

Concluding Summary of Going Beyond: Symposium on the Pillars of Sustainability of the UNESCO Conventions and Programmes – Bonn, 29. June – 05. July 2015

A presentation of the main ideas raised during the symposium kick off and think tanks were brought together as a conclusion to the event. The goal is to use these newly gained insights to craft the upcoming publication *Going Beyond: Perceptions of Sustainability in Heritage Studies No. 2*. This summary is by no means exhaustive, but will highlight some key terms and concepts according to the following groupings: trends and developments; paradigms; paradigm shifts; perceptions; and tools and methods. A summary of the concluding discussion is included at the end.

Trends and Developments

Trends and developments refer to those that are affecting and influencing heritage and sustainability now.

Musealization

Robert Rode, Kagosi Mwamulowe and Webber Ngoro spoke of the danger of musealization (the freezing in time) of living/dynamic heritage and entities such as nature or indigenous communities.

Demands for rights and participation

This is particularly evident from civil society and indigenous communities. Robert Rode spoke of addressing indigenous peoples as “rights holders” rather than merely stakeholders. Stefan Disko, too, spoke of the importance of respecting indigenous people’s rights as a prerequisite for sustainable development.

Growing tourism, gentrification, migration

These three terms address how people live and move, issues of dealing with boundaries and limitations. Carol Westrick, along with many others, addressed the issues of tourism. Michael Turner addressed gentrification from the perspective of the Historic Urban Landscape approach and its effect on historic city centres. Migration, whether forced or voluntary, was mentioned by Giovanni Boccardi. One must ask where is heritage and what happens to it when people leave the site?

Natural disasters, hazards, threats and risks

These issues are often perceived of as outside attacks, but they may also be internal. The question is, how to protect heritage in the face of potential destruction? Susanne von der Heide talked about the situation of Nepal post-earthquake. Another question asks what sustainability is in these cases. There may be opportunities to be proactive with risk management tools and assessments such as those presented by Mohammad Ravankhah regarding earthquakes in Iran.

Climate change

Problems relating to climate change include desertification in Africa, exceeding the capacities of the earth, increased competition for resources and a need to deal with scarcity, many of which concerns were posed by colleagues from Africa. Questions relating to responsibility, mitigation and adaptation arise from these issues.

Terrorism

This topic might have been included with “conflict” but this is perhaps a more extreme case requiring its own heading. It has been included here not because it was a major topic of conversation during the think tanks, but because it has been in the air and the problem of the directed destruction of

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cultural property was made abundantly clear through the recent Unite for Heritage initiative. The issue cannot be ignored, but the question remains, what to do?

In sum, these are factors heritage must face and the question is, how to face them sustainably, with a view toward the future. A further, very important question, which Shina Erlewein raised in one discussion, is, how can heritage be used in the face of all this to reach the sustainability of humanity?

Paradigms

Paradigms refer to frameworks and established ways of thinking. It also refers to concepts and notions that drive the heritage discourse and that are eventually considered for policies or heritage management plans. During the symposium the following paradigms came up.

Continuity – time, vision, space

Muhammad Juma, Michael Turner and Jennifer Harris addressed the paradigm of continuity. It demands a more holistic perspective in terms of how to address heritage issues in terms of time, vision and space. Michael Turner presented one relevant perspective in relation to spatial continuity and being able to go beyond the idea of an area of conservation.

Equal access

How can socio-economic benefits be balanced within World Heritage Sites? How can people be part of their heritage and participate in its preservation? The paradigm of equal access was addressed Juliana Forero and Webber Ndoro, who made special emphasis on equal access in terms of education and training for heritage protection and conservation. Is there still a difference between global North and South in terms of knowledge and resources?

Responsibility

Heritage protection demands responsible and empowered citizens, which form a society that looks after heritage and its values. Marie-Theres Albert presented this paradigm and mentioned that it also implies a vision of sustainability as the capacity to build societies that seek to protect their heritage in order to preserve their identity.

Resilience and self-sufficiency

Susanne von der Heide addressed resilience as a paradigm in her presentation about Challenges for Reconstructing Heritage Sites after the Recent Earthquake in Nepal. It is relevant to understand how societies can cope with the changes brought on by disasters and how local communities can contribute to heritage reconstruction after a disaster.

