

Research Article

CONTRIBUTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TO THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN MALI

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ABSTRACT

Mali, located at the crossroads of sub-Saharan Africa and the Mediterranean world, has an exceptional cultural heritage, inherited from a long human and political history (Sudanese empires (Ghana, Mali, and Songhai) and many other states including the Bamanan kingdoms of Ségou and Kaarta, the theocracies toucouleur and peul, the kingdoms of Wassoulou and Kéné Dougou, and of course the colonial period from the end of the 19th century. This immense cultural heritage is manifested through material remains (archaeological sites, mosques, monuments) and immaterial ones (rites, festivals, knowledge, traditions). Despite this richness, the cultural heritage remains poorly known by populations, especially by young generations and decision-makers. This ignorance leads to harmful behaviours: destruction, abandonment, illicit trafficking, anarchic urbanization, religious intolerance. Young people, often in search of landmarks, are turning away from these goods when they should be the main actors of protection and valorization. However, nowadays, young people represent hope and the future and constitute the majority of the population, thus a strategic asset. That is why it is imperative, today, to involve young people in the protection and promotion of cultural heritage. Cultural continuity is at this price. Several questions to know: what is the current state of knowledge of young people's cultural heritage? What are the causes of the erosion of identity values? How to better involve and educate young people in the protection and promotion of cultural heritage in the current socio-cultural context? What is the role and place of cultural identity values in civic construction? Our methodological approach consisted of documentary review and field observation. This paper will first address the transversal approach involving school, family, media and educational institutions, the conversion of the value system into a structured educational program and the involvement of young people in artistic projects, cultural and citizens related to heritage.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Heritage Education, Identity Values, Promotion, Protection.

INTRODUCTION

At the crossroads of sub-Saharan Africa and the Mediterranean world, Mali stands out for its exceptional historical and cultural heritage. Heir to thousands of years of human presence and the great Sudanese and pharaonic empires (Ali TIMBINE, 2025) hundred years before medieval empires such as Ghana, Mali, Songhay—as well as kingdoms and theocracies such as those of Ségou, Kaarta, Wassoulou, and Kéné Dougou, the country preserves numerous tangible and intangible reminders of this prestigious past: archaeological sites, monuments, earthen mosques, cultural landscapes, rites, festivals, and traditional knowledge. (Carte culturelle du Mali, esquisse d'inventaire du patrimoine culturel national 2005).

Although deeply rooted in cultural traditions, cultural heritage has been facing certain difficulties for some time now. Today, it is being undermined by the pressures of development, demolition, land speculation, illegal sales, natural threats (bad weather), conflicts, vandalism, and the abandonment of certain values. However, young people, who make up the majority of the population, should be its main guardians and promoters, as demonstrated by the civic engagement of young people in Gao in 2012.

Young people today lack guidance and reference points, having little or no knowledge of our history and cultural heritage. This jeopardizes the future of cultural heritage assets, which are a factor in dialogue, peace, and social cohesion, an important source of direct and indirect

job creation through the rehabilitation and restoration of sites and monuments, and an asset for the economic and social development of local communities through cultural tourism.

The loss of cultural heritage values exposes communities to anomie and groupthink, leading to intolerance and violence, which considerably reduce the effects of actions implemented to promote peace and development. Added to this is the depravity of morals and cultural degeneration manifested in the moral erosion of society and the decay of citizenship and civic-mindedness.

To overcome these obstacles and ensure the continuity and affirmation of cultural identity, it is imperative to pass on elements of cultural heritage to younger generations at a time when current generations are increasingly turning to contemporary lifestyles. It will therefore be necessary to create the conditions for a cultural renaissance through the rehabilitation of cultural values that define identity and their role in building citizenship.

Involving young people in the protection and promotion of cultural heritage is therefore essential to ensuring the continuity of national identity, strengthening social cohesion, and building a sustainable future. This raises the question : how does cultural heritage contribute to the education of young people in Mali ? The aim is to demonstrate the contribution of cultural heritage to the education of young people in Mali.

METHODOLOGY

This study combined bibliographic research with field surveys. Various documents were consulted for the collection of secondary data:

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- Normative and institutional texts (UNESCO Conventions of 1972, 2003, and 2005, Mali's Cultural Policy Framework Document, etc.).
- Academic works (Konaré, Keita, Legal Customs of West Africa, etc.).
- Studies and reports on cultural heritage, diversity, and social regulation practices in Mali.
- Notes on artistic activities, social interactions, and official discourse.

