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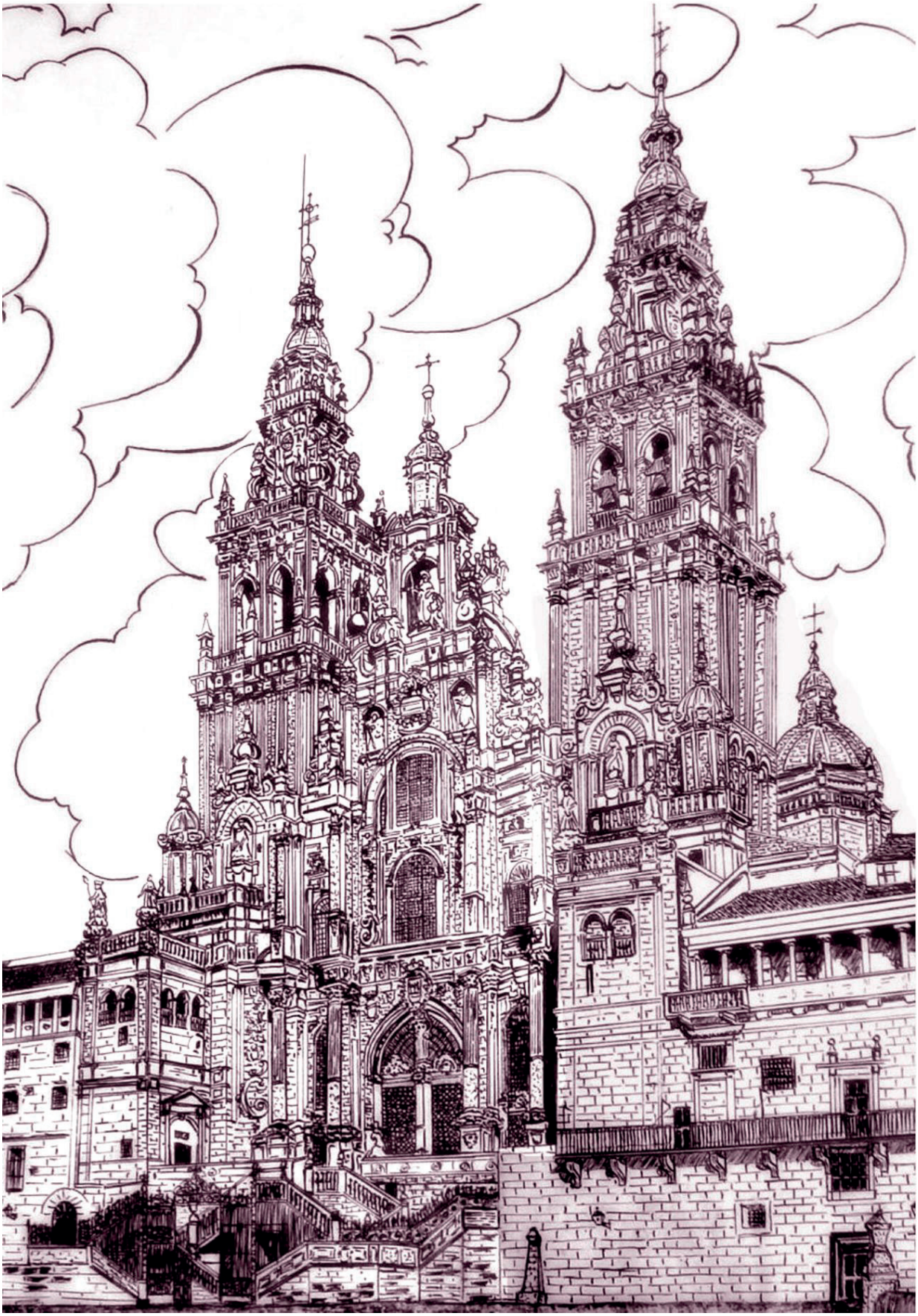

Santiago de Compostela Cathedral Basilica, Spain – a World Heritage Site.

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INTERFACING HERITAGES, CULTURES, & LANDSCAPES: PAVING THE WAY FOR CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Within the system of complex interconnectedness and interactions among cultures, heritage, and landscapes and their role in making cultural sustainability—all that is rooted in the past together, we seek to search ways, paths, and means that are implied for framing and creating a base for the UN Sustainable Development Goals Target 11.4, focussing on 'Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. Together with community development, nature-based education, and pilgrimages, revealing the spirit of places is part of the cultural process of transforming landscapes—seen and visualised in the fabric of landscape architecture. These attributes can be examined in relation to the trends and perspectives of the emerging literature and regional representations. The inherent and manifested meanings, symbols, metaphors, aesthetics, etc., exemplify the representations. In contrast to the mundane environment, spirituality offers a bridge through transcendence and connection to the inherent power of serene nature, which is also reflected in architectural symbols. These attributes are clearly visible in the holy-heritage cities. This paper presents an introductory review and appraisal of the entire journey and the resultant cultural landscapes, following the path of RWYC - Reconnecting With Your Culture, and attempts to lay out a pathway for cultural and sacred sustainability.

Keywords: architectural symbolism, heritagescapes, cultural sustainability, sacred sustainability, cultural landscapes, cultural wholes, mosaicness.

1. HERITAGE: THE PERSPECTIVE

Heritage is a most engaging contemporary foundation. Over the last quarter century, it has evolved from a small, elite pastime to a significant popular movement—a campaign to preserve and celebrate everything and all that we inherit from the past (Lowenthal 1996). It has been recently conceived that 'heritage is under stress and changing its role in society due to internal and external factors. At the same time, it also suggests a need to activate and change how we understand, protect, and manage heritage' (Bandarin 2024, p. xiv). In contemporary society, the way heritage is defined and presented is primarily a European concept that developed more than two centuries (cf. Bandarin 2024, pp. 12–14; Singh and Niglio 2025, p. 8). History encompasses nature, the cosmos, humanity, and landscapes. The past is visualised, touched, tasted, smelled, heard, read about, and communicated by humankind. Empathy, re-enactment, memory, and commemoration overwhelm traditional history, which converges into the heritage ensemble (Lowenthal 2015). Heritage is generally understood as 'something handed down from the past which has value in the present' (Hall 2011, p. 4). In Indian tradition, this is called '*virāsat*' (legacy). In societies that are becoming increasingly multicultural, knowledge of cultural values is of fundamental importance in creating identities and images that reciprocally protect and preserve cultural heritage (Niglio 2017).

In his seminal work, Mircea Eliade [1907–1986] introduced the concept of sacredness as part of his innovative research on '*hierophanies*', which refers to manifestations of sacred realities—the manifestation of the sacred in the physical world. Eliade (1959, p. 11) writes, 'Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane'. By manifesting the sacred, 'any object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu. A sacred stone remains a stone […], but for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural

reality' (Eliade 1959, p. 12). Sacrality and supernatural reality are the essence of sacred heritage. The dichotomy (between the sacred and the profane) provokes a corresponding bipolar distinction about spatiality between the private and the public (Singh & Niglio 2025, pp. 9-10). Émile Durkheim [1858–1917] initially posited this idea (1912) concerning his classical theory on 'sacred things', i.e. things set apart and forbidden, whose function is radically different from the norm. Similarly, in contemporary discourses, Jonathan Smith has clarified that things become 'sacred' because they are identified with and used in the selected places where the ritual is enacted; as he said, 'Ritual is not an expression of or a response to the "sacred"; rather, something […] is made sacred by ritual' (Smith 1987, p. 106).

