# PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE OBJECTS AS A FACTOR IN SUPPORTING PERSONAL CULTURAL IDENTITY

# PRESERVAÇÃO DE OBJETOS DO PATRIMÔNIO CULTURAL COMO UM FATOR DE APOIO À IDENTIDADE CULTURAL PESSOAL

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study investigates the role of cultural heritage preservation in supporting personal cultural identity. It examines how the restoration and maintenance of cultural objects, such as historical sites, museums, and artworks, impact the formation, development, and preservation of individual cultural identity.

**Methods:** The authors conducted a literature review and applied comparative analysis to assess changes in cultural identity before and after the restoration of cultural heritage objects. The study draws on both theoretical frameworks and empirical data from surveys, interviews, and case studies.

**Results:** The findings show that the preservation of cultural heritage has a significant positive effect on personal cultural identity. Access to cultural objects strengthens people's connection to their cultural roots, history, and traditions. This connection promotes self-identification, respect for national culture, and the development of a positive identity.

**Conclusion:** Cultural heritage preservation plays a crucial role in maintaining cultural identity. Beyond its historical and artistic value, it helps individuals connect with their cultural roots, contributing to a stronger sense of self and community. Effective preservation strategies are essential for enhancing this impact in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Historical turning points; Destruction; Preservation; Memory; Personal cultural self-identification; Cultural identity.





#### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Este estudo investiga o papel da preservação do patrimônio cultural no apoio à identidade cultural pessoal. Examina como a restauração e a manutenção de objetos culturais, como locais históricos, museus e obras de arte, impactam a formação, o desenvolvimento e a preservação da identidade cultural individual.

**Métodos:** Os autores realizaram uma revisão de literatura e aplicaram uma análise comparativa para avaliar as mudanças na identidade cultural antes e após a restauração de objetos do patrimônio cultural. O estudo baseia-se em estruturas teóricas e dados empíricos de pesquisas, entrevistas e estudos de caso.

**Resultados:** Os resultados mostram que a preservação do patrimônio cultural tem um efeito positivo significativo na identidade cultural pessoal. O acesso a objetos culturais fortalece a conexão das pessoas com suas raízes culturais, história e tradições. Essa conexão promove a autoidentificação, o respeito pela cultura nacional e o desenvolvimento de uma identidade positiva.

**Conclusão:** A preservação do patrimônio cultural desempenha um papel crucial na manutenção da identidade cultural. Além de seu valor histórico e artístico, ajuda os indivíduos a se conectarem com suas raízes culturais, contribuindo para um senso mais forte de identidade pessoal e comunitária. Estratégias eficazes de preservação são essenciais para ampliar esse impacto na sociedade contemporânea.

**Palavras-chave:** Pontos de virada históricos; Destruição; Preservação; Memória; Autoidentificação cultural pessoal; Identidade cultural.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The history of the preservation of historical heritage is the study of historical approaches to the preservation of cultural heritage objects (Volkova et al., 2024) and the sociocultural and economic conditions that contributed to the modern concept of cultural heritage preservation (Kokorina et al., 2023; Abdullaev et al., 2021). Transgenerational transmission of cultural identity is the determination of the impact of preserving cultural heritage objects on the transgenerational transmission of cultural values and identities (Zein et al., 2022). Empirical research is conducted to assess the impact of the preservation of cultural heritage objects on personal cultural identity, including surveys, interviews, observations, and data analysis. At present, we are experiencing a turning point in history, when the former norms of behavior are losing their relevance, while new behavioral patterns have not yet been formed (Malika et al., 2022; Togaibayeva et al., 2021). The world is entering a bifurcation point where multiple development scenarios arise and the outcomes of events are not always obvious (Gizatova & Ivanova, 2023). In this situation, a person drawn into the vortex



of negative events and news can experience increased anxiety and even depression (Starkman & Pathak, 2022). One of the most effective methods of normalizing a person's psychological state is art therapy or interaction with art (Bugazov, 2015, p. 89).

