflexible national preservation legislation and international recommendations. The challenge for planners and managers is to integrate established national and international systems of heritage protection and management into local contexts, as there are certain principles of heritage management that transcend the ascribed status of the site (Albert et al, 2007).

This paper addresses education- and preservation issues raised during the exploratory research, and is structured around two topics: (1) the influences of the local socio-political context on the management of preservation training centres, and (2) the current policies impacts on educational training in poor regions. It is not possible within the scope of this paper to discuss these topics to full extent but a few important points familiar to managers working in the field are being addressed.

## Local socio-political context and the management of preservation training centres

For a long time, the governments of developing countries and various stakeholders have been investing great effort towards implementing training programs that assist the revitalisation of heritage sites. These initiatives are of great importance for the preservation of cultural assets for local communities. However, before a sustainable context of cultural heritage education in developing countries can be developed, many problems need to be overcome.

According to the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM, 1995), and to the findings of this investigation, many of the issues present in developing countries result, amongst others, from insufficient legal provision, difficulties in interdepartmental coordination of policies, lack of appropriate planning and monitoring, lack of resources in relation to resource demand, the pressure from the politicians in reaching quantitative instead qualitative outcomes, and the frequent changes in the education system affecting the administrative and technical continuity of vocational training programs. Experiences from South America (Calabre, 2011), Africa (King, 1999) and Asia (Nadkarni & Hayes, 2001), also highlight extensive preservation problems in those areas. Inadequate legal and administrative frameworks, inconsistent national inventories, inappropriate conservation planning and management policies, a lack of training programs for conservation, and ineffective programs for promoting awareness and involvement of local communities are listed as the main culprits. Systemic problems such as corruption, violence, powerlessness and social injustice aggravate the situation, framing policies and decisions (The World Bank, 1999).

## Social aspects

A detailed review of the literature indicated that current reports and evaluations lack detailed investigations of the interactions of training centres and local people, although evaluating the impacts of training centre performance on local communities' social development is fundamental for identifying what and how the preservation process must take place. According to ICCROM (2010), any intervention should take into account the social, cultural and economic characteristics and requirements of a site. Planning and conservation management strategies should therefore be developed in relation to the perceived quality and value of a heritage resource based on a consensus of the population. Gilmour (2006) suggests that it is important to consider that cultural heritage is in fact a social construction; preservation education programs therefore should be based on what particular people at specific points in time think is worth preserving in a specific context.

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There is considerable political pressure at international and national levels pushing public institutions in developing countries to establish education programs which can promote knowledge and enhance value placed on the preservation of cultural heritage by affected local communities. Social participation is essential since often lay people who live, use and exploit historical centres for their survival, barely know what heritage is (Arantes, 1999). Several interviewees indicated that there was an urgent need for introducing local communities to conservation practices in order to strengthen communication links between the people and their governments. While analysing documents and interviews, we observed that some training centres often did not seem to be sufficiently prepared to make available adequate information so that citizens would better be able to involve themselves in the decision-making process with more clarity and better understanding (Schiffer, 2002).

In that sense, an issue needs to be addressed: why is it happening? Why is so difficult include local communities in decision-making processes? Maybe people living in historic centres in developing countries lack preparation to take part in the decision-making process. People who live in these areas and are directly affected by political decisions, share great difficulties in surviving and possess none to very little education. A socioeconomic research study conducted at Sao Luis Historic Centre, for example, demonstrated this reality present in many areas of South America: approximately half of the residents of historical areas did not possess secondary education (Nunes, 2005). Many cannot read or write thus they may find themselves unable to understand either the importance of preservation or the social-economic impacts of governmental decisions, nor are they able to participate in public discussions. In light of this socioeconomic profile, it becomes evident that time and resources are needed to be invested into social participation mechanisms by vocational training initiatives.

The harsh social situation has raised the interest of the international community, especially of organisations interested in promoting economic

benefits and poverty reduction through cultural heritage preservation programs, such as, The World Bank and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation - UNESCO. Many partnerships have been established between Latin American- and European countries, seeking to ensure sustainable preservation programs and focusing on social inclusion promotion (ICCROM, 1995). One such important initiative has come from the Spanish government and is called the *Escuelas Taller* (Workshop School) Project. It is a preservation education training program specifically designed for countries in Latin America, with the goal of enabling disadvantaged young people to physically engage with historic centres through hands-on training in cultural heritage conservation, thereby ensuring that this target audience will have a future career in civil construction (Agencia Espanola de Cooperacion Internacional para el Desarrollo - AECID, 2010).