Scarcity

Resources are not a given and in some cases are not even available. Is this a challenge or an opportunity? How can one talk about heritage conservation in places where other needs still need to be fulfilled? Kagosi Mwamulowe and Webber Ndoro presented their views about this paradigm in regards to the challenges they face in African countries.

Tangible and intangible

Is there a need to talk about two types of heritage? How can a dialogue be created between the two conventions to provide a better understanding of the links between tangible and intangible heritage?

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How can sustainable heritage conservation be promoted by bringing these views together? These questions in relation to the paradigm were part of the presentations of Juliana Forero and Shina Erlewein.

Paradigm Shifts

The context in which heritage protection and conservation was initially approached has changed as well society. The problems and challenges that people face today are different and this implies a paradigm shift. Some of the presentations provided the audience with new perspectives and frameworks to look at heritage conservation and give continuity to the heritage discourse.

People-centred

Heritage has moved from monument-centred to people centred, and the needs and demands of the communities living within and around heritage are now taken into account, or being heard. Jennifer Harris and Robert Rode presented the issues and challenges in relation to aborigines and indigenous communities living in heritage sites, and Juliana Forero presented her views about the social function of cultural heritage and how community involvement is the key to promoting sustainability.

Anthropocene

Giovanni Boccardi presented this new paradigm. He pointed out that the world is now going through a new geological era called the Anthropocene, in which the human being is the one that is in charge of all the changes. The current human behavior is having a negative impact on the earth and the availability of resources, and this is having an impact in culture, as many of the ideas that have been previously developed need to be renegotiated. In this sense, heritage sites are also affected, and there is a need of a paradigm shift that looks beyond the Western perspective and incorporates alternative perspectives on heritage conservation and sustainability.

Commons

This new paradigm was mainly addressed during the presentation of Marie-Theres Albert. It implies that heritage should be taken as a common good for people and the society. In this sense, a policy framework should be developed in order to promote participation as well as protection and use of heritage as a common good, in a conscious and responsible way.

Space instead of time

The main message in relation to this paradigm shift was that there is a need to move away from the idea of areas of conservation, and that the concept of isolated islands or protected areas separated from the rest of the world in terms of space and time is unsustainable. This paradigm shift was evident in the presentations of Giovanni Boccardi, Jennifer Harris and Michael Turner.

Perceptions

The question of whether to talk about “paradoxes” in the new publication came up, but this could have led to becoming trapped into a box of “either/or”. Instead, one could observe a diversity of perspectives in through the presentations. Along the lines of the publication proposal, this summary attempts to incorporate more viewpoints on how to meet corresponding demands.

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Sustainability and development

These may seem obvious, but as many presenters have observed, these concepts are difficult to define. Barbara Engels, for example, spoke of the changing definition of sustainability to encompass more than the environment, and Francesco Bandarin offered perspective on the political development of “sustainability”. As Michael Kloos and others presented, “sustainability” and “development” may, in fact, look different or require different approaches in different contexts.

Alternative and non-Western views

These were an important consideration for the realization of the symposium. One particular example, among many, was from Jennifer Harris, who shared the sometimes-divergent perspectives on what it means to be sustainable between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Australia, evidencing a difference of values and life quality. Harris suggests that the Aboriginal sense of “oneness” with and responsibility to surroundings is already present. Another non-Western approach to sustainability and heritage is urban acupuncture, as propounded by Chang Liu.

Development and conservation

There were topics addressed by many. Again, the concern of the musealization of people’s lifestyles, expressions or activities in a site came up. Webber Ndoro highlighted nicely the conflicting desired of local populations and decision makers, which leads to the next topic...

Needs, benefits and values

The speakers recognized that these often vary and there is no one-size-fits-all because of the following concept...

Difference and diversity

These may include people, places and approaches. Real life is complex and people need to learn from each other, but not to the point of total deconstruction. Rather people must find what they have in common – it is, after all, the heritage of humanity.

Equality/inequality and justice/injustice

These two pairs of terms are very much tied to the trends of rights and the people-centred paradigm. These issues are evident in the case of some poor people living near heritage sites in Africa who are left out of decisions making processes or not even able to afford access, as is the case at Victoria Falls. It is also an issue of the global North/South division as illuminates by Julianna Forero and of local versus high level decision-making as described by Claudia Lozano.