It is accepted that "the scope of heritage was dramatically expanded at the beginning of the present century by another UNESCO convention that introduced the idea of intangible cultural heritage. This is a collective name for activities and traditions that have deep historical roots in a culture and are still practised and experienced by participating in them. Heritage, which once meant the static preservation of things from an obsolete past, has been expanded to embrace a form of temporality in which the active continuity between past, present, and future is constantly acknowledged by adapting long-held practices and traditions to current circumstances" (Relph 2025, p. 56). Moreover, "heritage has enormous cultural significance because the idea that the past has enduring value has thoroughly permeated how the world and its places are experienced. In less than a single generation, it has grown from nothing to an almost omnipresent aspect of places, and its international popularity cuts across cultures, societies, politics, languages, and ethnicities. It is also significant because its emphasis on the past amounts to an implicit critique of prevailing trends towards growth and progress in contemporary society" (Relph 2025, p. 57).

2. THE ESSENCE OF SUSTAINABILITY

The word *Sustainability* is etymologically derived from the Latin word *sustinere,* which means to hold (*tenere*- hold, keep, support), thus representing an unlimited and indefinite place that takes on a physical connotation through material elements that describe and circumscribe it. Inferences of this word were also used in other languages, such as Italian *sostenere*, Spanish *sostener*, Portuguese *sustentar*, French *soutenir,* and English *sustain*. Still, it was forsaken mainly during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods. Additionally, a German forestry handbook, published in 1713, used the term 'Nachhaltigkeit', meaning 'sustained yield', to refer to the practice of never harvesting more than what the forest can reproduce. This materiality represents the narrative nucleus that the community recognises as essential for the site's sustainability, attributing specific "personalities" to it. In a space imbued with both material and immaterial elements, natural and cultural references shape the landscape of men, thereby describing their specific sustainability in dialogue with the local culture (Singh and Olimpia 2023a, p. 7).

Examining contemporary society and economic growth in the 19th century, John Stuart Mill (1848) took the idea of an economy consistent with the limits of the earth seriously, what he called a 'stationary state', and proposed his idea to support the society: 'There would be as many scopes as ever for all kinds of mental culture and moral and social progress; as much room for improving the art of Living, and much more likelihood of its being improved' (as cited in Meadows, et al. 2004, p. 257). In Western economic thought, this was the earliest prophecy for the revival of humankind, which has an inherent instinct for sustainability.

Since all the problems are generated from the mind, the solutions will also come from the mind, said Legrand (2021), "All the problems we face come from our minds and hearts. There also lie the solutions." However, this requires a constant practice of awakening the mind through deeply-rooted education and understanding cultural interconnectedness, as well as awakening and rejuvenating the human conscience to actively participate in the universal family (*Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam,* as mentioned in the *Mahā Upanishad*: 6.72-73). We should recognise global interdependence as the ultimate reality, thereby establishing a sustainable global order through optimal international governance (cf. Lopez-Claros et al., 2020), fostering a new dynamic world order and global balance while adhering to the principles of Ethics, Values, and Virtues (cf. Stückelberger, 2020). Moving from an economic to a cultural age can be made operative — linking cultural conscience and holistic understanding in the light of Sustainable Development (cf. Schafer 2020). Culture and the cosmos are interconnected in creating conscience through civilisational continuity, reviving the path that allows us to reconcile our minds and hearts through spiritual awakening (cf. Legrand 2021).

Over time, in the scientific literature, it has reappeared in the 1972 environmental report, '*The Limits to Growth*,' to convey 'the means of being resourceful in such a way that things may be sustained/continued in the future by generations to come' (Meadows, et al. 1972, pp. v-vii). Here, they have used the word 'equilibrium', which in "system language means that positive and negative loops are in balance and that the system's major stocks—in this case, population, capital, land, land fertility, non-renewable resources, and pollution—are held fairly. [However], it does not necessarily mean that the population and economy are static or stagnant" (Meadows, et al. 2004, p. 246).

The classical model of Sustainable Development proposed in Brundtland's report (1987, WCED) has been critically examined over time and comprehended under the umbrella of the Universal Forum of Cultures 2007, emphasising the base of Developing Civility – culture, language, and religions for inter-faith dialogue. By 2015, culture was recognised as a fourth pillar or mediating bridge, facilitating a more thoughtful approach to culture in sustainable development decision-making. Culture, as a new paradigm of sustainability, suggests a cultural transition towards a society where sustainability is embedded in the culture and provides a platform for a better future.

The ethics of "sustainable development," to which almost everyone subscribes today, requires this generation to use the world's environmental resources in ways that do not jeopardise "the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Being successful, this principle requires another dimension – reverence, revelation, and ethical concerns" (Singh and Olimpia 2023b, p. 27). Development should preserve, not destroy, those assets of the natural

and spiritual power of one's cultural heritage, which future generations would also wish to enjoy and cherish (Singh 1996, pp. 86-87). The spirit of sustainability can be explained as the ethic to behave in ways that help others and to realise the more profound nature of things; this cosmic integrity is ultimately the sanctity of life. This also involves a way of life and action determined by the more profound principle of realising the intrinsic value of one's services. This is a call of the time: 'When we care for the Earth, we are caring for ourselves' – "Despite our scientific and cultural taming of wild nature, we still wander, confused over how to value it" (Rolston 1983, p. 181). Obviously, "since the roots of our (*ecological*) trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not. We must rethink and re-feel our nature and destiny" (White 1967, p. 1207). Ethical values are the moral force in human beings' sustainable existence, progress, maintenance, and continuance.

The notion of *Prithvīputra* ('Earth-human'), as narrated by the great Hindi laureate V.S. Agrawal (1960, p. 23), is characterised by integrative thought among diversities. Those who lose the wish to be away from their earthly root will undoubtedly reach the grip of decay and death. Inspired by the *Atharva Veda*, Agrawal (1960, p. 91) proposed the framework of needful design, which has three apexes: the local environment (the earth), the human environment (habitat), and their resultant culture (milieu). This would be a way of linking 'locality' (*laukika*) to 'universality' (*vaishvika*) and ultimately culminating in 'cosmality' (*brahmāṇḍīya*)—the metaphysical framework of sustainability.

It embodies the 'spirit' of spirituality and interconnectedness, rooted in the past, conveying messages, existing in the present, fostering experiences, and envisioning the future through what is known as *sanātana* ('Essenceness-Beingness-Becomingness'), which, over time and space, represents eternity. This is a unified totality for psychological well-being, soul, and spiritual healing (see Singh 2009). It is to be noted that the Sanskrit word *sanātana* denotes that which always is and has neither beginning nor end, i.e., that which is eternal. This can be compared to the philosophy of sustainability, which embodies the principles of 'existence-maintenance-continuity' (*saṅdhrita,* or *saṁposhita*). One of the Vedic texts, dated ca 6th century BCE, the *Ishvasya Upanishada* (1.1), says, "All this—whatsoever moves in this universe (and those that move not) is covered (indwelt or pervaded or enveloped or clothed) by the Lord. That was renounced, enjoy. Do not covet anybody's wealth (or – Do not covet, for whose is wealth?)." This is considered the philosophy of sustainable living in Hindu ideology.

Indeed, we need a good and balanced combination and synthesis between insider and outsider, the Eastern and the Western, interdisciplinary and intra-disciplinary, experiential and reverential, rational and relational, as well as Nature-Man reciprocity, and so on; thus, we would have sustainable, happy, habitable, humane, and spiritually rich landscapes. Let us hope for 'the Truthfulness through the Goodness in a Beautiful way' -- *Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*. The Earth does not belong to Man; Man belongs to the Earth. All things are connected, like the blood that unites one family. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

Vision without Action is Empty. Action without Vision is Blind. Let the Vision be the *force* behind Action, and Action the *energy* behind Vision. This is how to understand the interconnectedness between human beings and Mother Nature. Let us keep the spirit always awakened and pray to Mother Nature (as *landscape*) to direct us on the right path to realising interconnectedness. This is a call for nourishing Soil, Soul, and Society where Humanity meets Divinity. Let us try to understand, feel, and ultimately frame it in making 'sustainable landscapes' (Singh & Olimpia 2023b, p. 37).

