

CHAPTER 2

Recognising the living dimension of heritage sites

Presentation

The field of heritage conservation has been characterised, at an international level, by an increasing recognition of the importance of the living dimension of heritage sites, in terms of the communities' association with heritage sites, and also the need for communities' involvement in site management. Specifically, the early approaches to conservation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the activity of the *Cambridge Camden Society*, the 'conservation movement', and philosophers like Alois Riegl (Jokilehto 1986, 295–298, 304–311 and 378–381; Stanley-Price *et al.* 1996, 69–83 and 18–21), could be seen as materialistic. They understood heritage as a tangible, material and non-renewable resource, and emphasised the need for the protection of this heritage from human practices considered to be harmful. It was only after World War II, in the *Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* (UNESCO 1954), that cultural property was recognised, at an international level, as human heritage (article 1). However, the scope of the convention was limited to protection in cases of war or violence (article 3). The *Venice Charter* (ICOMOS 1964) concentrated on cultural, aesthetic and historic values (article 9). The human dimension of heritage was acknowledged (preamble), but there was no direct reference to the people who may live in the monuments. The *World Heritage Convention* (UNESCO 1972) acknowledged ethnological-anthropological values (article 1), and made a direct link between heritage and the communities: 'Each State Party to the Convention shall endeavour . . . to adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community' (article 5). It is also important to note that until the 1990s there was no reference in the *World Heritage Convention* and the *Operational Guidelines* to any living traditions; it was only 'cultural traditions or civilizations which have disappeared' that were taken into account (cultural criterion iii in UNESCO 1980; 1984; 1994c). The term 'living' first appeared in the mid-1990s: cultural traditions or civilizations 'which are living or which have disappeared' (UNESCO 1997 onwards, cultural criterion iii); sites 'directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions' (UNESCO 1994c onwards, cultural criterion vi); or 'continuing cultural landscapes' that 'retain an active social life in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life, and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress' (UNESCO 1995) (on the attempts of the World Heritage concept to embrace living traditions see also Labadi 2013, 34–58).

The involvement of local communities in the World Heritage nomination process was initially discouraged, in order to avoid ‘undue publicity’ and ‘public embarrassment’ (UNESCO 1988; 1992; 1994c, paragraph 14), but was later seen as ‘essential to make them feel a shared responsibility with the State Party in the maintenance of the site’ (UNESCO 1996; 1999, paragraph 14). With the inclusion of ‘cultural landscapes’ (UNESCO 1995; see also Fowler 2003; Cleere 1995), traditional management mechanisms and systems of customary land tenure of the local-indigenous communities were recognised, initially as supplementary to modern scientific-based systems of conservation (UNESCO 1995; UNESCO 1997) and later also as exclusive management systems (UNESCO 2005) in parallel with a shift from the narrow concept of a management plan to the much broader concept of a management system (UNESCO 2005). The *Nara Document on Authenticity* (UNESCO 1994a; see also Stovel 2008) introduced the concept of ‘cultural diversity’, stating that heritage should be understood and managed in the specific local socio-cultural contexts to which it belongs (articles 11–12). The *Burra Charter* (ICOMOS Australia 1999) concentrated on the concept of ‘cultural significance’, referring to ‘a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape . . . the past and lived experiences’ (preamble), and attempted to ‘democratise’ the planning process by actively involving local, mostly indigenous, communities in the process (articles 12 and 26.3). The *Budapest Declaration on World Heritage* in 2002 (UNESCO 2002; see also Boccardi 2002), as well as a series of activities since then such as the meeting on ‘World Heritage and Sustainable Development’ and the adopted ‘Action Plan for 2012’ (UNESCO 2010), focused on the concept of ‘sustainability’ / ‘sustainable development’, linking conservation to the everyday social and economic interests and the quality of life of the local communities (article 6c). In 2007, a strategic objective that focused on ‘communities’ (known as ‘the Fifth C’) was adopted to guide the future implementation of the World Heritage Convention, stressing that ‘heritage protection without community involvement and commitment is an invitation in failure’ (UNESCO 2007).

Critique

Despite the increasing attempts to recognise the living dimension of heritage sites and the inclusion of intangible and less tangible heritage elements, conservation is still primarily attached to the protection of the material. With regards to the use of the term ‘living’ in the World Heritage concept, the World Heritage concept was originally developed upon the concept of dead traditions and sites, which were classified in strict listing categories. Later the World Heritage Committee attempted to take under consideration living traditions and sites by expanding the existing listing criteria and categories. In this way, living traditions and sites were added to the existing strict categories, and treated in the same way with the dead ones. For example, cultural traditions or civilizations ‘which are living’ were, and are still, included in the same category with those ‘which have disappeared’, while ‘continuing cultural landscapes’ were, and are still, included in the same category with ‘fossil cultural landscapes’. This attempt to include living traditions and sites into existing categories proved to fail, revealing the subjectivity, ambiguity and ineffectiveness of classification. For example, the differences between a ‘cultural site’, a ‘mixed site’ and a ‘cultural landscape’ (see Rossler 2004, 48) are not significant, especially ‘when it is clear that most of the world is a cultural landscape’ (Sullivan 2004, 50). The classification might help towards the measurement of tangible expressions, but not of living traditions and sites: ‘the concrete quantifiable values are easier to measure and manage but living natural and cultural sites are organic in the way they change and adapt and our practice sometimes does not suit the conservation of these values’ (Sullivan 2004, 50–51). Additionally, the difficulty to take into account living traditions, particularly of the non-Western world, was also reflected in the *World Heritage List*, with severe

imbalances of certain categories of heritage and regions being over-represented: namely European heritage, historic towns, religious buildings, Christian churches, elitist and monumental architecture. The attempts of the World Heritage Centre to correct these imbalances and achieve a more representative *World Heritage List* (eg. through the *Global Strategy for a Balanced, Representative and Credible World Heritage List*: UNESCO 1994b) proved far from successful (Titchen 1995; Labadi 2005, 93–99). Therefore, the World Heritage concept originally considered only dead traditions, and it was much later that it attempted to include living traditions, and still by expanding or amending its criteria and categories rather than by substantially changing its underlying philosophy and fundamental principles.