Choices and decisions

This is another very important issue of perspective. The presenters shared many instances of decision making processes and how people are included or excluded. Marie-Theres Albert mentioned Amartya Sen’s capability approach to consider quality of life in human development. Dilnoza Duturaeva offered a perspective that people, today, choose what heritage or inheritance, as she termed it, they will leave for the future.

History – different stories?

Duturaeva also posed questions about this subject related to educational curricula. There are no doubt different stories and perceptions, but she asks, is there a way to bring different, competing or comparative histories together, to write history together? Heritage professionals may want to ask that question as well.

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Tools and Methods

This section includes approaches, methodologies and practical tools, put forward by presenters. An important emphasis is that proactive approaches are key.

Awareness building

Awareness building has to do primarily with communicating what heritage is and why it should be valued. More than one presenter raised the issue that if a person sees no benefit of a heritage site, they see no reason to protect it.

Networks and partnerships

This refers in part to knowledge sharing. There was a suggestion that perhaps heritage workshops could offer Skype connections to other regions in the world.

Integration and inclusion approaches

Tied very much to the equal access paradigm, these approaches may include micro-interventions, bottom up “cures” as Chang Liu presented, rather than broad-sweeping, top down approaches.

Actor involvement and dialogue

These follow similar lines as integration and inclusion. Jan Küver spoke of bottom up approaches in which discussions with the local community resulted in the conservation of a colonial building *and* the erection of a monument to the injuries incurred from colonialism.

Empowerment

This can include civil society, managers, local populations near or within heritage sites. The aim is to create a sense of responsibility and capability for caring for their site. Allison Thompson spoke of empowering women and girls through sports (e.g. traditional sports of intangible cultural heritage) to increase confidence, health, leadership and involvement in the community.

Transparency

Transparency has to do with openness, trust-building, clarity and applicability of interpretations. Gaining the trust of peoples and governments helps to increase the credibility of the World Heritage Convention.

Local contextualization

Again, this is a matter of fitting to real-life circumstance. Jyoti Hosagrahar, for example, mentioned the case of a heritage aware approach in South Asia and Kagosi Mwamulowe challenged the audience with the observation that many people often think of Africa as a country rather than a continent, let alone a continent with different regions and peoples.

Training – formal and informal

Training enables people, professionals and laypeople, to better care for their heritage. Julianna Forero gave the example of a Colombian Workshop School for training those who otherwise had no educational access in order to better protect and care for their heritage while providing occupational skills.

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Assessment, monitoring and risk management

These involve methodologies, which use indicators such as: Strategic Environmental Analyses, Heritage Impact Assessments (Michael Kloos and Kagosi Mwamulowe), empirical sociology analysis (Ana Pereira Roders), disaster risk assessments (Mohammad Ravankhah).

Sustainable tourism

Tourism was a frequent topic of discussion. María Leonor Pérez and Carol Westrick discussed the subject at length. The coming UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit, which will aid site managers, is warmly welcomed.

Concluding Discussion

Learning from heritage

Roland Bernecker raised the point that discussions revolved around the notion of complexity. It is not just a matter of how to apply sustainability to heritage, but also the other way around. The concept of sustainability is also more complex than it has been presented so far in policy documents such as the Brundtland report. The report is essentially one-dimensional. It speaks of the present and future but lacks the past. Jennifer Harris remarked that even this kind of past-present-timeline is a Western concept. There are other cultural that think concentrically about time. Bernecker suggested that perhaps it should read "...using experiences, wisdom and knowledge of past generations". What does the past teach or show about how choices are culturally motivated? Bernecker posited that sustainability is not an invention of modern times but a natural guiding principle because there was no other possibility. He questions if the growth of urbanization and globalization devalue the local and rural.

What is heritage?

Many people, said Jennifer Harris, think of heritage as anything but complex. It is primarily aesthetic and supplemental to them. Heritage education is necessary to change such a perspective and to create a sense of the value of protecting material from other times. Ana Pereira Roders reminded her listeners that to reach communities, heritage rhetoric has to be simplified. The explanation is as easy as, "what you keep and save is your heritage". If a community sees value in something, they will protect and preserve it if possible whether it has been listed internationally or not.

Heritage is also an issue of identity, said one guest. He has observed that heritage professionals often lack emotions or inclusive intelligence for dealing properly with history and the future. He proposed that one must open one's mind and *listen*. He sees the World Heritage Convention as a good framework to enable people to think about others and to support their human rights.