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Student Presentation

Understanding Conflicting Interests in African Cultural landscapes: a conceptual framework.

Introduction

The integrity, management, and protection of most African World Heritage cultural landscapes have been compromised by a number of factors, which culminate in conflicting approaches to managing and conserving these heritage sites. Competition for finite resources, divergent beliefs and institutional factors trigger and exacerbate conflicts in cultural landscapes, (Hellstrom, 2001, Germani and Floyd 1999, Homer-Dixon, 1994). There are several conflicting factors that have an impact on the conservation and management of World Heritage cultural landscapes in Africa. These include intensification of agriculture, urbanization, development of infrastructure, tourism and recreation, excavation of mineral resources, establishment of land-fill sites, and the disappearance of natural biotopes, habitats, and ecosystems, among others. This paper addresses a particular form of conflict, cultural heritage conflicts, and develops an interdisciplinary conceptual and theoretical framework to assist in the analysis and management of conflicts, by identifying the key factors that contribute to the genesis, escalation, and resolution of conflicting situations in World Heritage cultural landscapes in Africa.

Cultural landscape conflicts arise when the interests of two or more stakeholders of a cultural landscape compete, and when at least one of the stakeholders is perceived to pursue its interests at the expense of the other's (Bennett, 2001:366). Cultural landscape conflicts in this context are defined as conflicts between people about the utilization of natural and cultural

heritage resources within the landscape. The degree to which the stakeholders' behavior is interpreted as asserting their interests at the expense of others can be influenced or enhanced by disagreement amongst stakeholders over fundamental values, power imbalances, or lack of clear institutional arrangements (Alston, 2000:165). Cultural landscapes have been defined, by Birnbaum (1994), as a geographical area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity or person exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.

Concern about vanishing cultural landscapes and new emerging landscapes have increased over the past years. Landscape change is considered as a threat because of its contribution to the loss of cultural identity which exists in cultural landscapes. Other researchers have pointed out that cultural landscapes are always subject to change and, as such, express the way the natural and cultural processes interact with one another (Antrop, 2005:22). Although it is recognized that some of the consequences of changes in cultural landscapes may be positive, proper management of these changes is necessary to reduce their negative impacts.

The issue of conflict in the heritage sector has been thoroughly discussed by several researchers in the last decades. The main focus has been placed on a value-led approach to heritage management which emphasizes the importance of assessing the divergent values that different parties attach to heritage sites (Kozan 1997:340; Burra Charter, 1999). Despite the existing theoretical discourse on the dissonance of heritage and the necessity to manage conflicting values, there is a practical and theoretical gap in the existing literature on how these conflicts pose a challenge for managing and conserving World Heritage cultural landscapes. The Burra Charter (1999) and other heritage documents acknowledge the importance of assessing divergent interests, but they do not incorporate the development of specific conflict management strategies as an essential component in heritage management processes (Rahim 2002:208; Augsburger, 1995).

Setting the Context

Cultural landscapes are recognized all around the world as important heritage sites, especially their associative values and features that are of importance to indigenous communities. The everyday protection of cultural landscapes is more relevant than, as threats to the very survival of the world's heritage have increased. These ever-growing threats also demand improved implementation of international and national legal instruments by states parties, (Rossler, 2015: 61). According to a report by the Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA, 2012), on their 3rd African nomination training workshop held in Uganda, it was noted that most potential world heritage sites in Africa face challenges of mismanagement, increased resource exploitation, dysfunctional institutions and diminishing of government resource allocation. A recent AWHF report (2015) noted that most potential African World Heritage properties suffer in the interest of short-term gains, which result in long-term losses. It was further argued that heritage sites of great value are sometimes affected by political and tribal conflict as a result of a scramble for limited resources.

Africa has the highest number of sites on the World Heritage List in Danger. Most of these sites are in conflict areas and the situation is a result of political, economic and social conflicts (AWHF 2015). According to the regional seminar on World Heritage Sites in conflict and post-conflict regions of Africa, held in Nairobi, Kenya, in September 2009, the following were identified as issues that cause conflicts: issues of ownership of land and mineral rights and equitable distribution; human encroachment on boundaries which intensified during conflicts; poverty; population pressure which leads to increasing demands for services; timber and water extraction; partnership and cooperation between communities, the private sector, government and heritage institutions. It was also observed that perhaps most endangered world heritage sites are in Africa because participation of the communities in managing and drawing up conservation programs for these sites is very minor.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

Understanding the nature of the conflict in heritage studies is a difficult but essential task when dealing with its reconciliation. Many academic disciplines, like economics, psychology, sociology, political science, among others, have their own theoretical approach towards understanding conflicts. Heritage management theorists emphasize the contradicting interrelationships of perceptions, values, and goals of individuals and groups of people as these are shaped by the past and its uses in the present (Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge, 2000:22). However, this has presented an interdisciplinary approach that will allow the fusion of different theories leading to the development of an integrated conceptual framework that will be used to understand and manage conflicts in cultural landscapes.

