The role of educational field trips in enhancing world heritage education

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Abstract

Heritage is one of the most contested topics in the world as it involves issues that range from political, economic, social, technological and legal in nature. There is a need for raising awareness and sharing knowledge and ideas about this topic. This paper discusses the benefits of field trips as catalysts for heritage education. It explores the potential of visiting world heritage sites and how that could enhance learning about heritage. The research has found that educational visits develop learners critical and problem solving skills. The paper also considers the value of field trips within the context of the digital learning norms of the 21st century. It is therefore suggested that training workshops for teachers and heritage organizations should be made a norm to support them in offering and running field trips to World Heritage Sites. Educational field trips to World Heritage Sites play a pivotal role in encouraging young people to pursue and promote the conservation of natural and cultural heritage.

Keywords: World Heritage Education, Botswana, Field trips, Heritage Education
Introduction

Heritage sites are faced with many threats such as infrastructural development that encroaches on the significance and authenticity of the sites, climate change, poverty and conflict, which deteriorates and in some cases completely destroys heritage sites. In order to address some of the threats, State Parties pledged by ratifying the 1972 UNESCO Convention to conserve their respective heritage sites by fully adhering with the rules set in the 1972 UNESCO Convention (UNESCO 1992). State Parties made a commitment to develop and promote effective approaches to conservation of heritage sites. The convention emphasised the need for research and training centres in helping to counteract the dangers that threaten cultural or natural heritage. It is the commitment that State Parties shall foster and intensify heritage education which is the basis for educational field trips to World Heritage Sites (UNESCO 1992).

World Heritage

According to Abungu (1996), heritage refers to the resource of a country; this could be cultural, historical or natural resource. Heritage institutions are those organizations that are entrusted with the custodianship of these resources. Every World Heritage resource has a unique beauty and an exceptional value thus a need to protect them. For example the Historic Centre of Vienna which played an essential role as a leading European music centre from the Viennese Classicism era until the early 20th century, the Robben Island Museum whose buildings signify the triumph of democracy and freedom over oppression and racism in South Africa and Shark Bay, Australia whose outstanding features include its vast sea-grass beds (4,800 km2) and its dugong ('sea cow') population (UNESCO 2010). Historic Centre of Vienna was inscribed in 2001, Robben Island in 1999 and Shark Bay, Australia in 1991 (World Heritage Committee 2003).

The 1972 World Heritage Convention defined a World Heritage Site as an area or place representing the most outstanding examples of the world’s natural and cultural heritage (UNESCO 1992). For example Shark Bay (2016) noted that the heritage site is as an area of outstanding beauty and wonder; mystery and grandeur; and is meaningful to the world.
Heritage Education in the 21st Century

In the continued call towards the protection of heritage and heritage resources, transformative education is a viable tool that addresses some of the problems currently besieging culture and heritage. According to IBIS Global Education Group (2014), transformative learning is an approach which develops learners’ academic and practical skills, in a way that lead them to reflect upon and re-evaluate their beliefs and experiences. For example, informal training and educational visits answer a very important question of “how to enhance learning about World Heritage Sites?” It is therefore crucial to involve all stakeholders to provide quality education and share knowledge through effective approaches to protecting heritage sites. A stakeholder refers to groups or persons that have claim and interest and affect or affected by the operations and decisions of an organization (Jeffery 2009). In relation to World Heritage Sites, the existence of heritage operations and decisions government’s take on heritage sites directly and indirectly impact stakeholders in many ways. It is important that teachers, schools, heritage organizations and museums all work towards enhancing education programmes and field trips their World Heritage Sites.

To provide evidence on the importance of educational trips, Shakil, Faizi and Hafeez (2011), explained that educational trips are a means of essential learning, where students go through essential learning experiences under the leadership and guidance of trained instructors. UNESCO (2010) calls it ‘experimental leaning’ and have defined it as an approach that entails creating a platform for debriefing and consolidation of skills and thoughts through feedback, reflection and the application of the ideas and skills to new situations.

Learning encompasses more than traditional teaching of sitting down in a classroom with a pen and a paper; paying attention to a tutor or teacher (Behrendt and Franklin 2014). Elias (2011) illustrates that learning is a result of interaction with instructors and tutors, with content and/or with other people. To further elaborate, Houwer, Holmes and Moors (2013) developed the “ontogenetic adaptation”, which the authors defined as changes in the behaviour of an organism that result from regularities in the environment of the
organism. Their definition of learning embraces that learning is not subject to interaction with other people only. It embraces that learning is a development in behaviour that is impacted by what is going in the environment, either through experience, interaction and research.

In the context of world heritage education, an educational visit is understood as outdoor and practical field trips to properties of Outstanding Universal Value used to enhance students’ knowledge. It is a way of exposing learners to the ‘tangible’ context of what they have learnt through written and spoken language in the classroom. An educational visit occurs when one goes out of a formal setting to observe and/or do activities that are linked to the theory they have learnt in class and/or formal education.