Despite the growing emphasis on local communities, there is still a concept of ‘a faceless abstract public’, defined and assessed by the heritage authorities (Jones 2006, 111; see also Cleere 1989, 10–11), and the concern for its involvement in site management remains to be converted into inclusive public debate, regulated by the heritage authorities (Schadla-Hall 1999, 156). Public involvement is defined by ‘a belief that the public either desires the conservation of heritage places in the manner advocated by the charters or should be encouraged to do so through education and involvement in conservation work’, and is addressed mostly ‘in presumptuous and naïve terms . . . more often treated as a realm of common knowledge or common sense’ (Byrne 2004, 19). With reference to the World Heritage concept, its most considerable developments over time, such as the principles of the *Nara Document on Authenticity* and the references to sustainability (see above), have not been successfully translated into actual policies or procedures for the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention* (see Labadi 2013, 34–58).

Officially there is no World Heritage mechanism to ensure community involvement in the nomination and inscription process, and the local community is marginalised in nomination dossiers (Labadi 2013, 86–92 and 113). Specifically, the (level of the) involvement of local communities is not a qualifying criterion for inscription on the *World Heritage List*. The format of the nomination dossiers has not been changed: from 1997 onward, one of the direct references to the local community is made under ‘Section 5(e) Factors Affecting the site; Numbers of inhabitants within property, buffer zone’. In the majority of the nomination dossiers the local community is presented as constituting a threat to the site (in terms of population growth, encroachments of private properties onto the site, vehicle circulation and pollution, vandalism and graffiti). The commonly held view among States Parties is that the local community is not supposed to be concerned with or consulted regarding the identification, nomination and management of the site. The majority of the nomination dossiers do not mention the participation of the local communities in the decision-making and the sharing of information between different groups of communities, possibly ‘due to their perceived limited appreciation of the resource’ (Taruvunga and Ngoro 2003, 3), and still details of such participation are rather scant. The majority of the nomination dossiers does not mention the participation of the local communities in the presentation of the sites either, and does not explain how the inscription of a site on the *World Heritage List* would assist with the generation of economic benefits to support local communities. The majority of the nomination dossiers still considers authenticity in terms of ‘design, materials, workmanship and setting’, and has not embraced the more dynamic understanding of authenticity on the basis of the *Nara Document on Authenticity*. Furthermore, the recent attempt to establish World Heritage Indigenous Peoples Council of Experts (WHIPCOE) as a consultative body of the World Heritage Committee or as a network to report to the World Heritage Committee failed, which ‘indicates that, for some countries, local empowerment, and especially giving local minorities an international voice, can be considered dangerous and destabilising’ (Sullivan 2004, 55). Therefore, on the one hand, heritage authorities are eager to create, maintain and involve a community that, it is assumed, will derive meaning and value from heritage sites. On the other hand, the concept of a community and the mechanisms for its involvement in site management remain abstract and problematic under the aegis of the heritage authorities.

Given this failure of the World Heritage concept to take on board living traditions and actively involve local communities, the World Heritage approach is sometimes taken advantage of by the national heritage authorities of the States Parties in an attempt to suppress or deny local and indigenous communities' associations with places. There are cases in which the World Heritage inscription of sites might have been sought in the first place for this reason. As it was noted with reference to Great Zimbabwe in Zimbabwe, the denial of suggested special associations of various communities with the site through the declared recognition or imposition of a new 'unified' National Heritage and especially World Heritage status is very convenient from the heritage authorities' perspectives (Ucko 1994a, 271–275; see also Pwiti and Ndoro 1999, 150; Pwiti 1996, 154–156; Ndoro 2001, 97 and 121–123). There are also cases in which present associations with sites are further suppressed after the World Heritage inscription of sites:

Nation-states feel that once a place is declared a World Heritage Site, the interests of local and traditional communities become irrelevant to its management demands. International interests ... become paramount. The result has been that, in many cases, we [conservation professionals] have sought to replace traditional systems with what we think are better modern management systems. Very often we have succeeded in ensuring that people no longer recognize or own their heritage. We have also succeeded in undermining the very significant values that formed the basis for their inclusion on the World Heritage list... In many cases, heritage management practices have denied people access to their heritage. (Ndoro 2004, 81–82)

Conclusion

The discipline of conservation, originated in the Western European world, creates discontinuity between the heritage, which is considered to belong to the past, and the people of the present, and faces severe difficulties while attempting to take on board living traditions of the non-Western world. The notion of authenticity is inherently linked to a particular type of value – historic value:

Authenticity...presumes that some kind of historic value is represented by –inherent in– some truly old and thus authentic material (authentic in that it was witness to history and carries the authority of this witness). Thus, if one can prove authenticity of material, historical value is indelibly established. (Mason 2002, 13).

The World Heritage concept is still 'a uniform and non-flexible set of conservation theory without recognizing the broader meanings of heritage and cultural diversity' and without embracing a significant range of intangible heritage elements (Wijesuriya 2003, 3; see also Matsura 2004, 4–5). In contrast with the 'outstanding universal value' of an abstract global community, the manifest continuity and traditional links of the local communities with sites are not considered universal values (Ndoro 2004, 81–82).