Field surveys focused mainly on Field observations :

Information was collected during inventory or collection missions on tangible and intangible cultural heritage

- Inventory or collection of symbols, rituals, and practices that reflect mechanisms of cultural mixing and social cohesion.

The data collected mainly concerned :

- The importance of cultural heritage (cultural identity values) in building citizenship, peace, and social cohesion.
- The need to involve young people in protecting and promoting heritage in order to maintain ecological balance.
- Cultural heritage promotes social balance and mobilizes the arts, sensitivity, culture, and values.

Data analysis is based on an exploitation

RESULTS

Existing Safeguard Mechanisms

Mali, through the Ministry of Handicrafts, Culture, Hospitality Industry, and Tourism, is engaged in ongoing efforts to preserve and promote its cultural heritage by registering cultural properties and classifying them as national heritage sites of historical, architectural, and cultural interest.

These various initiatives are carried out in partnership with administrative, political, and community authorities.

At the national level, we can note some important legal measures :

Decree No. 4179 declaring the registration of natural monuments and sites in French overseas territories (Official Journal of French Sudan, 1955).

- The 2023 Constitution of Mali, in its preamble, highlights the need to protect cultural heritage.
- The Malian Penal Code, which criminalizes the destruction or alienation of cultural property.
- Law No. 2022-034 establishing the regime for the protection and promotion of national cultural heritage.
- Law No. 86-61/AN-RM of July 26, 1986, on the profession of cultural property dealer, amended by Law No. 026 of May 14, 2018 ;
- Decree No. 275/PG-RM of November 4, 1985, on the regulation of archaeological excavations ;
- Decree No. 299/PG-RM of September 19, 1986, on the regulation of prospecting, marketing, and exporting cultural property ;
- Decree No. 203/PG-RM of August 13, 1985, establishing a National Commission for the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage.

At the international level, Mali has ratified the following Conventions :

- The 1954 Hague Convention and its two Protocols (1954 and 1999) for the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict, instruments of accession to the Convention and the First Protocol entered into force for Mali on August 18, 1961. Mali's accession to the Second Protocol, adopted on March 26, 1999, took effect on November 15, 2012.
- Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (Paris, 1970);
- Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted in 1972;
- Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted in Paris on October 17, 2003;
- Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, adopted in Paris on October 20, 2005.

Education to Heritage

Education and research are the foundations of all development. Cultural and natural heritage have great educational value in that they help to enlighten populations, and in particular the younger generation, about the cultures and civilizations that communities have known. - A better understanding of cultural and natural heritage through various channels (school and university programs, site visits, documentaries) can help develop a sense of pride in young people and, in doing so, slow down the process of deculturation.

Research focused on cultural heritage makes it possible to learn about, improve, and perpetuate traditional conservation techniques. Example : seasonal maintenance work on places of worship and homes. In the field of archaeology, research makes it possible to uncover the history and evolution of society, especially in societies with oral traditions such as ours.

Cultural and natural heritage is used as a medium and source of inspiration in artistic creation and creativity: opera, cinema, architecture, visual arts, etc.

Heritage Education is cross-disciplinary: it draws on the arts, sensitivity, culture, and values. It promotes :

- Social balance implies self-recognition, respect for differences, and respect for each person's cultural identity. To maintain this balance, the following elements are taken into account:
- Consolidating a culture of peace by sharing the common values contained in heritage, eliminating barriers between different ethnic or cultural groups, and managing cross-border heritage.
- preserving the positive values associated with sites, such as cultural celebrations or social events that periodically bring together all the inhabitants of a village, and socializing cultural practices (collective harvesting, the "nampun " among the Minianka, the 'pori,' among the Senufo, and the "bilè " among the Dogon, for example);
 - the integration of peoples and nations through bringing peoples closer together, the positive dissemination of the country's image abroad, and the emergence of pluralism;
 - knowledge of the past, as cultural and natural sites and all the movable property associated with them are the main source of information about the past. The past, which forms a continuum with the present, is decisive in defining the cultural identity of all communities, whether in the south or the north.

- The need to involve young people in protecting and promoting heritage.