Educational visits challenge learners to think critically about practical implications of conservation, the ability to solve practical problems in their daily engagements with heritage and decisions on heritage issues. According to Ocal’s (2016) report, educational fieldtrips provide an opportunity for participants to learn by doing which enables students to understand the link between the past and present and increases student’s sensitivities towards the subject. Behrendt and Franklin (2014) noted that experiential learning at formal and informal field trip venues increases student interest, knowledge, and motivation.

Today learners are sophisticated and use technology more than ever before. The use of technology has made possible digital visits to heritage sites, which involve the use of 3D displays, mobile devices and systems such as the Augmented Reality (AR) to access or navigate a site regardless of the actual physical distance (Walker 2008). According to Ch’ng (2011:6), ‘technology allows remote access to heritage sites at any given space and time without the site damaged by visitor pressure’. Thus, technology is not only a means of sharing and transmitting knowledge but also presents a way of dealing with issues such as degradation of heritage sites and climate change which are a global concern for heritage sites.
Whilst Digital Heritage is now common in museums and cultural heritage sites (Bonacini et al 2015), the challenges that come with it still favor physical field trips. It is argued by Li, Liew and Su (2012) that Augmented Reality (AR) system lays emphasis on intermingling actual with virtual environment from real time interaction, but however, the system does not contemplate the pre-experience and after experience of visitors. Walker (2008) claims that the common problem with digital devices is that there is normally a separation between the contents on the device and the real world experience. That makes the authenticity of the online experience questionable and untrustworthy as also argued by Hazan (2015). In that regard, technologies may hinder students from experiencing the real thing because it is part of the experience that will make people remember the concept. Herein comes a popular saying ‘seeing is believing’ that has some truth in it. Field trips to World Heritage Sites are therefore still essential in today’s digital age.

Learners want to explore, experiment, to see, touch and to feel. This is substantiated in Taylor and Parsons (2011) that learners of today are concerned with ‘relevancy’, which can be achieved by engaging them through educational trips to heritage sites. Taylor and Parsons (2011) further argue that learners ask that their learning apply to real-life scenarios whenever possible as opposed to theory. This clearly illustrates that an authentic and/or hands on experience during field trips helps learners make a better sense of oral and written education and even apply them to their daily lives.

In her report, Kushins (2015:3) explains how a visit to Metropolitan Museum of Art, Greece during one of her school trips shaped her professional life today.

“Experiences like this can play a powerful role in creative and intellectual development. My professional life today is rooted in aesthetic awareness and historical empathy grounded by such experiences.”

On a similar note, Robben Island Museum (2012) explain that many learners visiting the World Heritage Site normally appreciate that it is a good experience being there and that
they are challenged to take on continue the legacies left for them by forefathers. During
one of the field trips, one student admitted;

“I felt very proud to see that place where they struggled for freedom. That is why I wanted
to take my photo here, to show my family who did not visit the island”

Experiences such as these will definitely make one remember heritage space, and even
share with other people. These experiences even have the power to inform one’s career
or line of business. In the very same manner, visits to heritage sites can develop ones
interest for heritage. Participants get to have fun and that is actually one of the things
that will make them remember the experience. It is being part of the experience that will
make people eager to share the stories and inspire other who may as well continue the
heritage education cycle. In that sense, visiting heritage sites is undoubtedly a sustainable
measure of providing heritage education.

Ocal (2016) explains that museums provide an opportunity for students to learn through
practical experiences which will increase their sensitivity towards heritage. While
Behrendt and Franklin (2014) also concur that interactive exhibits help students play with
concepts, activities often not possible in the classroom. Ch’ng (2011) claims that a digital
means could be used to get the younger generation absorb knowledge and skills, given
the rate that they are involved with technology over the years. However, despite the fact
that virtual heritage present a good opportunity to support conservation and
dissemination of heritage information; digitization is still at an infant stage in Botswana
(Mnjama 2010).

Digital heritage like any other approach has its own benefits and limitations. This
approach can be used to transmit world heritage information to the youth as their
engagement with technology continuous to grow enormously. Digital heritage is a
creative method that can be used to get the younger generation involved in conservation
and preservation of cultural and natural heritage as it suites their interests in the current
millennium. Virtual heritage is also beneficial in addressing some of the concerns
affecting heritage sites like climate change and land deterioration as anyone can have the
experience from their comfort zones. An online experience however cannot entirely replace the authenticity of a physical experience. In addition, the legitimacy and certainty of the online heritage experience is questionable. Therefore, virtual visits and educational trips must be used all together to complement each other.

**Social training approach**

Social training is defined as the transfer of knowledge, skills and attitudes that can transform a behavior and lead to improved performance in key social areas (Grossman and Salas 2011). The ‘each one, teach one’ philosophy that was used by ex-political prisoners at Robben Island World Heritage Site applies when participants go into an educational trip to heritage sites. The skills are impacted on others through discussions and questions in a more relaxed environment. Shakil, Faizi and Hafeez, (2011) argue that educational trips offer students’ social training as they are normally taken in large group and students are included from different social backgrounds. In fact, many educational visits are organized for groups. Learners from different cultural backgrounds interact, work together, and share information on different cultures and learning about a culture locally and globally. This is necessary for learners to know more about what they learn in classes, workshops and conferences and even to put the ideas into practice. Participants can even watch dramas or do role plays displaying the life of the past which has the power to make history interesting for those who would otherwise find it not. These kinds of activities enable learners to map a relationship between the past and the present; to relate to everyday life situations and give them a deeper understanding than just listening to stories.

