

CHAPTER 4

Defining and managing ‘living heritage’

4.1. Existing approaches

The existing approaches to the definition and management of living heritage sites are examined here, with reference to a variety of examples throughout the world. In this analysis, there will be some overlap between the different uses of the term, but the aim is to stress the most important points of each use. Also, in each example offered, the definitions of heritage site and community have to do with their local geographical and socio-cultural context, and management treatment is linked to a variety of reasons; yet, this is an attempt to draw some conclusions from each example that have broader applicability.

A ‘living heritage site’ is defined in various ways, outlined in the following sections.

A site with a local community

The term ‘living heritage site’ refers most of the time to a site with a local community, which is seen as a community of fixed boundaries living near or around a site and is supposed to be differentiated from those communities using a site at a national or international level. However, defining a local community is ambiguous and problematic given the blurred boundaries between ‘local’, ‘national’ and ‘international’. In an increasingly globalised world with an increasing mobility of people, the membership of a local community may range from a small group of people to the entire living world population (Cohen 1985, 117–118; Robertson 1995, 26; Erb 2003, 131).

A local community’s association with a site is often a relatively weak one — something that heritage authorities may take advantage of in an attempt to further concentrate on the protection of the material of a site. This is illustrated in the case of Volubilis in Morocco (a World Heritage Site), where the local community seems to be more interested in the development of tourism in the nearby town of Moulay Idriss, and the heritage authorities separated the site from the local community through the imposition of a fence and significantly restricted the local community’s use of the site (pers. comm. Helen Dawson; Fentress and Palumbo 2001, 15). In extreme cases, a local community may have a negative association with a site, even favouring its destruction, in certain occasions with the acquiescence or support of the heritage authorities, as in the cases of

the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya in India by part of the local Hindu community (Layton and Thomas 2001, 2-11; Sharma 2001; Rao and Reddy 2001, 139–156) and of the Bamiyan statues in Afghanistan by part of the local Muslim community (Gamboni 2001, 10–11; van Krieken Pieters 2002, 305–309; Wijesuriya 2003).

A site with a dwelling community

A living heritage site is also perceived as a site with a dwelling community — a specific community of fixed boundaries living permanently in a site and, thus, differentiated from other communities using a site at other international, national and even local levels (Miura 2005, 3–18).

A dwelling community's association with a site may not be particularly strong, and can be rather easily disturbed by heritage authorities, with severe implications for this association. This is demonstrated in Petra in Jordan (a World Heritage Site), where the community of the Bdul (a Bedouin tribe) was relocated from the site to a new settlement (Akrawi 2002, 102; Hadidi 1986, 109–110).

A site with a changing/evolving community

A living heritage site is also seen as a site with a changing/evolving community — a community using a site in a different context to the original one, in response to the changing conditions, requirements and values of the society (van Vucht Tijssen 2004, 23; ICOMOS America 1996, article 5).

A community's changing association with a site is, generally speaking, not particularly strong — most probably much weaker than the association of the original community with the specific site. As a result, heritage authorities tend to give priority to the association of the original community. An example of a site that belongs in this category is Diocletian's Palace in Split in Croatia (a World Heritage Site), where the heritage authorities give priority to the protection of the original complex of the palace over the attempts of some of the current users towards the erection of new houses, shops and parking areas within the walls (Marasovic 1986, 57–62; Marasovic 1975, 17–23).

A site whose community has claimed a special association with it

A living heritage site can be also seen as one whose community claims a special strong social, spiritual or other cultural association with it (Matero 2004, 69; ICOMOS Australia 1999, article 12).

However, a community's claimed special association with a site can be problematic, given that it may be proved historically fake or remain questionable in terms of its historic validity. In any case, a community's claim to a special association with a site is in most instances accompanied by rights over the use, the management and even the ownership of the site, something that acts against the interests as well as the power of the heritage authorities. This is, for example, the case of Stonehenge in the UK (a World Heritage Site), where the Druids demand a special association with and use of the site (Bender 1998, 128; Sebastian 1990).