A recent study remarks that "If the urban SDG is to prove useful as a tool as intended for encouraging local and national authorities alike to make positive investments in the various components of urban sustainability transitions, then it must be widely relevant, acceptable, and practicable" (Simon et al., 2016, p. 60). This is particularly relevant in the case of Asian cities, where one continually faces the challenge of balancing local and universal perspectives. Additionally, central to this task has been the challenge of determining how to benchmark and measure performance according to the SMART criteria (i.e., specific, measurable, assignable, realistic, and time-specific) based on specialist scholarship, the existing literature and practical experience of the site (cf. Singh 2022, p. 6).

3. HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN ETHICAL VIEW

Heritage serves as a key economic resource in promoting tourism. Tour organisers and tourist agencies view cultural heritage as a resource to be exploited. On the other hand, the development and governmental agencies at most levels fail to reinvest profits in conservation. Subsequently, the over-promotion of tourism led to the encouragement of unthinking commercialism, with disastrous effects on natural beauty and the centuries-old rhythm of community life. With the increasing pace of modern tourism, the lack of maintenance of heritage ecology poses a significant threat to the deterioration of the heritage environment. Heritage ethics is a pathway that focuses on the relationship between humans and their cultural environment, and is identical to environmental ethics. It is a holistic approach to understanding and evaluating our moral obligations to protect and preserve the cultural environment and its heritage attributes. Heritage ethics seeks to bring together the interests of both human beings and nature, recognising that both are interdependent and have intrinsic value. A variety of ethical theories, including consequentialism, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics, define heritage ethics. These ethical theories provide a framework for understanding the moral obligations we have to the environment and how we should act to protect it. Environmental ethics also draws upon the fields of philosophy, economics, ecology, and law, providing a comprehensive approach to understanding and evaluating the moral implications of human actions.

There is an ethical gap in promoting tourism. In fact, this should have been promoted in light of the religious perspective of tourism and pilgrimage, with a view to maintaining the spirit of sustainability. Feilden, in his keynote speech at the first International Symposium on World Heritage Cities in 1991, has rightly warned us: What we do

today will be the history of tomorrow, and ultimately it is by history that we are judged. Civilising the city is now a vital cultural question. 'Where there is no vision, the people perish'"(Feilden 1993, p. 33).

We need to experience the vision in the *spirit of sustainability*. However, such issues are primarily concerned with moral understanding and 'Self-realisation' (*ātma-chetanā*). Alas! The increasing pace of 'ethical-and-moral pollution' is slowly threatening the cultural sense and identity of humankindness (cf. Singh 1996). A question always comes to mind: whether, in the face of all these modern changes, the heritage site can retain those qualities of the spirit that have made it a magnetic place. May one hope that the preservation of those qualities must derive from those old impulses of the tradition and belief which have made the glory of sacredscape the powerful symbol of that rich cultural heritage. One may also hope to revive the sense of belonging in the light of ecoethics, for preserving the age-old, intangible spirit of sustainability, and for recognising our identity in the context of heritage sites. Ecoethics is a moral principle that guides behaviour to benefit others—a form of justice for all, within an ecological cosmology known as *ecojustice*. Says Skolimowski (1990, p. 101), "Ecojustice as justice for all is a consequence of our ecological cosmology, of the idea of responsibility for all, and of the perception of the interconnectedness of all". We need the Self-realisation for responsibility – "a spiritual bridge which makes of rationality human rationality, and of ethics a nourishing river for the meaning of our lives" (*ibid.* , p. 100).

The disappearance of the cosmic relationship between human nature is one of the fundamental causes of the environmental crisis we face today. In the Indian context, it is referred to as 'ethical-and-moral pollution', or crisis, replacing the old value system of sustainability with materialism and consumerism. It appears that over the past 700 years of foreign cultural domination, superseded by Muslim culture and British Christianity, the Sanātana Hindu value system has lost many of its facets; nevertheless, the seeds remain preserved in some forms of religious ethics and related performances. We certainly need the public awareness march *(Chetnā march)!* Raising mass awareness of traditional cultural values would foster a new spirit of sustainability. However, such a revival need not turn into fundamentalism; that should not cause any damage to secularism. Gandhi has warned us that 'nature has enough for everybody's need, not for everybody's greed' (cf. Dwivedi 1990, p. 211).

Environmental problems arise from people living out of harmony with nature. Realising the deeper nature of things, the cosmic integrity to be re-searched as intrinsic value. Most of the great religious thoughts, including those of Hinduism, have a strong sense of spirituality tied to a particular place. It conveys the sense of the place's specialness. The spirit of place certainly influences the unconscious in specific, predictable ways, what Carl Jung calls "psychic localisation". Says Swan (1992, p. 225): "The spirit of place is the result of the interplay between the spiritual world and nature, and the collective product of the interactions of the people of that area too. When they all come into harmony, the spirit of place can really work its magic best".

According to Hindu theology, everywhere exists the spirit-of-place, imbuing the Earth and the heaven with its unique and ineradicable sense of rhythm, mood, and character; the experience of these results in a variety of local forms of faith and traditions derived from it; however, the fundamental ethic of reverence is everywhere. But disturbing the spirit and misusing the holiness of a place bring calamity to society. If the harmony is disturbed, the spirit of the place diminishes its sanctity and the power of life. The spirit of sustainability defines development in terms of the emergence of holistic understanding and action in every sector of society (Engel & Engel 1990, p. 20). The deeper principle of intrinsic value determines the meaning of the action that this action serves. After all, intrinsic value requires a new moral thought, of course, rooted in place and tradition. Says Tuan (1994, p. 9), "We need to be rooted in place, for without roots we cannot develop those habits and routines that are essential components of sanity. We need to have a sense of place, because without it we shall have failed to use our unique capacity of appreciation".

We want to possess the sacred without owing the ordinary. Seeking to tap into the power of heritage sites, we desire a direct, bodily experience, such as taking a sacred bath. As a result, we inevitably look beyond everything without seeing it for what it truly is. That is why a preparatory and special rite and mode of the human psyche are prescribed before entering the territory of sacredscape. Only then can one have a more intimate experience of touch and feeling. However, only those who have a deep faith and are well-prepared for psychological transformation can have that experience. The reverence and faith people have for their cultural heritage landscape, an integral part of their traditions, should be respected and incorporated into the World Conservation Strategy. The beliefs of nearby inhabitants regarding the sacredness of heritage sites should be integral to the conservation programme.

Attachment to a place is a pre-requisite for developing a sense of the spirit of place. This sense of attachment provides emotional and spiritual sustainability to both individuals and the community. Attachment is an existential and phenomenological experience. The key to the future lies in the commitment of the human inhabitants and their maintenance of a sense of attachment (cf. Singh 1996).

Reverence -- sanctity of life as a deeper vision, responsibility -- the connecting link between ethics and rationality, *frugality* -- grace without waste and promotion for others, and *ecojustice* -- value specific ecological cosmology, altogether form the minimal core of intrinsic values for proper conservation and preservation of the spirit of sustainability (as advocated by Skolimowski 1990, pp. 100-102). In fact, **reverential development** is unitary in the broadest and most profound sense, combining reverence and sanctity of life with contemporary economic, social, moral, cultural and traditional premises to bring peace and harmony with nature (Skolimowski 1990, p. 103). The fact that they may be challenging to implement in practice in no way negates their importance and desirability. Paraphrased Carl Jung's provocation should be taken as a moral and ethical concern for the heritage environment: 'People of our earth would never find true peace until they could come into a harmonious relationship with and deep feelings of reverence to the heritagescapes that are the cradle and identity of our culture and civilisation since time immemorial'.