There is a considerable body of research proving that the architecture of the place where a person lives greatly affects their psychological state (Gupta, 2023). Monotonous colors and decorative elements cause melancholy and even aggression, while complex and intricate solutions contribute to a better mood (Alieva & Sheripova, 2024). This phenomenon is especially evident when a person moves from a small town to a big city or emigrates from one country to another. At first, the architecture of an unfamiliar city may seem incomprehensible and overwhelming. However, gradually the new cultural environment begins to change the person's aesthetic taste, becomes an integral part of the individual, transforms their cultural identity, and adjusts other aspects of one's identity as a system (national, professional, political, patriotic, religious, etc.) (Wu & Chelyapina, 2023). The damage or destruction of such iconic architectural objects as the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris, the Karnak Temple, or the Pantheon in Rome can have a negative impact not only on the individual but on humanity as well, eroding the foundations of human existence.

The preservation of cultural heritage objects plays an important role in maintaining personal cultural identity. There are several research methods available to study this topic. Researchers conduct surveys and interviews to find out how the preservation of cultural heritage objects affects their sense of self and connection to culture. Sociological and ethnographic research explores the influence of cultural objects on the formation of personal identity in different environments and sociocultural groups. The interdisciplinary approach to the problem offers a deeper understanding of the influence of cultural heritage objects on one's cultural identity.

The purpose of this study is to explore how preserving cultural heritage sites impacts the creation, evolution, and maintenance of individual cultural identity.

# 2 METHODS

We systematically examined existing literature on the impact of cultural heritage preservation on cultural identity. The research design included a comprehensive



review of scholarly sources, empirical studies, and theoretical frameworks relevant to the topic.

To gather relevant literature, we used Scopus and Web of Science. The search was conducted using specific keywords and phrases related to cultural heritage preservation and cultural identity: cultural heritage preservation, cultural identity, transgenerational transmission of cultural values, historical monuments, sociocultural changes, and cultural heritage.

Sources were categorized and systematized based on their focus, such as historical approaches, sociocultural impacts, and methodological advancements.

## **3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Drawing on the existing research, we concluded that the preservation of cultural heritage objects has a positive impact on personal cultural identity. Studies show that access to cultural heritage objects, such as historical sites, museums, architectural monuments, and art objects, helps to strengthen a person's connection to their cultural roots, history, and traditions. This can lead to a stronger sense of self-identification, respect for national culture, and the formation of a positive identity.

Our findings also show the need to develop more advanced preservation techniques for cultural heritage objects to ensure their accessibility and relevance for future generations. Identifying more effective strategies for the preservation of cultural heritage objects and their impact on cultural identity is an important challenge.

W. MacsAkill in his article "The Beginning of History. Surviving the Era of Catastrophic Risk" published by Foreign Affairs in 2022 argues that our mistake is that we focus on what we have inherited from the past instead of thinking about what we leave to the future generations (MacsAkill, 2022). MacsAkill believes that to overcome challenges we must think about our place on the imaginary path of the historical evolution of the world community. The importance of continuous movement forward and conquering new peaks in personal development, science, and art can hardly be overestimated. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind the role of memory in the existence of mankind. Memory ensures the preservation of personal identity and increases the efficiency of human activity, allowing us to avoid the mistakes of the past in the present.



As argued by Abbot Suger of the Saint-Denis Abbey (1140), memory of the past is the key to the future. Many philosophers, scientists, and artists (H. Bergson, T. Chernigovskaya, I. Bergman, etc.) agree that it is impossible to lead a conscious life in the present without valuing the past. As Bergson (1911) rightly notes, the human body resides in the present and reacts to external stimuli, while the soul lives in the past and helps us make the right decisions. Memory is not a return from the present to the past but a movement from the past to the present. The greatness of the past is reflected in the achievements of the present; this reconnection of the past with the present gives us freedom and allows us to move forward and reach new heights. The process of remembering can be seen as a therapy that allows a person to cope with the complexities of the present, like needlework or gardening.

