

2022: UIA YEAR OF DESIGN FOR HEALTH Launch and Roundtable Forum



Role of Heritage in Health and Well Being

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Heritage broadly can be defined as human beings' experiences and creations over time. It includes natural landscapes and ecosystems plus the creativity products of various cultures over tens of millennia up to the very recent past

Further, for many people natural and cultural heritage are linked as parts of a greater whole in terms of meaning and significance. The significance and meanings of heritage varies between individuals, groups, communities, cultures and nations.





Wellbeing is about individuals and the creation of an environment that holistically supports their:-

- physical,
- mental,
- emotional,
- social,
- cultural,
- spiritual
- and economic needs hence enabling full realization of their potential;

a perspective underpinning the cross-cutting model of Agenda 2030 for sustainable development – the implementation of which is fundamental for the intergenerational wellbeing





On the other hand Tacon defines Well being as ... including social, personal, economic, cultural, environmental, psychological, spiritual, physical. Most importantly, it can be viewed as a positive sense of personal and cultural wellness that results from strong cultural identity. Strong cultural identity is underpinned by connection to places, landscapes, tradition, heritage, shared stories and communal histories (Tacon, 2019,Pg6)

Hence, well-being can be viewed as a positive sense of psychological, physical, emotional and spiritual satisfaction that results from being part of a culture and community that actively engages with its environment, heritage and traditions.





Or well-being can be seen as a sense of being:-

- content,
- comfortable
- and happy,

A state which is normally associated with:-

- physical,
- mental
- and emotional health
- as well as a standard of living that can sustain such health,

although the standard of living may vary across cultures past and present





The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding Intangible Heritage's Operational Directives related to sustainable development encourage States Parties to safeguard health practices recognized by communities as living heritage and harness their potential to achieve quality health care for all.

In tandem with the growing acceptance of the important role that culture plays in the provisioning of equitable health care, the Lancet Commission identified the systematic neglect of culture as biggest barrier to advancing the highest attainable standard of health worldwide.

From 2015, WHO and UNESCO have spear headed efforts to reflect on the intersection of culture, health and well-being. Moreover, UNESCO referred to a growing body of studies that demonstrate the importance of participation in cultural activities and sport to emotional and physical health, to social capital, cohesion and neighbourhood (UNESCO, 2013)



Highlighting some of these research studies that have linked various aspects of heritage and its relationship to well-being and health include:-

- Link of museum experiences to Health and Well-Being (Chatterjee and Noble, 2013),
- Human Well-Being and the Natural Environment (Dasgupta, 2001)
- Heritage and Community Engagement (Waterton and Watson, 2010)
- impact of archaeological excavations on happiness (Sayer, 2015),
- the therapeutic effects of community-based heritage conservation (Power et al, 2016),
- how the aesthetic experience of heritage sites can reduce stress (Grossi et al, 2019)
- How important cultural heritage, including rock art, ancient architecture, written heritage, material culture and intangible cultural practices, is to contemporary well-being for diverse groups of people. (Tacon, 2019; Gražuleviči et al, 2006; Fujiwara et al , 2015; Ander et al, 2009; Simpson, 2018)



Highlighting some of these research studies that have linked various aspects of heritage and its relationship to well-being and health include:-

- Visiting heritage sites has also been highlighted to be very beneficial to well-being (Monckton, 2018)
- Fujiwara and colleagues concluded that visiting heritage sites has a greater impact on well-being than attendance at sporting events (Fujiwara, 2014, p. 9; Maeer and Robinson, 2015)
- Research has also shown that visiting museums and galleries improves the health and well-being of people of vastly different socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Frogett and Roy, 2014; see also special issue of the journal Arts & Health 2015, volume 7, number 3 on Culture, Museums and Wellbeing).

Indeed Livni reports, in Montreal, Canada doctors are now giving patients prescriptions for free art museum visits in order to enhance well-being (World Economic Forum, 26th Oct. 2018)



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Along the same line, *Médecins Francophones du Canada*, an association of French-speaking doctors, has decided to allow member physicians to prescribe art. Hélène Boyer, vice president of the medical association, noted that “There’s more and more scientific proof that art therapy is good for your physical health. It increases our level of cortisol and our level of serotonin. We secrete hormones when we visit a museum and these hormones are responsible for our well-being.”

The doctor notes that art has a similar positive effect on people as exercise, saying, “Since the ’80s we’ve been prescribing exercise for our patients because we know exercise increases exactly the same hormones.” In view of this, Boyer believes museum visits can improve wellness in patients of all ages and offers an alternative to prescribing physical activity for those who might find exercise risky, such as the elderly (World Economic Forum, 26th October 2018)



Further, research in hospital settings by Ander et al demonstrated that patients expressed improved wellbeing, such as improved mood, calmed anxiety or a feeling of enhanced confidence by offering an opportunity for bringing back some of the pre-diseased self, through stimulation of the social, intellectual, experiential and emotional identity and distraction from the new medicalised, standardised and uncertain self-defined by the illness.

Further the heritage objects offered an easy social interaction, sensory stimulus and learning opportunities enabling them to tap into concerns about identity, emotions, energy levels and motivation (Ander et al, 2019)

Further research has revealed that a rich array of positive benefits accrue on the participants' social wellbeing with/in the community arising from sharing heritage products with others, and less anxiety about the present (Power and Smyth, 2016), while others have pointed out that history, heritage, and historic places are valuable assets for improving the human condition (Orthel, 2021)



Given the heritage, health and well-being relationship established in recent research studies, it follows that threats to heritage threaten health and well-being. Threats include:-

- natural disasters such as earthquakes, storms, fire, flood,
- insects (especially termites),
- environmental change
- and neglect have always threatened heritage and human well-being in many ways.

However, despite the demonstrated importance for individual, group, community and national well-being, heritage is threatened globally by development and even cultural intolerance where sometimes its destruction has increasingly become a tool for disempowerment of communities.



To date numerous studies have been published documenting how different forms of cultural and natural heritage impact on human health and well-being.

The overall conclusion arising from all this research from various disciplinary backgrounds is that meaningful encounters with a wide range of different types of heritage can positively enhance a sense of individual and community well-being and health.

Conversely, damage to heritage can have a detrimental effect on individuals and community as a whole, leading to diminished well-being and health.





The future of heritage, human well-being and healthy societies is a critical issue now as the world undergoes unprecedented cultural and environmental change fueled by new digital technology, depleted natural resources, human population growth, climate change and global warming and shifting political landscapes.

Human well-being and healthy societies are under threat from a myriad of growing factors, and some communities face an uncertain future than ever before. The role of heritage in alleviating some of this change plus how the loss of heritage multiplies the effects of rapid change in terms of health and contemporary human well-being are important issues that are in need of better discussion.

This UIA year of Design for Health is one such avenue which can serve the purpose of refocusing the issues and catalyse discussions that can begin to offer solutions to this multi-faceted problem



THANK YOU