In the world that is being born of the pandemic -- and against the background of looming climate crisis, the threats to urban life and deep structural inequities in most societies -- the regeneration of cultural heritage stands at the center of a spectrum of human needs. These range from the most basic, such as housing, gathering places, and workplace to sites of identity, community and deeper, psychic connection. At this intersection cultural heritage regeneration can play a critical role in creating the built environment that humanity needs.

Twentieth-century movements in environmental studies, historic preservation and urban theory recognized certain affinities between themselves, but largely remained discrete fields of action. The mounting challenges of this century have spurred more sophisticated science and advanced digital techniques of building design and environmental remediation. Related fields have proliferated, spawning a range of integrated propositions to improve human habitat in balance with changing natural forces. While disciplines have converged, they have also taken on a more technical character. Recent attempts by technology companies to design ideal “smart” cities or districts have foundered, not just on issues of privacy, cost and social exclusion, but because they don’t speak to our need for deeper meaning and connectedness to place and people. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals provided a holistic framework of sustainable development, emphasizing the interplay of economic, social and environmental benefits. However, heritage regeneration’s position at the critical intersection of those tangible goals has not been recognized. We need a "unified theory" of heritage regeneration at the center. It is the answer hiding in plain sight.

The imperative to reach net zero carbon in construction and operation of the built environment places historic urban centers in a uniquely strategic position to achieve sustainability in a key sector of the economy. Restoring and adapting existing structures takes us half way to that goal.
We will likely control this pandemic eventually, and possibly be prepared for other imminent contagions. But the greater looming threat to humankind is climate change – temperature increases, sea level rise, increasingly severe weather -- are causing catastrophic damage. Shrewd commentators have rightly characterized the pandemic as a dress rehearsal for the larger challenge of mitigating the effects of climate change. As economic activity picks up again the world will move inexorably towards the threshold of a 2 C temperature rise, considered a tipping point for global health. Re-using and adapting existing structures, and regenerating entire districts and urban cores, puts net zero carbon results within reach – even before the economic and cultural benefits of this work are calculated.

**Heritage regeneration should be combined with climate change mitigation measures and infrastructure renewal in an integrated program to spread the economic benefits of renewal across broad swaths of the workforce – manual, skilled trades, industrial and manufacturing, professional services, creative.**

The Works Progress Administration of the New Deal was largely focused on new buildings and their adornment. That national mobilization was wildly successful in its immediate economic impact and long-term legacy in the built environment. It also positively affected human dignity and helped build a sense of common purpose. Such a program for our time would favor rehabilitation, regeneration, adaptive re-use and heritage conservation. The Green New Deal and its variants are even farther reaching than the 1930s New Deal, but so comprehensive that they overlook the unique centrality of heritage regeneration in strengthening connectedness, identity and urban life. Heritage regeneration could easily be woven into any of the current visionary proposals, and greatly enhance them.

**If recent history is a guide, government policy and investment will be a necessary but not sufficient condition for the regeneration of**
heritage in all its manifestations and as centerpieces for holistic sustainable development.

Catalytic capital and impact investment are needed in order to magnify the positive effects of fundamental policy shifts, targeted government funding and tax credits, and philanthropic investment. Successes in the environmental and health fields can be replicated in the heritage field. Much of the exemplary work in urban heritage regeneration – conservation of key structures, renewal of entire districts and even cities – have been animated by the zeal of individuals able to inspire groups and to engage government in innovative public-private collaborations. The profit motive and the public good can converge in urban regeneration.

Our current social distancing and the immobility required to stem the pandemic has reminded us – achingly – of the irreplaceable value of direct, lived experience – with all our senses – whether in human interaction, the shared audience experience of the performing arts, or the direct engagement with works of visual art. In our various forms of lockdown we crave the authentic, the tangible, the real. The pandemic has created a pent-up demand to experience unique historic structures and heritage environments.

Because cultural heritage touches us more deeply and directly than most other manmade environments, we cannot afford to lose it. Whether through inward local, regional and national tourism or as international “cultural tourism,” the hoped-for re-engagement with cultural heritage could well see a greater demand to experience deeply meaningful heritage environments. For some, this nourishment is of a spiritual nature. For others it fosters a sense of deep connectedness and identity. These places make the intangible tangible.

The coming renewal of visitation should be leveraged for a more sustainable regeneration of historic places in all its dimensions. We need to understand this work as sitting at the vital intersection of the critical environmental, social and cultural challenges of our time.

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