As pointed out by F. Hodgson Burnett in "The Secret Garden", different memories are closely intertwined, forming a magical garden that few people know about. Although at first glance this garden may seem illusory, from time to time it can be entered to briefly hide from the frightening reality and gather one's thoughts, following the example of Moominmamma, one of the main characters in "Moominpappa at Sea" by T. Jansson. Moominmamma missed her garden so much that one day she painted it on the wall of the lighthouse where the family had moved to and went inside the painting to find comfort.

On the one hand, the memory garden is different from the pitch-black suffocating Murkwood described by J.R.R. Tolkien in "The Hobbit or There and Back Again", filled with strange noises and sticky cobwebs stretching from one tree to another. Neither it is a well-tended French-style garden, as there is no symmetrical arrangement of paths, trimmed trees, and shrubs, like in Versailles. This beautiful wild place is hardly ever a gardener's garden. It is a wilderness of growing things, reminiscent of an English landscape garden, emphasizing the beauty of nature, into which no one has entered for a very long time, for the door was locked and the key buried (Burnett, 2005). Following the example of the heroine of Hodgson Burnett's book, we also propose to enter a garden of memories during a transitional period in our history.

Everyone knows how much one can learn about a person from reading or listening to their memoires. Memory can be carried not only by people but also by artworks. The Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood is inextricably linked with the tragic fate of Emperor Alexander II, who died in that very place on March 1, 1888. Similarly, La Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore would never "forget" Giuliano de' Medici murdered

inside its walls on April 26, 1478. The image of Peter the Great is forever etched into the soul of Saint Petersburg, and the history of Germany cannot be imagined without the erection and fall of the Berlin Wall. A visit to the Sistine Chapel gives the feeling of being in the shadow of the great Michelangelo, observing his frescoes and evaluating the results of the recent restoration, revealing the unique beauty of the artist's color palette (Cascone, 2019; Masliakova, 2021). When different parts of a single painting, once separated, are reunited after years of being apart, one can once again read the memories of the world on these canvases. In this context, of note is the exhibition "Mantegna and Bellini. Masters of the Renaissance" held in Berlin in 2019 or the famous collection of paintings by Sir R. Walpole reconstructed by the Houghton Hall in collaboration with the Hermitage in 2013.

There is a trend toward the densification of the so-called "network of memories". It suffices to turn to temple architecture to notice something that unites all these structures, starting with the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican and ending with the Kamppi Chapel, or the Chapel of Silence, in Helsinki. Every detail of their design symbolizes the unity between the divine and the human, the macrocosm and the microcosm. They keep the memory of their architectural predecessors and are included in the memories of their descendants. Let us consider the following evolutionary chain: the Pantheon in Rome – Rotonda de Galerio in Thessaloniki – the Panthéon in Paris – the Temple of Canova in Possagno, etc. People who have seen and admired the beauty of these temples take back with them the pieces of memories stored there (not to mention the elements of their decor). These "centrifugal forces" do not lead the memory to fade away but augment it, making the network of memories more intricate and complex. Our physical presence in the places we have once visited is not decisive for the awakening of memories associated with them. As soon as we think of the artworks we have seen before, we are already dwelling among them: standing in the center of the Sistine Chapel and admiring Michelangelo's frescoes or sitting on a bench in the Kamppi Chapel and enjoying the silence after the hustle and bustle of the city (Bergson, 1911).

The displacement of personally or socially significant art objects can be just as painful as their destruction. Occasionally, artworks disappear and never return to their homeland. Examples include the obelisks taken from Egypt to decorate the city of Rome, the relics of St. Mark transported from Alexandria to Venice, the porphyry statues of the four tetrarchs adorning the facade of St. Mark's Basilica brought to Venice from Constantinople, etc. Most artworks travel a lot, and the geography of their travels is extensive. For example, in 2022, the Prado Museum hosted the exhibition "Return Journey. Ibero-American art in Spain", showing that after the Spanish conquest of Latin America and before its independence, there were significant movements of artworks between continents. It is hardly surprising that disputes continue between countries as to who owns a particular masterpiece. However pressing these issues may be, it is much more important to sensitize the public to the significance of art objects. We should decipher the messages that artworks convey to cherish their memory and preserve them for future generations.