During the fieldwork, it was encountered other similar initiatives implemented with the same intention of reconciling heritage preservation and social inclusion through education. According to some research participants, this type of training program has a strong social appeal, potentially constituting an indirect way of reducing poverty through training and integration of trainees into the workforce and market. However, several concerns were raised by the research participants, including:

- Programs of this nature demand the training of people from vulnerable, social circumstances. The question arises if those people have the same inclination to gain knowledge as those considered 'privileged'?
- The programs demand long-time engagement of apprentices in one work environment which is often incompatible with the lowest price/shortest time scheme for construction works as imposed by Brazilian legal system.
- Programs may be certifying students without sufficient knowledge and skills, therefore creating 'illusions' of qualifications leading to frustration when trying to join the job market and realise they

are not ready to meet the high demands of conservation works.

- Graduates without appropriate knowledge and skills may cause irreversible damage to cultural heritage.

Although the social merit of these educational initiatives is undeniable, unfortunately poverty should not be perceived in terms of resource deprivation only but also in terms of the capacity to invest in sustainable solutions. What currently happens in relation to the implementation of some training programs which associate conservation works and social inclusion is risky and unsustainable: the market is being flooded with people lacking sufficient qualifications. The after-effect of this short-term solution is that the market is receiving professionals who offer a less than satisfactory level of service. In the long-term this can, in fact, create a future increase in unemployment when these people will no longer be able to remain in the market place. However, these difficulties have to be considered from within the reality of poor countries, where any solution to poverty alleviation is considered a valid attempt.

## Political aspects

When examining education- and preservation issues and observing the rapid changes occurring within the natural and built environment and their impacts on cultural heritage sites and human settlements, it appears that in order to arrive at successful practices in heritage management, it is imperative to know not only how to deal with these issues but also to know how to manage the sensitive balance between politics, tools, strategies and stakeholders (Sullivan, 2004). The world heritage status of a site instils local governments with the responsibility to prepare experts with adequate skills for developing and implementing actions within strategic planning; for integrating managerial actions, and for optimising resources and generating synergies (Zancheti, 2002). However, politics has a particularly strong effect on the management of training centres.

Within this investigation, the analysis of qualitative data has highlighted the effects of socio-political factors on the quality of training programs in poor regions. The quantitative data however, seemed to paint a different picture: conservation training centres reported relative success in preparing graduates through practical programs. Their claims were based mostly on quantitative indicators collected through official reports. This seemed to stand in stark contrast to research participants' interview-comments stating that the courses did not provide the necessary training and skills for graduates to properly operate in the civil market. According to several interviewees, the programs faced great socio-political challenges affecting their performance which interfered with the overall quality of the professional training. These

problems seemed 'insoluble' for those involved locally in the heritage conservation system since the issues were related to the broader socio-economic situation of the whole region. Moreover, what is officially reported by institutions seems strongly influenced by the political context. Particularly in North-Eastern Brazil and other extremely poor regions, training-centre managers feel oppressed by the political domain as local politicians lead decision-making processes and budget definition for training programs. Official reports tend to suppress information which could show a program's weaknesses or management inefficiencies in an attempt to avoid administrative and financial consequences.

Such political control is often linked to corruption. Corruption can be labelled as the main poverty issue affecting high levels of government and heritage programs and it is not confined to the political sphere only (Aranha, 2007). Corruption affects programs' development, the daily lives of ordinary citizens and dictates how the public sector operates (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). It is not just about financial issues but also abuse of power as well as geographical and social favouritism. Particularly regarding training programs, corruption generates misuse of resources and over-pricing of restoration and revitalisation works, amongst other issues. As Timothy and Nyaupane (2009) state that "bribery and other forms of corruption influence what heritage products are selected for show, financed for conservation, and traded on the world market".

In Brazil, some mechanisms have been put in place to combat corruption within the public system. With regards to heritage conservation work, for example, restoration interventions are governed by bid. There are administrative procedures for hiring services or for the acquisition of products by public administration institutions. This process is regulated by Legislation # 8666 which stipulates that public works and services must be preceded by a bidding process to ensure the selection of the most advantageous proposal for the public administration. The right to execute the work is granted to whoever offers the best price and the fastest execution (Arts. 21, § 2º, I). Two problems arise from this situation: (1) although the bidding process may be dispensable in certain cases of "acquisition or restoration of works of art and historic objects with certified authenticity" (Art 24, V), in the case of sites which are used as training sites for apprentices, it follows that: if the training centre executes works bypassing the bidding process, it raises suspicions of fraud or overpricing of services, which are often delivered by partners involved in the project. This generates technical and institutional conflicts which can lead to the weakening of management. (2) Since training initiatives for conservation works demand long-term engagement of apprentices in a work environment, it is not possible to develop an effective learning environment if a training centre is under pressure of the lowest price/shortest time scheme.

