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## Aran Journal for Language and Humanities

<https://doi.org/10.24271/ARN.025-01-01-SC-27>

### Cultural Guide: A Strategy for Cultural Heritage Preservation and Sustainable Development

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Article Info		Abstract:
Received	April 2025	<p>This paper presents a university-led initiative to formulate a comprehensive cultural guide that brings together archaeological, historical, and cultural anthropology research to document and promote cultural heritage. This guide serves as a multifaceted resource designed for various stakeholders. The initiative seeks to protect cultural heritage while functioning as an educational resource, facilitating cultural heritage planning, and promoting economic empowerment through sustainable cultural framework and interdisciplinary collaboration.</p> <p>A multidisciplinary working group consists of local and international specialists who develop research methodology and implementation strategies to accomplish these objectives. The guide applies digital heritage tools, GIS mapping, anthropological studies, and archival research to systematically document cultural assets. Primary archaeological activities include the cataloguing museum artefacts, the promotion research on artefacts, conducting excavations, and the generation of an archaeological map—each serving as vital measures to preserve history while improving accessibility for public and researchers. Restoration projects enhance the structural preservation of heritage monuments, strengthening local identity and fostering sustainable cultural development. The cultural guide elevates heritage as a cultural and economic asset by establishing collaborations with national and international organisations to promote cross-border cultural exchange. Nonetheless, the cultural guide encounters obstacles like securing sustainable funding and the desire to adapt to political and economic variances. To alleviate these concerns, the guide is executed in small-scale phases, ensuring sustained viability and flexibility.</p> <p>This model enhances the discourse on heritage conservation, cultural policy, and sustainable development, providing a consistent framework for the integration of academic research with cultural management and public participation.</p>
Accepted	May 2025	
Published:	August 2025	
Keywords		
Cultural Guide, Cultural Heritage, Sustainable Development, Context		
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## Introduction

Cultural Heritage has been recognized not only as a reservoir of history and identity but also as a drive for sustainable development. The tangible and intangible elements of cultural heritage reflect the values, practices and creativity of communities. The growing engagement of culture in global development through cultural goods, services and intellectual property, highlights the urgent and more complex need to preserve cultural heritage, as globalisation and urbanisation continues to impact societies. Preservation attempts must go beyond the mere protection of the remnants of the past and seek to create, through cultural heritage, a link to the present and future well-being of societies. The inclusion of cultural heritage in the United Nations' 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, which emphasises its role in promoting inclusive societies, economic resilience, and environmental responsibility (United Nations A/RES/70/1) clearly reflects this perspective and cultural considered as the fourth pillar of sustainable development (Hawkes, 2001; Sabatini, 2019)

This paper outlines a preliminary conceptual framework for a university-led initiative, that will lead to a context-aware understanding of cultural heritage.

## The Fragmented Representation of Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage incorporates both tangible and intangible components, deeply rooted in rich historical and socio-cultural contexts. There are many publicly and privately funded projects, such as cultural festivals, museum initiatives, archaeological parks, etc., which aim to display cultural heritage and create a connection with the public. Each of these projects can certainly offer a certain degree of insight, but there is a common problem underlying the planning of cultural projects, which manifests itself in the scarcity or absence of a unified, heritage-related chain of meaning in the presentation and narration of cultural heritage. Heritage does not only derive its significance from physical assets or intangible traditions, but also from the representations, interpretations and lived experiences linked to them (Graham & Howard, 2008). A selective focus motivated by political, economic, and social agendas or simply a lack of knowledge on this subject damage cultural heritage and its significance over time in the first place and, consequently, the society to which it belongs. Isolating the concept of culture without integrating it into a broader cultural horizon, which fundamentally contradicts the interconnected nature of culture, results in a distorted interpretation of heritage with far-reaching repercussions that can affect the cultural, social, economic and political spheres, potentially for decades.

This fragmented representation of culture may play a role in decontextualising it, either through simplistic narratives or by prioritising specific components, diminishing cultural value and authenticity. Artifacts are detached from their historical context, ceremonial procedures are demoted to mere performances, and rich traditions are reduced to easily digestible clichés.

Such actions are not harmless. They might undermine cultural continuity, jeopardise the transmission of intergenerational knowledge, and distort both internal identities and external perceptions. The damage could extend further, for instance by privileging visual appeal over substance in tourism strategies that encourage superficial involvement, while policy decisions based on inadequate understanding tend to misallocate resources. Most importantly, when these imbalanced representations are broadly accepted as facts, they affect collective memory and cultural identity and may be deeply experienced by communities whose heritage is commercialised or distorted, undermining meaningful connections between past, present and future in ways that may take generations to recover (Nasser, 2003; Smith, 2006; McDowell, 2008; Khalaf, 2021; Alamineh et al., 2023; Polo-Flórez, 2025).

Heritage should be perceived not as a mere assemblage of separate objects, monuments or traditions, but as a dynamic and interconnected ecosystem of meanings, relationships and lived experiences. (Fouseki,

2023). To achieve this, comprehensive frameworks are needed that integrate academic expertise with community knowledge, emphasising both accessibility and global understanding. The value of heritage lies in its connection to individuals, places, narratives and contemporary realities. Preserving the authenticity of cultural heritage, facilitating its transmission to future generations and effectively addressing developing global challenges, such as mass tourism, digital change and migration, can only be achieved through multifaceted and integrated approaches. By these approaches, contextual knowledge of cultural heritage can be improved and revitalized (Butzer, 1980; Dilley, 2002; Papaconstantinou, 2006; van Vliet et al., 2009)

### Conceptual framework

Cultural Guide is a multidisciplinary, university-led project, whose primary objective is to establish a research center of systematic documentation in the disciplinary fields of archaeology, history and cultural anthropology, in order to become the key provider of scientific knowledge for various stakeholders, including academic scholars, public and private institutions, local community, and tourism planning.