With time, our memories become more intertwined with the memories of the artworks we regularly interact with. We assimilate their memories, and this cultural dialog shapes our worldview, stimulating our cultural self-identification. Their destruction can then create a vacuum, emptiness, and existential loneliness. Therefore, the value of an artwork is determined not only by its physical characteristics but also by the historical and cultural memory it holds. Physical damage or even destruction of an art object, with all its negative impact on cultural heritage, is not decisive in preserving memory. Even if an artwork no longer physically exists, it continues to exist in the memory of those lucky enough to see or hear it. We come to understand the role of the human factor in the preservation of the cultural fund of humanity. Recognition of the seriousness of the situation with disappearing artworks and readiness to change the course of events can help prevent a cultural crisis and have a stabilizing effect on public consciousness, especially at such pivotal moments in history as now.

Not only museums that are agents of the memory of the past, preserving vast collections of artworks and shaping the worldview. Every individual, like R. Bradbury's characters trying to memorize banned books and pass their knowledge on to others, is responsible for maintaining the integrity of this chain of memory, whether a particular work of art exists in reality or only in their memory.

During the pandemic, when almost the entire world's population was forced to narrow down their social circle, becoming prisoners of their own homes and apartments, many people realized the significance and beauty of such simple things as a ray of sunlight peeking through the window, the sound of birds singing, or the shape of stones used for paving. It is difficult to imagine how many people of different backgrounds and occupations must have walked the winding streets of old towns. It is natural for a researcher to want to join these people from the past and listen to their fascinating life stories. We believe that the memories of stones can be no less impressive. This is real, since, at contemporary art exhibitions, one can notice that many artists draw attention to the memory of stones in the broad sense of the term. There are several ways of revealing their past.

Some stones are covered with inscriptions. This includes the richly painted Egyptian sarcophagi or Tamga-Tash, sacred Buddhist stones on the southern side of Lake Issyk-Kul (Kyrgyzstan). Although these messages are not always fully decipherable, many stones are devoid of even this kind of clue. If one listens carefully, one can hear what the stones are trying to say, as evidenced by the work of C. Edefalk (2022), who has assembled a collection of stones and given them voices that convey their state of mind and history.

To make the voices of the stones clearer and more distinct, it is possible to initiate a dialog between the past and the present by exhibiting a contemporary art object in a historical space or by presenting works from a past, bygone era in a new, contemporary setting, thus connecting the stones of the past with the stones of the present. One example is the Solovetsky Stone, a granite monument to the victims of political repression located on Troitskaya Square not far from where the Old Trinity Cathedral, St. Petersburg's oldest church, once stood. Another example is the Egyptian sphinxes made of Aswan granite around the 14th century BC decorating the Universitetskaya Embankment, St. Petersburg designed by K. Thon in the 19th century. A dialog between the past and the present can be initiated not only between participants in the same space but also between those separated by many miles. The sculptures of Castor and Pollux framing the entrance to the Saint Petersburg Manege allude to the famous Fontana dei Dioscuri in front of the Quirinale Palace in Rome. We cannot but agree with M. Bakhtin's opinion that when a person turns from a passive contemplator into an active participant in the dialog of cultures, the process of their self-identification is activated, allowing them to realize and accept their cultural identity, raise their selfesteem, and become more successful.

As rightly argued by art historian V. Scully, the ruins of the past are deeply embedded in New Age culture, for one of the defining facts of the 20th century is that it has left behind more ruins than any other century. The importance of preserving the memory of the past cannot be overemphasized, especially in the present. The implementation of this idea, however, is not that simple.