A site that has not suffered from modernisation

A living heritage site is also regarded as one that has not suffered from modernisation, urbanisation and globalisation (Inaba 2005, 46). This understanding of a living heritage site is assumed to focus on the 'traditional' that is under assault by, and should thus be protected from, contemporary 'influences' (Rohit Jigyasu, cited in Shimotsuma, Stovel and Warrack 2003, 13–14). In extreme

cases this use of the term might end up associating the concept of a 'living heritage site' with the memory of an unchanging archetype of a past lifestyle, an 'idyllic Eden,' as was characteristically noted with reference to Tana Toraja in Indonesia (a World Heritage Site) (Adams 2003, 92).

Nevertheless, despite the attempts of heritage authorities to protect a community's 'traditional' association against contemporary 'influences,' the latter often prevail, with a serious impact on the former. Once a community's 'traditional' association with a site has significantly suffered, it is very difficult to revive (see The Japan Foundation 2004, 3).

Conclusion

The above-mentioned uses of the term 'living heritage site' suggest different types of communities' association with sites, each of different strength. Specifically (from the weakest to the strongest association): any community using a site at a local, national or international level; a community living near a site; a community dwelling in a site; a community with a changing association with a site; a community with a suggested special association with a site; a community whose original association with a site has not suffered from contemporary circumstances such as modernisation. Yet, in all these cases, the communities' association with and use of a site is placed under the heritage authorities' association with and control over a site.

4.2. Towards a new approach

Presentation

There is a tendency to consider continuity of a community's original association with a site to be the key concept in the discussion of a living heritage site (Gamini Wijesuriya, cited in Shimotsuma, Stovel and Warrack 2003, 9; Nguyen The Son, cited in Shimotsuma, Stovel and Warrack 2003, 15; Wijesuriya 2005; Wijesuriya 2007a).

The restoration of the Temple of the Tooth Relic in the city of Kandy in Sri Lanka (a World Heritage Site) (Wijesuriya, 2000) could be considered a milestone in the management of living heritage at an international level because it clearly challenged the 'conventional,' material-based approach, and opened the path for the development of a new approach (see immediately below). The Temple, constructed in the seventeenth century, is today the most sacred Buddhist site and the most important heritage site in Sri Lanka, and one of the most significant international Buddhist pilgrimage centers. The Temple was demolished in 1997 as a result of a terrorist bomb attack. The restoration of the Temple required the participation of all main groups, but any decision would be subjected to the approval of the monastic community as expressed by the two high priests and the lay guardian [the officer] of the Temple. In this context, the first priority of the restoration project was the revival of the living (religious) function of the Temple. The restoration solutions clearly favored the function of the Temple at the expense of the protection of its heritage significance, and generally run counter to conservation principles and practices, particularly in the strict World Heritage concept.

The restoration of the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Sri Lanka also influenced the approach of ICCROM towards living heritage (Shimotsuma, Stovel and Warrack 2003, 2–3; Stovel 2005, 2–3; Wijesuriya 2007b; see also Poullos 2014). ICCROM had been following a material-based and a values-based approach. Since the mid-1990s, however, ICCROM has started showing a consistent interest in the living dimension of heritage sites, developing projects that concentrated on communities and communities' associations with heritage sites, such as *ITUC Program*. Since the early 2000s, ICCROM has been running the *Living Heritage Sites Program* and the *Promoting*

People-Centered Approaches to Conservation: Living Heritage Program. The former started as part of *ITUC* Program and was originally focused on the South-Eastern Asian region, while it gradually took a much broader perspective, also linked to other ICCROM programs focusing on other regions; the latter is of international relevance. The aims of the Programs are to develop, implement and promote a new international approach to heritage conservation that clearly differs from the ‘conventional’ material-based approach by placing the living dimension of heritage at the core of decision-making and considering continuity as the key theme: a living heritage approach. The key principles of this approach are: a) recognising communities as the true long-term custodians of their heritage sites; b) empowering communities in the conservation and managing process, and benefiting from their traditional (and established) values, management systems and maintenance practices; and c) linking conservation to the sustainable development of the communities, by developing a process to manage change and by making heritage relevant to the needs of the contemporary communities.