Following D.H. Lawrence's (1923) provocation that the 'spirit of place' is a profound reality, and to understand the earth's mysteries and wisdom, heritage ecology is a vital vision. We may separate ourselves from the web of our heritage in the line of modern secularism, but it will always be in the heart and soul of ourselves. It is essential to remember that modern science and the way of life, along with ancient wisdom and its message, can work together to help humanity find a harmonious and peaceful path of integrity with nature. Our heritage sites tell the story of our history, possibilities, and prospects for our existence and continuity. Heritage is a mirror of humankind's growth, progress, and prospects; it must be preserved. This ideology should be viewed as an environmental ethics with heritage ecology at its core (cf. Singh & Niglio, 2026).

4. SACRED SITES, SACRALITY AND RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPES

It is noted that "In recent years, sacred sites have garnered significant attention from the international community engaged in heritage preservation and management. Their unique significance and character have been acknowledged within the framework of international heritage conventions and charters, prompting the development and testing of specialised management processes aimed at preserving both their spiritual and heritage values. This shift marks a departure from the traditional concept of heritage, which has been predominantly associated with secular values, artistic excellence, or historical importance" (Bandarin 2025, p. ix).

The landscape is 'nothing more than an 'interdisciplinary cultural synthesis' where the humanistic approach, together with subjective knowledge (emotions, creativity, imagination) and objective knowledge (cultural heritage, traditions, belief systems, scientific codifications), leads towards 'an emotional projection' of the landscape based on sensory aspects and relative values that depend on the observer's traditions and lifeways. That is why the sacredness of the landscape depends on human beings' sensory reflections (Niglio 2025, p. 160). It is true that, over time, the aspect of humanising the landscape has prevailed; history teaches us that since ancient times, human beings have always established a reciprocal dialogue with the environment and its resources in order to ensure their existence and survival (Bianchi 2013). Sensory experiences and resultant responses take shape in terms of a screen of knowledge, values, beliefs, and emotions. In such a process, world vision and views, as well as the spatial manifestation of cosmology, are ways of systematically representing spatial experience, memory, imagination, and cultural exposure.

As Sinha (1991, p. 30*)* remarks, "a sacred place is not viewed for aesthetic appreciation only (although that may be a part of it), but is also associated with transcendental experience. Therefore, its environmental manipulation should be handled extremely sensitively with full awareness of religious history and contemporary cultural meanings." All such sites and places that are living cultural treasures are a part of our heritage; therefore, they must be preserved and maintained. Of course, there exists a line of thought that heritage preservation is a luxury that can be spared, but it is only marginally true when times are hard. One has to remember that "a principal aim of culture is to extend the realm of the familiar at the expense of nature and the strange" (Tuan 1986, p. 16).

The concept of 'sacred sustainability' constitutes a multidisciplinary framework towards reconciling "the preservation of sacred spaces, cultural traditions, and environmental integrity with the exigencies of contemporary urbanisation. Drawing from urban studies, religious studies, environmental science, and cultural anthropology, this framework emphasises sacred spaces as cultural and ecological assets, integrates spiritual values into environmental conservation, and safeguards biocultural diversity" (Gupta, Mitra, & Gahalot 2025, p. 434). By advocating adaptive heritage management aligned with evolving cultural practices, this nuanced approach offers a promising strategy for holy-heritage cities of profound religious and cultural significance to preserve their sacred essence amidst modernisation pressures; this is vividly explained in an exhaustive case study of Vrindavan, one of such premier pilgrimage places (ibid., p. 434). Moreover, "in synthesising these diverse theoretical strands, sacred sustainability emerges as a holistic framework for urban development in religiously significant [holy-heritage] cities. It calls for an approach beyond merely preserving physical structures, instead seeking to maintain the dynamic interplay between spiritual beliefs, cultural practices, and the natural environment", and the associated attributes (*ibid*., p. 434). The holistic strategy for planning sacred sites encompasses a range of elements, including the conservation of sacred topography, ecological rejuvenation, cultural continuity, and community engagement.

Sacred space is considered a vital representative of interfacing heritagescapes and cultural sustainability; of course, the perception, uses, practices, and processes of manifestations vary—recording both distinctiveness and resemblances. Sacred space is also envisioned as a composite mosaic of constructions—mental, visual, memorial, architectural, physical, ritual, cultural, traditional, literary, and supporting —encompassing a range of attributes.

Religion and its pilgrimages to sacred sites are among the most perfect manifestations of cultural heritage. Cultural heritage comprises those things we inherit from the past, utilise in the present, value as heritage and hope to pass on to future generations in a sustainable way. This encompasses both tangible and intangible elements, as well as the transitional elements that comprise the human record. One of the key pillars of culture is religion, and a great deal of the human heritage valued and valorised throughout the world is sacred in nature. Overall, "religious heritage is manifested in buildings (e.g. temples, churches, mosques, ashrams and shrines), religious and archaeological sites, belief systems, practices and rituals, music and poetry, dance, prayers, worship and veneration of deity, sacred scripture, food practices and offerings, and many other elements that underlie religious practices, places and beliefs. Sacred heritage is often the most pervasive manifestation of heritage in cities and frequently forms the foundations of the social and economic life of places through tourism, worship, culture and urban life in general" (Timothy 2025, p. xv). Pilgrimage, as a metaphor for life and as the actual act of travelling in search of meaning, architecture, and its capacity to enable us to have, be, and create meaningful experiences within our daily lives. However, with the impact

of changes and transformations, the classical sense of pilgrimage has evolved in pilgrimage tourism; the effect of secularisation has, in many ways, altered its symbolic, mystical, and religious qualities (Singh & Rana, 2025, p. 467).

The role and status of sacred heritages in cities in the context of UN-SDGs and associated cultural and sacred landscapes with reflections on awakening the more profound cultural sense of harmonising the world and enhancing religious and spiritual tourism and urbanity—all together make a frame of 'Future of the Earth', RWYC—'Reconnecting With Your Culture' and emerging vision of 'Cultural Sustainability'.

5. HERITAGE IN MAKING A CULTURALLY SUSTAINABLE PATH

The political dimension of "heritagisation" is vital "to understanding how cultural heritage is preserved, sustained, and used for broader political and social benefits. The process of heritagisation, which refers to the transformation of particular places, practices, or objects into "heritage" to make them politically and socially valuable, plays a significant role in how national identities are constructed and promoted, taking into view the cultural history and representative symbols" (Singh & Rana 2025, p. 460). This issue is recently exemplified with a case study of the Kāshī Vishvanātha Temple Corridor (KVTC) project in India's prime holy-heritage city of Varanasi, where the process of heritagisation has been used for political messaging, shaping public perception, and galvanising a specific cultural or religious identity (cf. *ibid*.).

Many of the holy-heritage and pilgrimage cities in India [and in several South and Southeast Asian countries] have been significantly reshaped by commercialisation, altering their socio-cultural fabric through heritagisation and economic strategies, e.g., in cases of Varanasi and Vrindavan. The influx of tourists and pilgrims has driven the rise of commercial establishments, often replacing traditional religious spaces and practices, thereby altering the city's traditional and cultural character, for which it was previously known. "This commodification of religious experiences has transformed spiritual rituals to cater to transient visitors, compromising the preservation of authentic customs. As a result, its sacred core, once renowned for its contemplative tranquillity, now exhibits the characteristics of a commercial urban centre. The commodification of religious experiences has introduced large-scale projects integrating residential, spiritual, and commercial dimensions" (Gupta, Mitra, & Gahalot 2025, p. 429).

The cultural heritage site planning involved five broad principles (Table 1). Creating site plans that enhance cultural heritage is a complex but rewarding endeavour. By adhering to the principles of preservation, authenticity, accessibility, sustainability, and interpretation, we can ensure that these invaluable sites are protected for future generations while also providing enriching experiences for visitors. Through careful planning, community engagement, and the strategic use of technology, we can create spaces that celebrate our shared history and foster a deeper appreciation for the diverse cultures that shape our world.