Furthermore, frequent political changes within the government also impact on institutional management. The education system in Brazil may serve as an example. From 2007 until 2010, the country had 62 Heads of Department of Education in Brazil's 26 states (Education Secretaries National Council – CONSED, 2011). A survey indicated that continuity of public policies may be compromised in face of frequent management changes. The instability created within the education sector during these changes has also been prevalent in the cultural and heritage preservation area. New leaders tend to abandon existing projects and create new ones - in the same area, with the same goal - for achieving, in theory, better desired outcomes. In practice, the programs become a way for the new political leadership to leave its 'stamp' on the projects. Moreover, political changes impact on cultural heritage preservation policies as the preservation system depends on public government decisions and funding. As part of the preservation system, training centres, administratively and financially dependent on the government, are exposed to this discontinuity. In addition, the changes impact on management tasks and new strategies that preservation training centres and their managers have to adopt seeking to align their actions with the ever changing new policies. Thus in practice, changing managers means changing policy guidelines and consequently the interpretation of heritage policies and the allocation of resources within the preservation system. This lack of adequate consistency of political support and resources strongly affects training centre management. With limited resources, inappropriate physical and administrative infrastructure, no long-term policies, no defined budget, there is insufficient stability for training centres to provide adequate and continuing education training.

## Current policies and educational training

Within the field of cultural heritage preservation the concern about the provision and quality of preservation education has been continuous in many so-called developing countries. Data generated from the research highlighted the extent to which the quality of education training in poor regions can be negatively affected by the local context (Packenham, 2005) and also how the quality of conservation efforts in poor regions can be affected by inadequately trained professionals. To professionals involved in the day-to-day work of conservation, the scarcity of cultural conservation qualifications is obvious. Many craftsmen, technicians, planners and managers working on cultural heritage projects do not seem prepared to deal with the issues present in the field, nor are training programs adequately structured to attend to market demands and professional requirements and interests.

Preparing professionals to deal with the diversity of physical structures of heritage sites and the environmental influences in which they work in are major concerns. With regards to physical characteristics of heritage sites, the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 1972) provides a definition of heritage under three main headings: (1) monuments, (2) groups of buildings (ensembles), and (3) sites, which includes historic buildings, historic areas and towns, archaeological sites, and the contents therein, as well as historic and cultural landscapes. Other heritage resources to be considered are living historic areas, such as historic towns, villages, cultural landscapes, heritage routes, and sites containing contemporary architecture. In addition, cultural heritage as part of the built environment is subject to environmental impact such as climate and weathering, industrial pollution, ground conditions, water resources, and changes in landscape (ICCROM,

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2010). Training centres are expected to qualify professionals able to execute heritage conservation works in any structure accounting for all the factors listed above. This raises the question: how limited acquired knowledge can possibly prepare graduates for such large scale of different types of physical structures and contexts?

With respect to the scope of the course syllabus, an important concern among participants was how to improve the scope, approach and methods in order to provide better knowledge and skills necessary for conservation within any given context whilst also meeting high demands of national legislation and international recommendations. As Rössler (2007) stated, the preservation system “requires not only highly trained professionals at all levels but that they are able to perform analysis which keeps up with new developments, such as, transnational and serial site management or addressing new emerging issues and emerging threats” (pp. 39). Karpati and Bhürler (2007) highlighted that we need to consider more than just cultural and natural heritage in need of preservation in cities:

- The interaction between its inhabitants and its built environment plays a vital role in the survival of historic sites;
- The demand to align management towards the needs of inhabitants without neglecting the important aspects of preserving original fabric; and
- The ability of cultural heritage management to meet the demands of economic and socio-cultural values.

The Vienna Memorandum (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO, 2005) summarises the situation for cultural management “continuous changes in functional use, social structure, political context and economic development may be acknowledged as part of the city's tradition, and require a vision on the city as a whole with forward-looking action on the part of decision-makers, and a dialogue with the other actors and stakeholders involved (Art 13). The central challenge [for professionals] is to respond to development dynamics in order to facilitate socio-economic changes and growth on the one hand, while simultaneously respecting the inherited townscape and its landscape setting on the other. In this process, the historic city's authenticity and integrity, which are determined by various factors, must not be compromised (Art14)” (p.3). Finally, professionals need to be able to understand and discuss contemporary concepts such as integrated conservation, strategic planning, holistic management, cultural diversity, risk assessment, preventive intervention, concepts necessary for a conservation professional (Cather, 2000). It seems almost unfeasible to develop a curriculum that covers all topics as it seems unlikely that students will be capable to embrace all of this knowledge. In light of

the increasing challenges to achieve higher levels of procedural qualification, some training centres succumb to the pressure and cease to develop courses.

