

Natural and Cultural Heritage in the Urban Context: Impacts for sustainable development

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Climate change and the resulting effects on our urban environment will have an increasing effect on the world's population in the coming decades (Collette 2007). Both natural and cultural heritage have an important role to play, as a vector for mitigating the impacts and effects of these changes in the urban environment. From heat island mitigation, to the maintenance of ecological and cultural diversity, to the level of resilience that a population exhibits in the face of overwhelming and fast-paced change, heritage is a powerful tool for sustainable development.

For many people, climate change and increasing political strife will result in displacement. Today there are 59.5 million forcibly displaced people in the world – up from 19.4 million in 2005 and the number is continuing an upward trend – the loss of place, and a physical connection to a landscape of home is often a significant source of trauma and hardship (UNHCR 2014). This “trauma of exile” as described by Said (2000) refers to the “unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (173). The trauma of displacement has garnered research attention in a variety of fields, and developed a body of research focusing on the short and long term psychological and health impacts of displacement. However, as pointed out by Sampson and Gifford (2010), “the focus on displacement has left a gap in our understanding of emplacement – about connections to place in settlement contexts” (116) and of the role of heritage in understanding the impacts and potential mitigation of displacement.

This paper will explore the forms of tangible and intangible heritage, both natural and cultural, that exist in the urban environment, and the roles they can play in strengthening resilience and long term sustainability. These include attitudes towards land, community and change, food systems and the role they play in social cohesion, cultural attitudes towards environmental stewardship, and the role of material culture in place identity and place attachment.

Colette, Augustin. (2007) *Case Studies on Climate Change and World Heritage* (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2007).

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