Conflict theories are classified into two broad theoretical approaches, behaviorist or micro-theories and classical or macro-theories (Jehn 1997:535, Van de Vliert and Kabanoff, 1990:206). The latter analyzes the individual and his/her environments (Thomas 1992:270), while the former examines the conflict interaction of groups. Based on the latter approach, this paper has examined the type of social and economic categories where groups of people oppose or support the conservation and management of cultural landscapes. This was based on the key assumptions of these theories, that conflicts stem from group competition and the pursuit of power and resources (Amason 1996:141). The method that classical theorists use in order to explore inter-group conflicts is based on the relationship of many variables using historical and case study approaches.

Decision-making and game theories deal with the balance of power, conflict genesis, escalation and its management. Their assumption is that people make rational choices and decisions based on informed choices and weighing opportunities (Behfar et al 2008:182). Heritage management theory has recently emphasized the necessity to assess and manage the divergent values that different individuals or groups of people attach to heritage and its contemporary uses (Fisher and Ury 1981:14). However, it lacks suggestions for specific ways in which the divergent values and the derived conflicts can be managed. The heritage conflict resolution framework suggests the active involvement of various stakeholders with an interest in a

cultural landscape so that different values, positions, and interest are freely expressed and accommodated.

In a cultural landscape, some of the common conflicts occur because of the contradiction between benefits of the past (cultural benefits) and the benefits of the present (social and economic benefits) (Lowenthal, 2009); between the collective ownership of a common past and the private ownership of a more recent and personal heritage at local, national and international level (Baron, R.A. (1997); between local , national and international identities shaped by the sense of place and the associations with the past (Ashworth and Tunbridge 2005); between visitor accessibility/tourism and conservation of the heritage site; between religious values and the scientific values (Bodtker and Jameson 2001); between contemporary uses of archaeological sites by living communities and conservation-visitor-scientific accessibility (DeDreu and Weingart 2003). Conflicts are also inherent in the political abuses of the past/heritage for political power (Wall and Callister 1995), in the notion of change (Wilson 2004) and the notion of innovation.

The case of Mulanje Mountain cultural landscape, Malawi.

This cultural landscape has been on the UNESCO tentative World Heritage list since 2000. The landscape is important ecologically as a unique center of endemism and biodiversity, and culturally as a repository of rich cultural heritage both tangible and intangible.

In this area the cultural landscape has a function in the life of the people and their identity. In many cultures in Africa, cultural landscapes are regarded from different angles. In the case of Mulanje mountain cultural landscape, it is regarded as a space which was inhabited by the ancestors, whose traces on the ground can be followed a long way back in time. These cultural traces are still partly perceptible and are visible in the terrain. The connection between the material and the non-material, the tangible and the intangible heritage is very important. Cultural landscapes also exist in people's memories and imaginations and are linked to place names, myths, rituals, and folklore. In people's minds, there is rarely a clear distinction between the visible and the invisible components of the landscapes. Stories and myths endow cultural

landscapes with meanings transcending the directly observable and create people's mental maps.



Figure 1: Mulanje Mountain Cultural landscape in Mulanje, Malawi.

The sacred and spiritual meaning of the Mulanje mountain cultural landscape is not always demonstrated in the human modifications to the physical landscape. It is in the oral history, stories, songs, arts and crafts that the importance of these places to sacred ancestral history and origins is expressed. This cultural landscape demonstrates the application of the concept of World Heritage Cultural Landscapes for the identification and conservation of sacred places in a variety of cultural and environmental contexts (Rossler, 2002). Better management of this cultural landscape will help Malawi as a country, and Africa as a region, to generate economic activity, create jobs, attract tourism, and reinforce the community's self-esteem, a fundamental aspect of sustainability.

Protection of cultural landscapes can contribute to modern techniques of sustainable land-use and can maintain or enhance natural values in the landscape. The continued existence of traditional forms of land-use in Mulanje Mountain cultural landscape supports biological diversity in the region. The protection of traditional cultural landscapes within the area is therefore helpful in maintaining biological diversity.

Conclusion

The conflicting interests in African World Heritage cultural landscapes adversely affect the proper management and conservation of these cultural landscapes. Once these conflicts are amicably reconciled cultural landscapes will be better protected and managed. There is need to develop a clear and concise framework on how to manage and reconcile conflicts in heritage management processes. The definition of cultural landscape conflicts presented in this paper is a starting point to help African heritage professionals understand conflicts in cultural landscapes and heritage places in general. It has been noted that cultural landscapes act as places where histories, narratives, and messages are tied to spaces and forms. As cultural heritage practitioners, our interests should not only be establishing the value of heritage and demanding its protection, but utilizing the resources comprised by cultural landscapes to benefit a given territory's local development, education, quality of life and economic potential, while creating a space for leisure activities, fulfilling emotional and spiritual needs, and contributing to a sense of identity. The ultimate goal is to improve the lives of the local communities.

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