Thus, the greatest educational challenge is to define and develop heritage education programs which include knowledge about a broad variety of management skills, planning concepts, legislation, conservation and restoration techniques, procedures, and problem-solving strategies for conflicting interests (Albert et al, 2007), and, in addition, to prepare professionals for the socio-political issues present within harsh contexts.

## What can be done?

Governmental institutions are aware that they alone are not able to guarantee sustainable policies for heritage preservation. Building partnerships between the public sector, the private sector and civil society with decentralised management as a goal is essential for guaranteeing a level of administrative and financial stability for the training centres. In Latin America, the involvement of the private sector as a partner of training preservation initiatives has become more consistent in recent years, mainly attracted by the governmental funding mechanisms as applied in countries such as Ecuador and Brazil (Zancheti, 2012). In Brazil, for instance, the Rouanet Law (Ministério da Cultura - MINC, Law # 8313/1991) is a fiscal incentive policy which allows companies and citizens to dedicate part of their taxes to cultural activities. This law was created to stimulate citizens and private companies to invest in sponsoring cultural projects. Ever since the law was implemented in 1995, it has been used as a tool by the public sector to bring the private sector in as a partner in restoration projects of historical buildings, in many cases permitting the development of training programs and practice workshops avoiding the pressure of the lowest price/shortest time scheme.

Stakeholder involvement in training centres policies development has been identified as an influential factor for the success of cultural heritage training management since it seems to be a vital aspect for the articulation of effective strategies for regional and local development (UNESCO, 2010). According to the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (UNESCO, 2008, par. 39 & 40), heritage management that involves stakeholders, such as, private organisations, owners, businessmen and local communities, provides a significant contribution to the heritage system. Stakeholders can also become a social-political controlling mechanism. Participatory decision-making is commonly used in contemporary heritage management as a way for civil societies to help choose development alternatives whilst seeking to reconcile the interests of all parties involved in the process of preservation.

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Promoting strategic thinking initiatives has been suggested as another fundamental factor to be considered in relation to consistent policy development. As heritage preservation is a vast field of social and political actions, it demands the establishment of effective working relationships amongst a variety of stakeholders, whilst working in a consultative and collaborative manner at executive and operational levels. Stakeholders have different backgrounds and interests that are often conflicting; however, all decisions must be based on consensus amongst the principal stakeholders - a task not easily achieved but essential for successful management.

Several initiatives of strategic and decentralised management aiming to promote integrated policies and actions have been implemented in Latin American historic sites. In Brazil for instance, the Historical Centre Management Council was implemented in 2002 in the city of Sao Luís in order to develop strategic plans and coordinate initiatives to ensure sustainable development. Furthermore, international institutions such as UNESCO, ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), ICCROM and IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) constantly provide technical support for worldwide partnerships in an attempt to conserve the integrity and diversity of cultural and natural resources (UNESCO, 2008).

In Brazil, despite all adversities, heritage conservation policies have continually and slowly improved in recent decades. The gradual increase of political intent, more consistent involvement of the private sector as a partner of preservation initiatives and initiatives of strategic thinking promotion among stakeholders, may have been contributing to this situation. The public sphere however still faces restoration as an urgent matter and remains threatened by the permanent loss of historic fabric and, as it understands the importance of the heritage, leads the process in promoting mobilisation of social participation, aiming to build public-private partnerships for the development and implementation of preservation planning.

## Conclusion

When comparing similar studies in developing countries, we can note the complexity of linking preservation process with economic and social issues. There are no ‘universal’ models to follow. The most difficult task for professionals and institutions is to achieve strategic management of cultural heritage not only for the sake of preservation for aesthetic gratification, but more importantly, as a resource and condition of sustainable development for local communities using the heritage of built environments (Ferreira, 2010).

Financial, cultural, social, and political difficulties and conflicts cause increased challenges in establishing appropriate training programs management. The policy development of heritage conservation training programs depends on various factors to be overcome, such as, the inter-sectoral integration of public policies, the active involvement of all key stakeholders, the social participation in the formulation of goals and objectives, the financial cooperation amongst the diverse public and private actors, national and international legal frameworks, and the solutions to social problem. When defining a management system compatible with the above tasks, local contexts and the needs of local societies are the central challenges for cultural heritage training centres. It seems that the system requires decentralised management achieved through the participation of local stakeholders in the decision-making and finance-allocation processes (Thakur, 2007). Since the execution of actions demands aptitude in the planning, sharing, discussion and negotiation processes, all sectors, departments and participants - public and private - which are part of the preservation process, need to execute their roles successfully and skilfully within the system, so that synergy and interaction can be ensured (ICCROM, 2010).

However, despite all preservation efforts in developing countries, the remaining question is: how to talk about preservation to those who do not have conducive conditions for living? This is our major challenge.

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