Ecological Balance

- The conservation and enhancement of natural sites (forests, sacred ponds and hills, caves and rock shelters, to name but a few) enable:
- The protection of the environment in order to preserve wildlife and forest resources and, with them, associated beliefs, traditional medicine, traces of human settlements, etc. It thus contributes to maintaining biodiversity, slowing the extinction of rare species, and combating desertification and the greenhouse effect.
- rational use of resources, as cultural and natural landscapes offer a variety of resources that enable communities to survive (products from gathering, hunting, fishing, agriculture, construction materials, and medicinal plants) ;
- the development of ecotourism by providing an ideal setting for the ecological education of local people and tourists, as well as recreational areas for local communities. Because it also generates financial resources, ecotourism contributes to the development of local communities.

Shared Responsibility between School, family, Media and educational institutions

The protection and promotion of cultural heritage is a shared responsibility between :

- The family and the school

Outside the family environment, children are welcomed into school, whether public, Koranic, or initiatory, to receive a complementary education. There, they discover a new central figure : the teacher. Through images, lessons, and tests, students assimilate knowledge that stimulates their thinking and reactions.

The school thus appears as a true educational complex. The teacher, whether a primary or secondary school teacher, acts as a mediator of the knowledge essential to the student's culture and education, from elementary to higher education. As the leader of the class or lecture, they transmit not only science but also awareness, in accordance with the values upheld by the state and the republican model.

Through its structures, public policies, technical services, academic bodies, and school curricula, the state disseminates educational standards in order to stimulate learners' intelligence, open their minds to the world, and help them adapt to the demands of their environment.

Heritage education is therefore based on the combination of the teacher, educational content, and transmission tools.

Today, alongside traditional books and notebooks, multimedia enriches teaching materials: educational kits, audio books, and more.

- Media

The media play an essential role in heritage education : they raise awareness, transmit and promote cultures, while democratizing access to knowledge through :

- Awareness Raising and Transmission

- The media inform and raise awareness about issues related to the preservation of cultural heritage, whether tangible (monuments, works of art) or intangible (traditions, know-how).

- Promoting intergenerational transmission (television, radio, and press by helping to maintain a link between generations by recounting the history of traditions and promoting local practices).

- Promotion and Democratization

- The media give a wide audience access to heritage content (virtual tours, documentaries, podcasts).
- Partnerships between educational institutions and the media promote the integration of heritage into school curricula, making learning more lively and interactive (cultural mediation).

- Innovation and Modernity

Social media and influencers play an increasingly important role in spreading traditions and promoting cultural practices among younger generations.

- The digitization of archives and works enables sustainable preservation and innovative educational transmission.

In short, the media are essential mediators between heritage and society. They do not merely preserve : they reinvent the way heritage is taught and experienced, reconciling tradition and modernity.

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Need for an integrated educational program to convey these values and strengthen human capital.

The UNESCO conventions (2003, 2025) place a central emphasis on education, awareness-raising, and capacity-building. Their main objectives are as follows :

- Promotion and protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage through :
 - educational, awareness-raising, and information dissemination programs aimed at the general public, particularly young people;
 - training and education activities targeted at the communities and groups concerned;
 - initiatives to develop skills in safeguarding, management, and scientific research;
 - non-formal modes of knowledge transmission.
- Informing and raising public awareness of the threats to this heritage, as well as the measures implemented under the Conventions.
- Promoting education for the protection of natural spaces and places of memory, which are essential to the expression of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

Mali, with its rich cultural heritage inherited from centuries of history and political diversity, now faces a major challenge in preserving and passing on this wealth to future generations. Despite the abundance of tangible and intangible heritage, a persistent lack of awareness, particularly among young people, undermines cultural continuity and encourages harmful behaviors. However, young people, who make up the majority of the population, represent a strategic lever for the protection and promotion of heritage.

It therefore seems necessary to invest in education, awareness-raising, and the active involvement of young people so that they become the real actors in safeguarding identity values.

These values are not merely historical relics, but essential pillars for building citizenship and strengthening social cohesion. Mali's cultural sustainability therefore depends on the collective ability to transform this heritage into a source of reference points, pride, and a shared future.

In short, heritage education for young people is a prerequisite for ensuring cultural continuity and sustainable development in Mali. It must be conceived as a national project involving all social and institutional actors.

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