

Future Literacy and Cultural Heritage Education: Integrating Anticipatory Competencies for Adaptive Cultural Sustainability

Subjects: [Social Issues](#)

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Futures Literacy, as defined and promoted by UNESCO, is the capability to imagine, question, and use the future as a resource for better understanding the present and acting with intention. When applied to Cultural Heritage Education, it reframes heritage from a static object of preservation into a dynamic anticipatory system that evolves through dialogue between past, present, and future. This integrative approach enables learners and communities to strengthen what can be called cultural adaptive capacity, understood as the ability to ensure continuity of identity and traditions, to promote responsive innovation in the face of change, and to transmit heritage knowledge across generations. This entry situates Futures Literacy within a wider theoretical framework that includes complexity theory, anticipatory systems, and sustainability education. It emphasizes that heritage education must increasingly address uncertainty, diversity of perspectives, and interconnected challenges such as globalization, climate change, and cultural transformations. UNESCO Futures Literacy Laboratories conducted in different regions of the world, as well as ICCROM's foresight initiatives, provide concrete examples of how anticipatory competences can be fostered in varied cultural contexts, demonstrating both universal patterns and context-specific adaptations. By embedding Futures Literacy into heritage education, cultural heritage becomes a living resource for nurturing resilience, global citizenship, and creativity. It allows communities not only to preserve their legacy but also to reimagine it as a driver of innovation and inclusion. Ultimately, this perspective highlights the potential of education to enhance cultural sustainability, foster intergenerational solidarity, and cultivate temporal justice, preparing societies to face the uncertainties of the future with confidence and responsibility.

future literacy

futures literacy

cultural heritage

anticipatory systems

sustainability

educational innovation

The contemporary landscape of cultural heritage education stands at a critical juncture where traditional preservation methodologies must evolve to meet the unprecedented challenges of the twenty-first century. As Yuval Noah Harari observes in *Sapiens*, "Culture tends to argue that it forbids only that which is unnatural. But from a biological perspective, nothing is unnatural. Whatever is possible is by definition also natural" ^[1]. This perspective challenges us to reconceptualize cultural heritage not as static preservation but as dynamic adaptation within the natural flow of human cultural evolution. The implications of this insight extend far beyond academic discourse, demanding a fundamental reconsideration of how we approach heritage education in an era of rapid technological change, environmental crisis, and social transformation. The convergence of Future Literacy, a conceptual

framework developed under UNESCO's auspices, with cultural heritage educational practices represents not merely an incremental improvement in pedagogical approaches, but rather a fundamental paradigmatic shift that reconceptualizes the relationship between past, present, and future within educational contexts [2]. This integration addresses the growing recognition that cultural heritage education, traditionally focused on the transmission of historical knowledge and cultural practices from one generation to the next, requires transformation to encompass adaptive capacity and anticipatory thinking capable of navigating the complex uncertainties that characterize our contemporary global condition [3]. The traditional model of heritage education, which emphasizes preservation and transmission of established cultural forms, proves increasingly inadequate for preparing learners to engage with heritage as a living resource for addressing contemporary challenges while maintaining cultural authenticity and community relevance. The urgency of this transformation becomes apparent when considering the multiple pressures facing cultural heritage in the twenty-first century: climate change threatens physical heritage sites and disrupts traditional ecological relationships that have sustained cultural practices for millennia [4]; digital transformation challenges conventional knowledge transmission methods while simultaneously offering unprecedented opportunities for cultural documentation and dissemination [5]; migration patterns disrupt cultural continuity in some contexts while creating new possibilities for cultural exchange and innovation in others [6]; and generational shifts alter the relevance and interpretation of cultural practices as younger generations navigate between tradition and modernity [7]. These pressures create what might be termed a "heritage crisis" that demands new approaches to education that can maintain cultural continuity while enabling adaptive responses to changing conditions.

References

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