University is an institution that specializes in gathering, imparting, producing and sharing knowledge. In this project the work of professors and scholars of archaeology, history and cultural anthropology results in specialized knowledge of a range of interrelated subjects. The first step to implement the project is to gather existing knowledge by means of bibliographical inquiry, archival research, collection of historical maps and audiovisual material. Researchers need to assess the state of the art and to recognize the gaps in their multiple fields of research – archaeology, history, cultural anthropology – to have a clear understanding of the width and boundaries of their common research field, which is cultural heritage. Knowledge of the historical periods when people lived in those areas is a key aspect of the project. Chronology provides the necessary context to correctly place cultural heritage in time and space. It must be defined as exhaustively as possible through rigorous multidisciplinary study.

Students are part of the academic community and, at the same time, are also part of or live closely with the local community, so they participate in the project both as scholars and as community members. They are encouraged to engage in this project through their academic programs, making contributions through academic papers, theses and workshops. It is important to share the knowledge achieved with members of the university through lectures and seminars.

The university's role as a hub between the local community and the scientific community makes it the ideal environment to both learn about cultural heritage and elaborate concrete suggestions to improve existing policies and implement new ones. The role of the university as a producer of knowledge is reinforced by providing the students/community members with the means to conduct an informed narration of local history and avoid distorted interpretations of cultural heritage. Although university is an institution committed to providing objective research independent of the needs of politics, it is at the same time the institution that trains future policymakers, who will serve in decision-making roles in the field of cultural heritage. A policymaker who is acquainted with the challenges and the advantages of cultural heritage preservation, and who is aware of the pivotal role university plays in independent research and education, can mediate between the needs of the community and the necessity for cultural heritage preservation, understands the importance of both the historic and archaeological landscape, of local arts and crafts, and can successfully plan strategies for development.

When this overarching picture of the multidisciplinary knowledge at the researchers' disposal is ready, the following step is to work on research development. Researchers need to recognize the shortcomings in the study material they gathered and focus their research on what is less known or even missing, keeping in mind the aim of enhancement of neglected cultural heritage. For example, the archaeologists' groundwork should be to compile a detailed archaeological map, and cataloguing not yet inventoried archaeological remains in

museum and private collections. This activity is necessary to assess the current state of archaeological sites and objects, and to take conservation measures and introduce new research.

Regular meetings and discussions among project members are essential to report on ongoing progress and to discuss collected data and new insights as each group advances in its specific field. These meetings can be expected to identify potential connections between the various data, thus fostering integration across disciplines. They can also promote a re-evaluation or reinterpretation of research methodologies as required to provide greater consistency and collaboration.

The desired result is to shape three main bodies of data, namely the historical guide, the archaeological guide, and the anthropological guide, on which to build a new research area. Thus, the new research area is not simply the synthesis of previous knowledge reorganized into separate fields of study but creates overall added value by presenting and discussing a common theme from three different but integrated perspectives. This interdisciplinary synergy can lead, for example, to the compilation of a craftsman's guide that sheds light on historical knowledge of the production, trade or use of crafts, archaeological evidence, presentation of objects and interpretation of their context of production, use or preservation, relationship to the elements that enrich their meaning, and anthropological documentation of the traditional craftsman, the process of production, trade and consumption; highlighting not only the objects, but more importantly the people and their skills in producing them, the process and the need to trade them, and the need and habits of use. In this way, a network of knowledge has been created that extends the threads of meaning and relationships in different directions, linking the past and the present to preserve it and build it for the future.

One can think of different kinds of guides, such as music guide, dance guide, specific religion or ethnic guide, administration guide, food guide and so on. The subjects can vary based on the history and culture of each specific area.

The choice of subject must consider the cultural assets, the priority of presenting them (for example disappearing customs, traditions or communities) and national or international opportunities for funding and collaboration.

As the work progresses, the networking and sub-branching become more intertwined, a path that is homogeneous with the inherent identity of cultural heritage.

## Conclusion

Cultural heritage incorporates the history, identity and values of societies. The perspectives on cultural heritage integrated into the framework of sustainable development and cultural sustainability are acknowledged as the fourth pillar of sustainable development. Advancing sustainable cultural heritage development planning requires a holistic view of cultural heritage.

By artificially detaching specific aspects of cultural heritage from one another, cultural programs harm the interconnected nature of culture, which is anchored in different aspects of human life in connection with the surrounding environment.

The fragmented representation of cultural heritage plays as a decontextualization factor and damages that chain of intertwined meanings which is the identity of the local community, leading to a misrepresentation of it in the eyes of the outsider. It can cause profound damage that takes a long time to repair.

The university, as an institution specialized in research, education and knowledge production, is the most appropriate place to address the problem of contextualization of cultural heritage and to put in place a program that helps to advance cultural heritage studies, to train students to enable them to gain an active

role in the local community as future cultural planners, and to provide an opportunity for more sustainable development.

A university-led program based on three disciplines: history, archaeology and cultural anthropology, through a process of systematization of existing knowledge, a process of re-evaluation and recognition of gaps, a multidisciplinary collaboration to design and implement new lines of research, can be a reliable resource for local cultural heritage. The progressive line of research is able to assure multifaceted, layered and rich results that reflect the composite nature of cultural heritage.

The limitations and problems at this conceptual stage of the program include the organization of data storage, format and accessibility, the economic resources to develop the research area, and the definition of communication channels with policy makers. The theoretical and executive issues of this pilot study will be developed in future works.

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