Table 1. Key Principles for Cultural Heritage Site Planning, and the Example

Se	**Principle**	**Objectives, Perspectives, and the Example**
1	**Preservation**	Protecting and preserving the site's integrity for future generations. This involves a careful assessment of existing conditions, identification of vulnerabilities, and implementation of measures to mitigate threats such as erosion, decay, vandalism, or inappropriate development. *Example*: The ongoing conservation efforts at the Great Wall of China.
2	**Authenticity**	Maintaining the authenticity of a cultural heritage site is essential. This encompasses both the physical fabric and the intangible aspects, such as traditional practices, rituals, and associated memories. *Example*: The restoration of the historical landscapes in Hoi An City, Vietnam.
3	**Accessibility**	Accessibility to the cultural heritage sites should be available to everyone, regardless of physical abilities or cultural background. This requires thoughtful design of pathways, entrances, and facilities to accommodate diverse needs and preferences. *Example*: The installation of ramps and elevators at the Colosseum in Rome
4	**Sustainability**	Site plans should promote long-term sustainability, taking into account environmental, social, and economic factors. This involves minimising the impact on the surrounding environment, respecting the needs of the local community, and ensuring the site's economic viability. *Example*: Implementing strict carrying capacity in the Machu Picchu Sanctuary (Peru).
5	**Interpretation**	Effective interpretation helps visitors connect with the site's significance and fosters a deeper understanding of its cultural value. This can be achieved through various methods, such as guided tours, exhibits, signage, and multimedia presentations. *Example*: Using appropriate technology at Pompeii to visualise the ancient city.

(Source: Collated from various sources by the authors).

The emerging concept of Sacred Sustainability, a beacon of hope amidst the global crises of climate change and biodiversity, recognises the Earth as a living entity, akin to the Greek theology of Gaia, deserving of respect and care. This viewpoint elevates nature conservation from a mere necessity to a moral imperative – a moral duty (*dharma*) of human beings. It's not just about survival; it's about restoring the spiritual connection humanity once had with the natural world, dating back to the existence of life. This life philosophy intertwines ethics with ecology, urging

humankind to nurture rather than exploit the planet's resources and maintain a harmonious balance in the cosmos. The journey towards Sacred Sustainability is not just about preservation; it's about transformation—transforming the world into a vibrant and divine place where human conscience and sublime nature coexist in balance, making the world harmonious and happy.

Nevertheless, embracing Sacred Sustainability requires a global effort, a paradigm shift that may seem daunting but is undoubtedly essential. By redefining our ethical and spiritual obligations towards the Earth, we lay the foundation for a sustainable future. This is a global call, in the provoking of ancient sages: "Heal the Earth, Heal and save ourselves". This call aligns with Buddhist thought. Being sustainable while still obtaining what you need to survive is more possible than it ever has been. In the Metta Sutta, meanwhile, the Buddha encourages the practice of Metta (loving kindness) toward all beings. The scripture reads, "Let one radiate boundless love towards the entire world—above, below, and across—unhindered, without ill-will, without enmity." Being close to nature and becoming one with it is a Buddhist vision, which can be portrayed in an image (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. The Buddha in the gesture of meditation (*padmāsana*), awakening his Self to be part of sublime nature.

Based on his study of English heritage, Thurley proposed a model of 'Heritage Cycle' (Fig. 2 a and b), "where an increasing understanding of the historic environment leads to people valuing it more and, as a consequence, caring for it better. An environment cared for will be enjoyed, and enjoyment normally brings a thirst to learn more, thus completing the cycle" (Thurley 2005, p. 26). The vision behind this model is "*Making the Past Part of our Future*." The heritage cycle has four interrelated and sequential phases with high-level strategic aims.

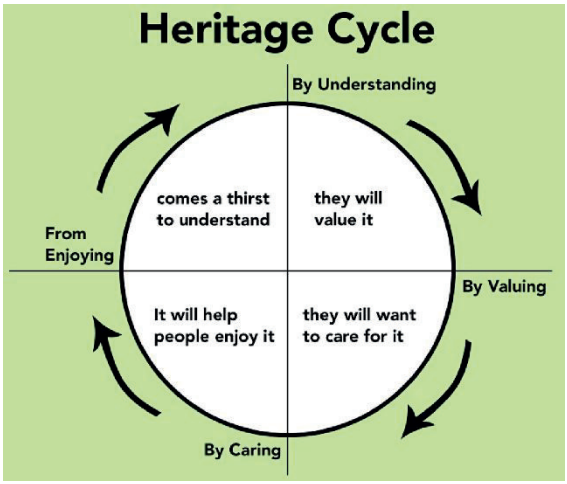

Fig. 2a. Heritage Cycle: Interfaces, after Thurley 2005.

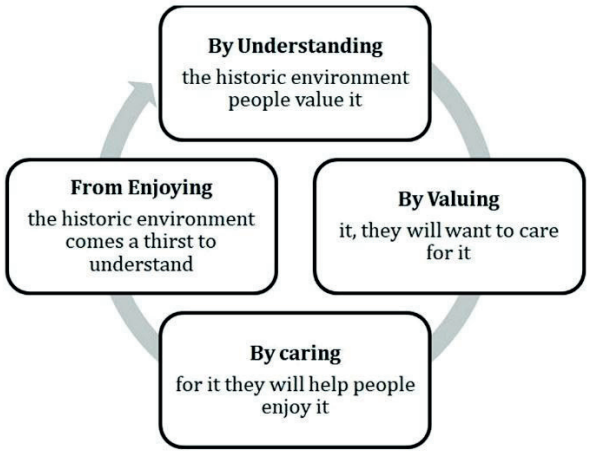

Fig. 2b. Heritage Cycle: Interlinkages, after Thurley 2005, p. 26.

The first is *to help people develop their understanding of the historic environment*—an essential prerequisite for dealing with our built heritage, both on a macro level and a micro level. The second aim is *to bring the historic environment onto other people's agendas*—to foster the recognition that the historic environment is a cross-cutting issue affecting many areas of policy and activity, not just a small box labelled heritage. Thirdly, we need *to enable and promote sustainable change to the historic environment*—promoting processes that facilitate conservation without any hurdles, in line with the vision of a sustainable future. The fourth aim is *to help local communities care for their historic environment*—through the active involvement of local authorities and stakeholders, who take responsibility and powers to protect and enhance the heritage. From the fourth part of the heritage cycle, our fifth aim is *to stimulate and harness enthusiasm for England's historic environment*—we need to harness this enthusiasm for good and nurture it where possible among those who currently do not have access to it through education and awareness. We need to use all these resources efficiently and effectively for the public good in order to create a sustainable and happy future. These may be challenging and difficult, but not impossible (Thurley 2005, p. 26).

6. THE WAY TOWARDS CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

Sacred Sustainability recognises the Earth as a living entity deserving of respect and care. This viewpoint elevates nature conservation from a mere necessity to a moral imperative. It's not just about survival; it's about restoring the spiritual connection humanity once held with the natural world. Sacred sustainability is to be perceived under the three broad ethical imperatives:

(i) *Reciprocity*: at the heart of Sacred Sustainability is the principle of reciprocity; we must give back to the Earth as much as we take. This principle can manifest in practical ways, such as sustainable farming practices, ethical tourism, and mindful consumption.
(ii) *Interconnectedness*: Recognising the interconnectedness of ecosystems and human communities is vital. When we acknowledge this web of life, our actions align more closely with sustainable and ethical practices.
(iii) *Respect for Indigenous Knowledge*: Indigenous communities worldwide have long practised ecological balance. By learning from and respecting indigenous wisdom, modern society can adopt more sustainable practices.

