

# Cultural heritage policies as a tool for development: discourse or harmony?

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## **ABSTRACT**

In recent decades “the notion of ‘culture’ emerged as the fourth pillar of sustainable development” (see e.g. Dallaire & Colbert 2012: 7). Probably even more than other cultural expressions, cultural heritage is considered as a tool for sustainable development, certainly for the developing world. With this article we want to discuss the notion of sustainable development in the context of cultural heritage policies. Although international policies increasingly point to the value of cultural heritage for sustainable development, we would like to feed the debate on whether and to what extent these cultural heritage policies really contribute to sustainable development or whether these policies can only be classified as policy discourse.

### **Keywords:**

Cultural heritage

Sustainable  
development

Cultural policies

Policy discourse

## Introduction

Currently, in international cultural policy documents culture is linked to economic development, social cohesion and stability, environmental sustainability and resilient communities<sup>1</sup>. Cultural heritage, in particular, is perceived as an important vehicle for development since “cultural tourism contributes to economic development”, “cultural heritage builds social cohesion”, “mobilizes communities around its care and management”, etc. Recently the Hangzhou Declaration<sup>2</sup> placed culture at the very heart of sustainable development policies and heritage is seen as “a critical asset for our well-being and that of future generations”. Ever more heritage is considered as a driver for sustainable development in different domains such as inclusive social, cultural and economic development, harmony, environmental sustainability and peace building.

Due to a global scarcity of funds, policy makers increasingly seek justification for allocating funds to culture by attributing socio-economic values to it. The cost of culture is obvious in governmental budgets. Unfortunately, the benefits are often intangible and more difficult to capture in conventional terms (McLoughlin, Sodagar & Kaminski 2006: 43). An ever growing body of academic research demonstrates the socio-economic benefits of culture and heritage for society. This led to a remarkable shift in heritage discourse in contemporary heritage policies. Heritage policies altered from an object-oriented approach to a subject-oriented approach. In the past heritage policies mainly concentrated on restoration and conservation (or the object). Today, the focus evolved and the value of heritage for the wider society is emphasized. This culminated in the adoption of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (2005)<sup>3</sup>.

Indeed, every field of culture, from creative industries to cultural heritage, is known to produce employment and revenues. Cultural tourism, for example, accounts for an estimated 40% of the total amount of tourism revenues (Bandarin, Hosagrahar & Sailer Albernaz 2011: 15-18). Additionally, cultural heritage is linked to social or human development and cultural heritage is clearly interconnected with human rights and democracy. The General Assembly adopted the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>4</sup> in 1966. It does not explicitly mention cultural property, but it recognises “cultural rights” as intimately tied to human rights and

Article 15(1)(a) guarantees the right to participate in cultural life, which is considered as impossible without the experiencing of cultural heritage. So, in this article we do not want to question that cultural heritage contributes to sustainable development. This has been confirmed by a range of academic studies and concrete initiatives (int. al. Rizzo & Throsby, 2006; Peacock & Rizzo, 2008). What we do want to question is to what extent policymakers, on the national and international level, who increasingly point to the value of heritage for sustainable development in their discourse, really contribute to sustainable development.

## Cultural heritage – driver for sustainable development in heritage policy discourse

UNESCO, in particular, is increasingly focusing on the interconnection between cultural heritage and development. In 1982, the Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies focused on the cultural dimension of development by arguing that “balanced development can only be insured by making cultural factors an integral part of the strategies designed to achieve it”<sup>5</sup>. This process was set in motion even more palpably in 1996 with the Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development “Our Creative Diversity”<sup>6</sup>. Today, cultural heritage, in particular, is perceived as an important vehicle for development since “cultural tourism contributes to economic development”, “cultural heritage builds social cohesion”, “mobilizes communities around its care and management”, etc.<sup>7</sup> The organisation has also progressively assimilated alternative approaches that have emerged from the South. The “Nara Document on Authenticity” is noteworthy. This document was issued in 1994 by UNESCO and ICOMOS. It confirmed that various conservation practices that reflect the cultural values of particular societies are acceptable (Askew, 2010: 27). The concept of authenticity, which was before considered as a basic principle for world heritage sites, was now perceived as typically Western. In order to counter the monopoly of the concept of authenticity, the 2005 version of the operational guidelines on the World Heritage Convention introduced the concept of integrity (Labadi 2010: 72). In addition, the organisation developed different instruments