While in the 19th century, many tried to correct the works of the old masters – compare, for example, C. Czerny's revision of J.S. Bach's works, full of dynamic nuances, with the Urtext (the original text) – the recent trend is that restorers should not make old works resemble new ones but strive to preserve the original appearance of artworks with all their imperfections. R. Rogers, the creator of the Lloyd's Building, preserved the 1928 Neo-Romanesque facade and placed it in the context of a complex of elevators and pipes reminiscent of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. If one looks closely at the columns of St. Isaac's Cathedral, one will find that they bear marks from shell fragments, yet these defects do not diminish but enhance the aesthetic value of the structure. Often, when paintings are cleaned and centuries-old dirt and corrections made during previous restoration campaigns are removed from them, specialists leave small sections of the canvases unrestored so that viewers can see the original version of the piece and at the same time go "back to the future" and compare it with later additions.

Many artworks were never completed. This includes Symphony No. 8 in B minor by F. Schubert, the Requiem by W.A. Mozart, later completed by J.L. Eybler and F.X. Süssmayr, opera Prince Igor by A. Borodin, which after his death was edited and completed by N. Rimsky-Korsakov and A. Glazunov, Tatlin's Tower, which was meant to embellish Troitskaya Square in St. Petersburg, but the project was never brought to fruition, etc. Although the idea of completing all unfinished artworks may seem tempting, we cannot but agree with V. Scully that some artworks should be preserved in their eroded state. Since the Basílica i Temple Expiatori de la Sagrada Família in Barcelona has always been a majestic ruin and had great appeal as a never-finished ruin, perhaps it would be best to leave it as is and not attempt to finish A. Gaudí's project (Nabokov, 1954).

The restoration and preservation of artworks require significant financial resources, so it is not surprising that the facades of many historic buildings in St. Petersburg have been in scaffolding for years. And yet, no matter how difficult this problem may seem, every person can contribute to its solution to the best of their ability. First, the buildings should not be modified without prior approval from specialists, as the violation of construction norms can lead these historic structures to be damaged or even destroyed. Another issue to not be approached rashly is renovating the interiors of apartments in houses built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. On the one hand, replacing historic ceilings with modern materials may seem to have advantages, not to



mention its financial benefits. On the other hand, nothing can compare with the original design of the ceiling, because it has memory. Each crack reveals a piece of the past, and the combination of the rough texture of wooden beams and smooth white moldings creates a multi-level effect that allows one to explore the history of the past like an archaeologist without leaving one's home.

J. Picoult (2021) in "The Book of Two Ways" cites the theory of the plurality of worlds, according to which every time we make a choice, we split in two. In our space-time dimension, many of the greatest works are damaged or destroyed. According to this theory, there is another, parallel reality in which all these masterpieces exist in their originally intended form as conceived by the artists (Picoult, 2021). The cultural identity of people living in this parallel dimension would be different, because they would not be familiar with the feeling of loss and emptiness when a piece of art, an integral part of human existence, suddenly turns into ruin or is distorted under the hand of an inexperienced or unscrupulous restoration expert. Without decisive action to preserve the cultural fund of humanity, the remaining masterpieces may also disappear (Bakhtin, 1979).

The preservation of cultural heritage is the keystone of our society since the resiliency and further development of the latter is largely determined by our attitude towards our history and past (Smith & Brown, 2020). The diversity of approaches to achieving this goal matches the complexity of the tasks. We hope that each of us, in one form or another, will participate in the preservation of cultural heritage, so that the next generation can also enjoy the beauty of the art that in many ways makes us who we are, shaping our cultural identity not only on a conscious but also on a subconscious level.

## **4 CONCLUSIONS**

Cultural heritage preservation plays an important role in maintaining cultural identity. Cultural heritage objects are valuable not only in their historical and artistic context but also as elements that contribute to the formation and consolidation of a person's connection with their cultural roots. They can influence self-identification, strengthen respect for national culture, and contribute to the formation of a positive identity. To effectively preserve and utilize cultural heritage objects, they need to be presented in a contemporary context, making them understandable and relevant. This calls for new





strategies and methods of preserving cultural heritage. Further research and efforts in cultural heritage preservation are crucial for supporting cultural identity and strengthening cultural heritage.

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