Cultural sustainability relates to sustainable development. According to UNESCO, "culture provides the necessary transformative dimension that ensures the sustainability of development processes" (cf. UNESCO 2019). Originally, sustainable development was defined through three dimensions: ecological, economic, and social dimensions. Further, the social dimension has been understood in multiple ways, often accentuating socio-economic assets of development rather than socio-cultural capacities. Eventually, there has been an increasing interest in defining cultural sustainability as a fourth pillar of sustainable development (e.g., Sabatini, 2019).

Cultural sustainability involves preserving cultural identity and ensuring that future developments align with the community's cultural values (Anghel, 2019), acknowledging that these values can evolve over time. For culture to be sustainable, the integration of new ideas and influences is crucial (cf. Printsmann 2025). Culture provides a non-destructive, transformative dimension that is crucial to the sustainability of broader development processes (Järvelä 2023). Thus, culture is both an anchor and an agent of change. The key principles and practices of cultural sustainability include: (i) Preservation and conservation of cultural heritage, including intangible aspects such as traditions, rituals, and crafts; (ii) Social innovation aimed at maintaining cultural values, while balancing social, economic, and ecological interests that are critical to local sustainable development;(iii) Adaptive capacity, understood as the ability to identify vulnerabilities and implement coping mechanisms, i.e., socio-cultural resilience (Holtorf 2018); and (iv) Effective management strategies, which may be increasingly informed by the evolving Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks, although these often rely on index-based approaches.

Sometimes regarded as not only one of the dimensions of sustainability but even the central pillar of sustainable development, cultural sustainability is itself an agent, lever and catalyst for non-destructive socio-economic and demographic transformation. Defined as the ability to preserve cultural identity and ensure consistency and congruency between future developments and the cultural values of a community, achieving cultural sustainability seems to be a continuously increasing challenge in the current global socio-demographic landscape (Anghel 2019). The concept of cultural heritage in the context of sustainability should always be considered holistically.

Cultural heritage, like nature, is a continuously evolving process, not a legacy that is already complete in any part. The British social anthropologist Ingold (2010) advocated the view that both people and buildings should be seen as something persistent, continuously reborn and constantly growing, undergoing ever-new creative transformations (cf. Holtorf 2018). For Ingold (2010), people and built heritage are persistent, and they are, therefore, continually originating, undergoing continuous episodes of birth. Their lives have no beginning or end but are punctuated by various events and processes of transformation.

The three pillars of sustainability (society, economy, and environment) as classically defined by Brundtland (1987) has been challenged and modified in view the emerging global scenario realising cultural as the core concern, thus by 2015 cultural sustainability assumed to be as the covering set of all the rest three pillars; hence, 'culture' is accepted as core and cultural sustainability as the overall covering set (Fig. 3). With respective to practising 'cultural sustainability' the five notions are generally taken into consideration, viz. evaluation, assessment, capacity, planning, and implementation—all together will make a balance cultural competence with sustainability (Fig. 4).

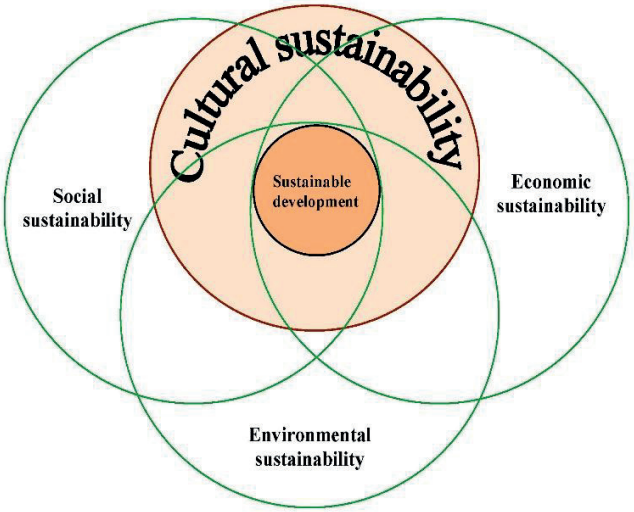

Fig. 3. Cultural Sustainability: The Covering set.

Fig. 4. Sustainability and Cultural Competence

In practising and implementing cultural sustainability, the following six attributes should be given due consideration: (i) contribution of cultural institutions, (ii) reduction of energy and environmental footprint, (iii) deeply-rooted education and awareness, (iv) protection of natural and cultural heritages, (v) management of tangible and intangible cultural heritages, and (vi) sustainable conservation.

7. HOLY HERITAGE CITY VIS-À-VIS SACRALITY*

* (This section is adopted from Singh & Niglio 2025, pp. 11-12).

The sacred heritage city is like a musical harmony, where everything is interconnected; it ultimately creates a soothing sound that encompasses different forms and cultures, all in tune with one another, conveying messages and rhymes. On the other hand, a contemporary city without historical and sacral enforcement is like a musical disharmony, where nothing interacts with one another. Still, everything prevails with its noise without considering the reciprocating dialogue among 'stone, earth and air'; therefore, it results in disparate cultures that make up the distinct cultural biography of a city (Niglio 2020). That's why reflecting upon the dialogue between the sacred heritage city and the contemporary city is essential. In the latter case, contemporaneity makes the city's biographical history and tries to bridge locality and universality at the theoretical level. Understanding the reasons for contemporary cities without knowing their historical evolution is a complex phenomenon (cf. Niglio 2023, p. 469).

Sacred heritage cities are 'examples of a complex whole, regulated and functioning through an interlinking network of structural, morphological, and cultural elements [rituals] that make a frame of a 'cosmocised city" (Singh 2023, p. 37); of course, they are constantly transformed while maintaining their manifested meanings, messages, and historical glories, and also absorbing the succeeding changes and manifestations introduced by the adherents. Pilgrimage to these cities often 'acquires cosmogonic and cosmological meaning as pilgrims re-enact the origin myths of the cosmos, mimic significant events of the past, and move in parallel with the cycles of the heavens' (Singh 2023, p. 41). They also represent the passage of succession (evolution in the past), sustenance (existence in the present), and

resurrection to sustainability (eye view for the future); this can be exemplified with a case study of the Kāshī Vishvanātha temple in the holy heritage city of Varanasi, India (Singh and Rana 2025).

Emphasising the distinct role of sacred heritage in developing Holy Heritage cities, we propose the framework of 'Holy Heritage Urban Landscape' (HHUL)—an extended form of HUL, where deeply rooted, multi-religious, and spiritual dimensions would be the primary consideration. Over time, the processes have paved the continuum path of evolution, existence, and emerging future. The cities of Jerusalem (Israel) and Varanasi (India) may be cited as illustrative of HHUL, where several religions have their historical roots. Despite contestation and the superimposition of transformations over time, the primary role of sacred heritage and a sense of reverence remains at the core, maintaining the balance between physicality (*axis mundi*) and functionality (*sacral loci*), and preserving the spirit of place (*genius loci*). Sites of sacred heritage should primarily possess some peculiarity, along with the sacral spirit and power of the place, to qualify as a point where human beings can seek contact with the divine.