An example of a place where a living heritage has been applied – also in the context of the *Living Heritage Sites* Program of ICCROM – is Phrae in Thailand (Luk Lan Muang Phrae and SPAFA 2009; see also SPAFA, Phrae Architectural Heritage Preservation Club and Luk Lan Muang Phrae 2011). There the local community established its own (local) heritage management committee, Luk Lan Muang Phrae [‘the Children and Grandchildren of Phrae’]. Luk Lan Muang Phrae has the following main objectives: a) revive wisdom and pride in local heritage through different awareness activities. Examples: interviewing local house owners about the meaning and significance of their houses, organising awareness programmes on local heritage preservation for children; b) organise a wide range of activities concerning the conservation and management of local heritage, based on traditional knowledge, management systems and maintenance practices. Examples: establishment of an award programme for old house owners who take good care of their houses (owners are given a certificate and a flag to place in front of the house, and the houses awarded are registered by the Provincial Cultural Office), formation of a local museum and a library, and conservation of the city wall; and c) seek development options. Examples: cooking local dishes, growing local vegetables, local pottery- and puppet-making, and making products for sale. For the accomplishment of these objectives, Luk Lan Muang Phrae established over time collaborations with SEAMEO-SPAFA Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts in Thailand, the Thai Fine Arts Department, and ICCROM. At present Luk Lan Muang Phrae is accepted as an important mechanism in coordinating and mobilizing people and activities as well as networking.

Critique

Continuity, as defined here, is a particularly strong association, clearly differentiated from the other types of association discussed in the previous section: continuity is much more than the association of a local or a dwelling community, is the association of the original (and not a changing/evolving) community, is a historically valid (and not a claimed) association, and can embrace contemporary changes such as modernisation. A living heritage approach has also succeeded in embracing indigenous/non-Western communities and cultures, as illustrated in the cases of the Temple of the Tooth Relic and of Phrae.

Yet, there are cases in which continuity may not necessarily be physically linked to an actual site. For example, the indigenous communities of Jigalong in Western Australia, who have voluntarily left their home territories and settled near Europeans, retain their original association with their sacred ancestral sites and associated beings through dream-spirit journeys (rituals consisting of singing and dancing: ‘going badundjari’). These journeys, however, most of the time have nothing to do with the actual sites: they are performed away from the sites, and by people who in most cases have never physically been in the sites but are simply imagining them (Tonkinson 1970,

277–291; pers. comm. Peter Sutton). In a similar context, there was a recent case in which indigenous communities of Uluru-Kata-Tjuta National Park in Australia (a World Heritage Site) performed in court a ritual about the site, in an attempt to justify the continuity of their association with the site, but this ritual is no longer performed on the site itself (pers. comm. Peter Sutton).

There are also cases in which continuity, though related to an actual site, may be severely restricted and affected by other communities' associations with the site, often with the consent of heritage authorities, with an impact on the character of the site. At the World Heritage Site of Canterbury Cathedral in the UK, for example, despite the continuity of the religious association of part of the local, national and international community with the site, the site is treated less and less as a sacred place and more as a tourist attraction (Hubert 1994, 12–14). In extreme cases, continuity can be restricted and affected to such an extent that it may not be a sufficient criterion to even prevent the destruction of a site, often with the consent of heritage authorities. At the site of Ayodhya in India, for example, the continuity of the local Muslim community's association with the mosque and their struggle to protect it did not eventually prevent its demolition (Layton and Thomas 2001, 2–11; Sharma 2001; Rao and Reddy 2001, 139–156).

The above elements which emphasise on the concept of continuity (Part 1) will be further developed and expanded, also through a detailed account of the conservation and management of the monastic site of Meteora in Greece (a World Heritage Site) (Part 2), towards a more holistic definition of a living heritage approach (Part 3).