<sup>1</sup> e.g. UNESCO CLT/2010/WS/14.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO CLT-2013/WS/14.

<sup>3</sup> Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, adopted 27 October 2005, <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/199.htm>

<sup>4</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted 16 December 1966, [www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/a\\_cescr.htm](http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_cescr.htm)

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies, World Conference on Cultural Policies, Mexico City, 26 July-6 August, 1982, [http://portal.unesco.org/pv\\_obj\\_cache/pv\\_obj\\_id\\_A274FC8367592F6CEEDB92E91A93C7AC61740000/filename/mexico\\_en.pdf](http://portal.unesco.org/pv_obj_cache/pv_obj_id_A274FC8367592F6CEEDB92E91A93C7AC61740000/filename/mexico_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO CLT-96/WS6.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO CLT/2010/WS/14.

to concede to developing countries such as Funds installed by the main heritage conventions<sup>8</sup>, “The Global Strategy for a Balanced, Representative and Credible World Heritage”<sup>9</sup> and the research project “Culture for development Indicators Suite” (2009 to 2012) (UNESCO, 2012). The Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression<sup>10</sup>, that also includes cultural heritage, explicitly encourages the “integration of culture in sustainable development” (art. 13) and Pyykkönen (2012: 555) argues that “one might justly conclude that binding cultural expression to developing countries to the global market economy is one of the core missions”. Furthermore, UNESCO participated in the “Rio+20” UN Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012, which mainly focused on human development. The outcome document of the conference acknowledged, among other things, the importance of investing in cultural tourism and “the need for conservation as appropriate of the natural and cultural heritage of human settlements, the revitalization of historic districts, and the rehabilitation of city centers”<sup>11</sup>. In May this all culminated in the “Hangzhou Declaration. Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies”<sup>12</sup>. Regarding heritage in particular, the declaration states e.g. that the “rehabilitation of cultural heritage should be promoted to enable affected communities to renew their identity, regain a sense of dignity and normalcy” and “inclusive economic development should also be achieved through activities focused on sustainable protecting, safeguarding and promoting heritage”.

## The other side of the coin

Indeed, cultural heritage can contribute to sustainable development. Unfortunately, we argue that this is not a *sine qua non*. Cultural heritage can also oppose development and can even be a factor in the prolongation of armed conflict. The Hangzhou declaration urges inter alia to “mobilize culture and mutual understanding to foster peace and reconciliation”. Nevertheless, cultural property can also play a role in war and exclusive societies. Cultural heritage mirroring the identity of opposing groups can be targeted in identity-bound armed conflicts and this can lead to even more manifest expressions of in-group solidarity (or out-group competition) as was observed, for instance, in

Kosovo, where Serbian Orthodox heritage was targeted by Albanians and *vice versa*. Cultural heritage was perceived as the cultural claim of a community on the territory. Via the destruction these claims disappear and it becomes “easier” to believe the (re)constructed version of history empowering the claim on the territory of the remaining community. As the Preah-Vihaer case indicates, even UNESCO Cultural Heritage policies can hinder development. Preah Vihaer, the “Holy Monastery”, is a Cambodian Khmer site close to the place where Cambodia, Thailand and Laos meet. After the decline of the Khmer dynasty the region became contested territory (Buss, 2010: 112). The International Court of Justice pronounced a judgment on this case in 1962<sup>13</sup> and the territory officially became a part of Cambodia. Nevertheless, the territory surrounding the temple continued to be a source of dispute. The situation has become more complex and politicised since the contested inclusion of the Preah Vihaer site on the World Heritage List in 2008. There have been significant human casualties and the development of the region retarded (Hauser-Schäublin, 2011: 37). The International Court of Justice reinterpreted the judgement of 1962<sup>14</sup> in July 2011. In this judgement, the link between the re-intensification of the conflict and the inclusion of Preah Vihaer on the World Heritage List was acknowledged.