The association of sacrality with the geographical setting enhances the power of sacred heritage in a place, and therefore, the awe or reverence it inspires (Singh, Kumar, & Rana, 2020, 2021). On a lower level from HUL, the HHUL will emphasise the importance of sacred heritage and pilgrimages in holy cities. With the emergence of spiritual tourism and the quest for a divine connection with the invisible spirit to achieve peace, happiness, and sublime bliss (*ānanda*), the HHUL will provide valuable insights. The HHUL will also offer an in-depth understanding and analysis of a 'cosmocised sacred city', where the sacred heritage and pilgrimage systems will be the overarching framework of its structure (cf. Meyer 1991, pp. 147–165). The holy heritage cities in the ancient world grew 'organically' without intentional city planning, such as Mecca, Jerusalem, Kyoto, and Varanasi (cf. Singh 2023, p. 33). These cities are "examples of a complex whole, regulated and functioning through an interlocking network of structural, morphological, and cultural elements that make a frame of a 'cosmocised city' (Singh 2023, p. 37)

8. THE PRESENT VOLUME (*EdA*, vol. 13, 2026)

In the sequence of the preceding four years of the *EdA* (since 2022), for the present volume, the focal theme has been "**Interfacing Heritages, Cultures, & Landscapes: Paving Cultural Sustainability".** Out of the total 42 abstracts submissions and succeeding full papers, only 23 papers were selected that directly focused on the theme, and arranged into two issues.

Most ancient cultures organised the natural world according to cosmological principles and established harmonious relationships with nature. Mountains, springs, plains, and rivers were sites and channels of sacred power, influenced by historical events and timeless sacred forces—over time, they are perceived and manifested as cultural landscapes. Such natural and constructed places commonly became centres of religious heritage and pilgrimage, serving as pivots for harmonising the world through their inherent message and underpinning meanings. That is how they require special care for understanding and planning. This volume of the ***EdA*, Vol. 13, 2026,** will present the role and status of heritages, cultures, and landscapes that help pave the way for cultural sustainability, which will be envisioned, understood, interpreted, and co-shared through expositions drawing upon the perspectives of multidisciplinary and cross-cultural interfaces.

Within the system of complex interconnectedness and interactions among cultures, heritage, and landscapes and their role in making cultural sustainability—all that are rooted in the past, together, we seek to search ways, paths, and means that are implied for framing and making a base for the UN Sustainable Development Goals Target 11.4, focussing on 'Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. Together with community development, nature-based education, and pilgrimages, revealing the spirit of places is part of the cultural process of transforming landscapes—seen and visualised in the framework of landscape architecture.

RWYC- Reconnecting With Your Culture – is a visionary mission and movement, re-appraising interconnectedness between Locality and Universality – from Holiness (*humanity*) to Wholeness (*sublimity*): Humanism to Spiritualism. The special issue of *Esempi di Architettura* [vol. 13 (nos. 1~2), 2026] attempts to keep pace with this vision—theoretically, philosophically, implicatively, phenomenologically, and regionally—always illustrative. Professionals and scholars from various disciplines are invited to present papers to explain these issues. As a significant cultural awakening occurs globally, this volume will help make the path harmonious and full of co-sharedness. Within this vision and outline, the following sub-themes have been crystallised:

i. **Culture-Nature Reciprocity vis-à-vis Heritage and Landscapes**: Cultural landscapes reflecting the imbued meaning and aesthetics inherent there and also human manifestation of this spirit through existence and aliveness through human creation, love, and continuance; Heterogeneity vs. Homogeneity in Cultural Landscape Aesthetics and making a harmonious world.

ii. **Sacred Space, Architectural Symbols and Faithscapes**: Sacred space envisioned as a composite mosaic of constructions—mental, visual, memorial, architectural, physical, ritual, cultural, traditional, literary, and supporting attributes; Aesthetics and creativity; Critical appraisal of the concepts, hypotheses and trends in literature; Sacred time, ritualscapes and cognition.

iii. **Architecture, Culture & Spirituality (ACS): Interfaces and Interaction**: Re-appraising conceptual frames of spirit or 'life', sacredness, meaningfulness, wholeness (sublimity), sacred vs. profane interfaces, aesthetic views, metaphysical images; Interfaith discourse on religion, art and architecture; Creating spiritual places—architecture as a medium of spiritual development.

iv. **Spirituality, Cultural Traditions and Landscape Symbols**: Spirituality as the form of transcendence and connection to others, landscapes, the self, and architecture; Belief systems and sense of belonging—regional representations; Places symbolising religious belief systems and communal rituals; Cultural meaning of place: historical, manifested, and contextual.

v. **Holy-Heritage Cities and UNESCO Heritage Sites**: Critique of the UNESCO WHL criteria—regional and cultural differences and distinctiveness; Pilgrimage places: heritage values and inclusive development; Typology, Heritage sites & Cultural Sustainability; Planning, heritage inclusiveness and strategies for sustainable future; Outstanding Universal Value – critique of contextuality.

vi. **Heritage Landscapes and Cultural Sustainability**: Leaning, preserving and redefining the interfaces and reciprocity; Sustainable practices, and contestations; Heritage preservation and conservation, dynamics of change; Location, distribution and scale in the spatial dimension of heritage cities; Religious heritage sites and cultural landscapes in harmonising the world; RWYC – Progress Reports: County, Regional, & Local representations – Locality vs. Universality.

9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Carl Jung's provocation (1970, paraphrased in Swan 1991, p. 304) expresses a moral and ethical concern for the sacred places and an associated faith system: "People of the earth would never find true peace until they could establish a harmonious relationship with the sacred places where they live. Learning to encourage, harmonise with, and perhaps even converse with the spirit of each place may be an essential survival skill for creating a future world of peace where people live an ecologically sustainable lifestyle".

Vision without Action is Empty. Action without Vision is Blind. Let the Vision be the force behind Action, and Action the energy behind Vision. This is the way to understand the interconnectedness between human beings and Mother Nature, where heritage serves as a bridge between them. The most common view shared by institutionalised and indigenous spiritual traditions alike is that the world is a 'multiple-level hierarchical reality'. These relationships may be represented by a simplified model showing three different planes of the spiritual world, the natural world, and the human world, which, when overlapping, result in three values: symbolic, conservational, and religious. It is a way of demonstrating that the management of sacred sites should consider all values and stakeholders involved (Singh & Rana, 2019, p. 172).

Injunctions to *Cosmically*, see *Globally*, behave *Regionally*, and act *Locally* but *insightfully*. This appeals to cosmic vision, global humanism, and Self-realisation (*Sva-chetanā*). In Gandhian thought, it is said, "Once the path is chalked out, the means will follow". Let us believe that 'sustainability' is a path and lifestyle. Jung's implicit promotion of an ecospiritual worldview, a spirit of wholeness and a sense of holiness grounded on an evolutionary cosmology is embedded in the Hindu conception of sacred place and sacred geography. Through the practice and use of sacred ecology, a strategy for sustainable development that considers heritage conservation, preservation, and reverential development should be accepted in service to human civilisation and its symbolic identity.