Through group based visits to World Heritage Sites, learners get to share ideas on what is done differently in their respective countries and how it can benefit other heritage sites. In that process, they also learn more about culture and cultural tolerance and take ideas home, which is also a way of incorporating social training.

Social training extends to communities who have impact and are impacted by heritage sites. Community involvement is vital as the concept of “each one, teach one” cannot be implemented if people separate themselves from world heritage sites. Looking
specifically at some countries in Africa, for example, Botswana has established youth development projects that seek to engage and sensitize the youth on the importance of conservation through Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) projects. Mining and Travel (2014) argue that CBNRM was initially aimed at wildlife conservation and has now been extended to heritage management. According to Mining and Travel (2014) The Kalahari Conservation with the Barclays Bank of Botswana launched a Youth Development Rhino conservation project as a response to the CBNRM outreach programme. The Youth Development and Rhino Conservation project was motivated by the need to develop a great involvement of youth in conservation and teaching environmental sustainability. Engagement of local communities in any form of disseminating heritage education is vital as it gives them a sense of ownership on their local resources and makes them cooperate in decision-making process concerning heritage sites. Specifically, involving the youth is vital and conservation will be undertaken by the youth of today and tomorrow.

Incorporation of World Heritage Education in the school syllabus: Botswana

Botswana has two heritage sites listed on the World Heritage Sites list, which are the Okavango Delta and Tsodilo Hills. The Tsodilo Hills was declared a UNESCO Heritage site in 2001 and was joined by the Okavango in 2014 (UNESCO 2015). In Botswana, menial efforts have been made to link traditional knowledge to the school curriculum or to incorporate indigenous knowledge into Botswana’s school system (Silo and Khudu-Petersen 2016). However, even so, some attempts which include of incorporation environmental education in subjects such as Environmental Science cannot be overlooked (Silo 2015). Silo (2015) observes that Environmental Education clubs formed at schools are focused much on the environment or natural heritage with emphasis on litter pick-ups and cleaning campaigns and sometimes characterized by visits to the world heritage sites and national monuments. Silo and Khudu-Petersen (2016) on the other hand argue that schools’ educational trips to heritage sites are not compulsory but teachers’ own initiatives. Even so, Mosothwane and Ndwapapi (2012) claim that in a research they conducted with 60 trained primary school teachers, 63% of the participants reported this was not a well established education and 75% said that they have not received enough
training that they could use to impact their students. The delivery of World Heritage Education can be fostered by increasing teachers’ knowledge because with the lack of skills and knowledge it is almost impossible to achieve a heritage sensitive future (students). Students should be taught to harmonize and establish the relationship between culture and the environment; appreciating the fact that our cultures are informed or dependent on the natural environment. This will help to prepare students also to respect cultures and traditions practiced at different world heritage sites.

Conclusion

In conclusion, experimental and experiential learning through educational visits to heritage sites is one of the categories of learning, which plays a fundamental role in the protection of heritage sites. Visiting World Heritage Sites has emerged as a catalyst for learning and has the power to enhance knowledge. In today’s digital world, physically going to a World Heritage Site has proven value. Educational visits to World Heritage Sites are important as they allow visitors firsthand experiences that give them the ability to gain social skills and transform their behavior and attitudes towards heritage. This approach of learning also develops students’ critical and problem solving skills. Through educational trips, learners get to make sense of history, relate it to the world today and even put to practice the skills and ideas needed to protect heritage sites. Field trips develop learners’ appreciation of heritage such that they can even be challenged to pursue a career in heritage. It has also been found out that in most instances, educational trips are taken in large groups that enable interaction among learners and learning from one another in a more relaxed environment. Finally this social interaction allows participants to learn about local and universal cultures, the spirit which promotes cultural tolerance.
Recommendations

As a result of the findings and conclusion, this study recommends that;

Educational trips to World Heritage Sites should be made a norm in heritage education. This will develop and increase learners’ sensitivity about heritage and will help them to raise heritage sensitive future generations.

Participants should engage in activities symbolizing the significance of World Heritage Sites, thereby developing a understanding based on the past, present and future.

It is essential to intensify education programs targeting the youth in schools to raise awareness of cultural and natural sites. Awareness campaigns in schools will cultivate appreciation for World Heritage Sites as well as promoting domestic tourism.

At World Heritage Sites, the youth should be given the platform to get involved in conservation of natural and cultural heritage. This can be achieved by providing them with education, training and allowing them to voice out on heritage related matters.

Author

Tshepang Rose Tlatlane studied BA (Hons) Tourism Management at Botswana Accountancy College. Her education and career in Tourism has introduced her not only to the world of tourism business but to the conservation and preservation of cultural and natural resources as well. Tshepang loves heritage with passion and has participated in the African World Heritage Youth Regional Forum in April 2016.

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Bibliography