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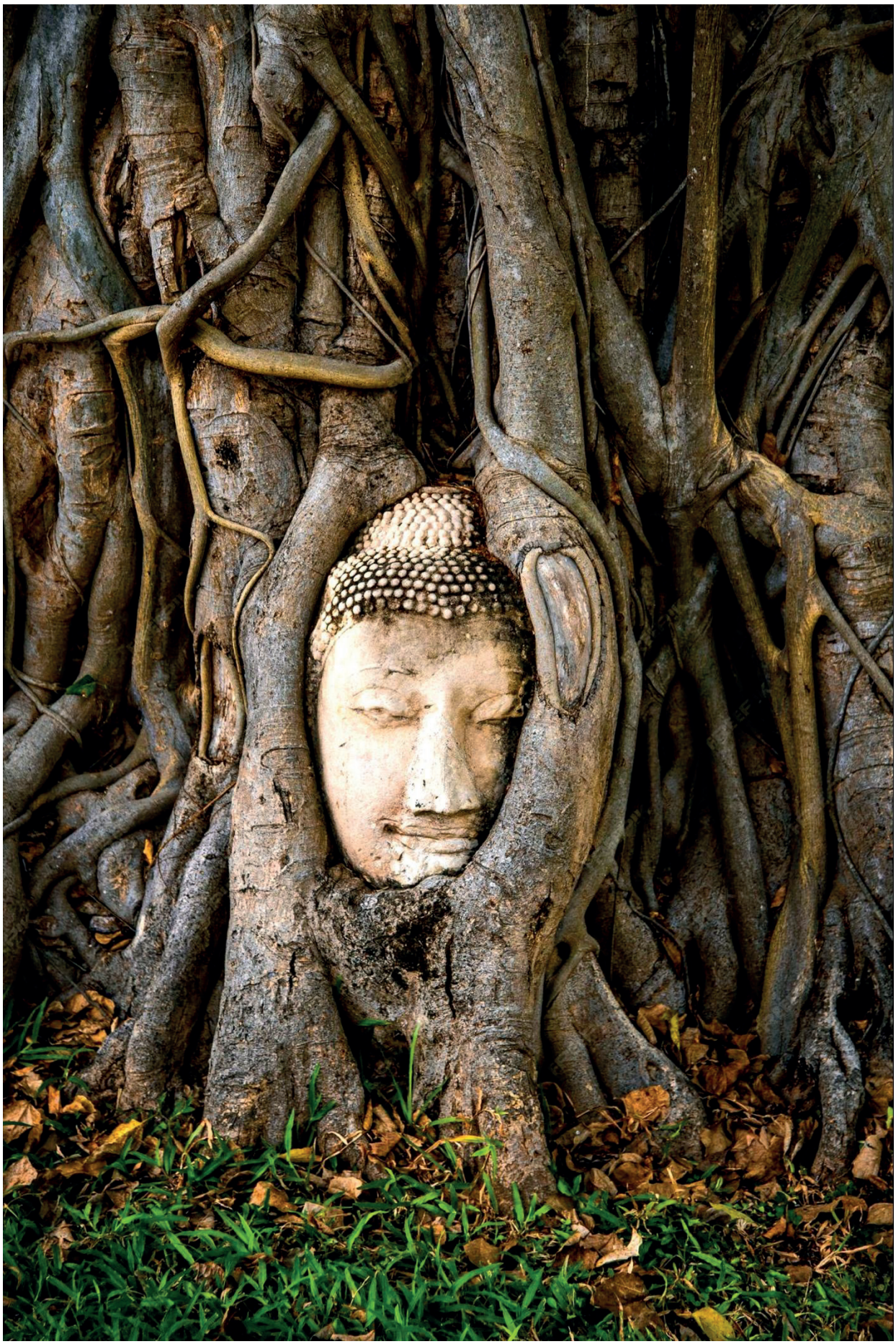

Wat-phra Mahathat temple, Head-statue-trapped in Bodhi-tree, Phra-Nakhon-si, Ayutthaya, Thailand (by Singh)

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RECAPITULATING HERITAGE ECOLOGY AND CULTURAL CONSCIENCE

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Abstract

Heritage ecology, a way of knowing, is the line of thought that involves multidisciplinary and multi-code research and is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our built nature (landscape architecture) cultures, as well as the ways to follow the path of sustainable development. Heritage Ecology, conceived as the yoga of place, is allied to geomancy and linked to the Gaia theory, as well as the human psyche and the earth's spirit. As a cultural resource, heritage represents the sacredscapes of mystic religious sites, built structures, historical monuments and the perceived natural scenarios and landscapes. Environmental problems arise from people living out of harmony with nature. Heritage ecology can help research the cosmic integrity of our intrinsic value, which is deeply rooted in our cultural traditions and maintained through rituals, festivities, pilgrimages, and other associative religious activities. Heritage resource conservation is a strategy of sustainable development. The spatial-religious view, cosmic-movement context, and human psyche together develop a theosphere called *faithscape*, which is more concerned with experiences and emotional bondage than mere speculations, observations, and participation. The manifested power of sacralisation, regulated by ritualisation, ultimately promotes the cosmicising of the harmonic relation between human beings and the divine nature. In pilgrimage, deeper understanding, feeling and meaning are intertwined, and at one point, they become one. The question of moral ethics extends beyond human greed and interest at times; in fact, it provides a way for one to pass on a carrying heritage to future human generations. This paper aims to revisit heritage ecology within the cultural conscience, envisioning a harmonious and happy world.

Keywords: sacredscapes, sacred sustainability, heritage ecology, faithscapes, ritualscapes, sacred time, pilgrimage, culture-nature reciprocity.

1. **Introduction**

The quest of man in search of his identity and connectedness with nature leads to his interaction through the media of culture and cognition. Sensory experiences and resultant responses take shape in terms of a screen of knowledge, values, beliefs, and emotions. In such a process, world vision and views, as well as the spatial manifestation of cosmology, are ways of systematically representing spatial experience, memory, imagination, and cultural exposure. The deep-rootedness of man's interaction with nature, shaped through changes in space and time, ultimately forms the idea of landscape as structured, expressive, aesthetic, value-preserving, and a giver of sacramental feelings—the core concern of Heritage ecology. Over time, humans have developed a symbolic structure to organise their feelings and values, which is how monuments are accepted as historical heritage. Of course, even without a humanised structure, distinct places and natural scenes also exist, which are revered by humans as sacred places and heritage sites.

The most commonly cited definition of geography revolves around three key concepts: the earth, humans, and home. It is encapsulated in the phrase: "geography is the study of the Earth as the home of mankind". Moreover, to be an intimate part of the Earth Spirit, we should follow the pathway of the RWYC- Reconnecting With Your Culture. The fundamental essence behind this definition refers to the idea of humans transforming environments into worlds and nature into homes. Earth as home reflects the natural identity and the creative form of humans. Home as an 'ultimately lived-in-place is imbued with moral meaning! (Tuan 1991). Intimate thought finally refers to faith and involvement, which have a tradition of continuity, change, existence, maintenance, and sustenance—visible in the form of our cultural heritage. Its climax is developed in history in the form of sacramental values that promote the

growth of sacred sites, accompanied by an atmosphere of theosphere. Generally, we believe that human-made rituals and involvement give rise to a sacred site, but the process was actually in reverse; awakened human beings had searched and revealed the manifested power of a site, and over time, it acquired more divine connotations, represented with some visual or symbolic representations. Despite various forms of change, the assimilation of traditions and taboos, the spirit of place (*genius loci*) attached to a sacred site remains; it will persist into the future, albeit with changing appearances and uses. Heritage ecology, as a pathway of awakening, helps to see 'clearly' and understand them. One such tradition that has evolved and continued throughout history is pilgrimage (Singh 1995b, p. 192).

2. **Heritage Ecology: A Purview**

The idea of 'ecology' is derived from the Greek root for 'home' (*oikos*); thus, it refers to the interactions between the living and non-living components that together form an ecosystem. In a broad view, ecology deals with "a major interdisciplinary science that links together the biological, physical, and social sciences" (Odum 1975, p. 4). This interconnectedness reflects cosmic unity. About the present crisis and upheaval, Oates (1989, p. 6) remarks:

> "We live at a fascinating moment, a rare time when the place of humans in the natural world is being questioned and reformulated. New ideas of how to understand the living process are being introduced, and these, unexpectedly, are leading many thinkers around to some very old ideas about the almost sacred importance of the earth and our connection to it".

The realisation of a deep sense of connectedness is a concern of ecology. One of the most ancient and sacred texts, dated ca. 2000 BCE, the *Rig Veda* (X.18.11) mentions a funerary hymn honouring the mother Earth, Bhū Devī (Figs. 1 and 2):

> Heave thyself, Earth,
> nor press thee downward heavily
> afford him easy access,
> gently tending him.
> Earth, as a mother, wraps her skirt
> about her child, so cover him.

Fig. 1. Bhū Devī seated in Varāha's lap, copper statue, ca CE 1600.

Fig. 2. Varāha rescues Bhū Devī, Hoysaleshvara Temple, circa CE 11th century.