Moreover, some authors, like Smith, perceived UNESCO policies on cultural heritage as relying on an “Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD)” (Smith, 2006: 28-34), an old way of looking at heritage which privileges old, grand, prestigious, expert approved sites, buildings and artefacts that sustain Western narratives of nation, class and science. Some will argue that the Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage<sup>15</sup> endeavored for a new approach. Prior to its adoption, countries from the South increasingly directed frustrations to the World Heritage Committee, which reflected the geographic imbalance of the World Heritage List. More than in Western countries, in non-Western countries cultural heritage tends to be considered as a whole; a building or an object cannot be separated from its associated values and traditions. The selection criteria of the World Heritage Committee were not necessarily suited to these cultural features of southern countries. According to Aikawa-Faure, UNESCO was urged to include intangible components (Aikawa-Faure, 2009: 15). Lixinski argues that the stress on the survival

<sup>8</sup> The World Heritage Fund, the Fund for the Protection of Cultural Property During Armed Conflict and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund.

<sup>9</sup> UNESCO WHC-94/CONF.003/INF.6.

<sup>10</sup> Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression, adopted on 20 October 2005, [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/Conv2005\\_BasicTexts\\_HD\\_EN.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/Conv2005_BasicTexts_HD_EN.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> A/RES/66/288, par. 130-131, 134.

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO CLT-2013/WS/14.

<sup>13</sup> Summary of summary of the Judgment of 15 June 1962 Case concerning the Temple of Preah Vihaer, <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?sum=284&code=ct&p1=3&p2=3&case=45&k=46&p3=5>

<sup>14</sup> Request for interpretation of the Judgment of 15 June 1962 in the Case concerning the Temple of Preah Vihaer (Cambodia v. Thailand), <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/151/16564.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted on 17 October 2003, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00006>

of intangible cultural heritage and its importance for cultural diversity and sustainable development is even a basic pillar of the Convention. Development is regarded as a necessary element for the very survival of intangible cultural heritage (Lixinski, 2011: 83-84). However, apart from the possibility to grant a special status to another kind of heritage which is thought to be more important for developing countries, there has not changed a lot. For instance, the involvement of communities (albeit a contested concept as such, see e.g. Anderson, 2006), to counterbalance the idea of an authorized Western nation-state heritage, is strongly encouraged. Nevertheless, as UNESCO is a state-driven organization, which respects the sovereign right of its members, the nomination of intangible cultural heritage still remains an exclusive right of the state concerned. This is particularly problematic in developing countries where there is a tangible risk that nominations will not happen due to lack of means and institutional capacity. Moreover, these countries are vulnerable for identity-bound conflict and heritage of cultural minorities can be excluded. Effective bottom-up strategies challenging the Authorized Heritage Discourse still appear to be absent.

Another striking problem we want to address in this regard is the reluctance of developing countries to access or implement UNESCO heritage policies and law standards. This is obvious when one considers the unequal geographic distribution of ratification rates of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of 1954 and its Second Protocol. In the case that a developing state has ratified, the provisions are rarely implemented. On the other hand, UNESCO seems to be willing to improve the situation and a Plan of Action was launched at the Fourth Meeting of Parties to the Second Protocol (12-13 December 2011)<sup>16</sup> (Van der Auwera, 2013). In this regard, the reputation of other UNESCO Conventions is even worse. Steiner and Frey concluded, for instance, that the world heritage list has become even more imbalanced since the Global Strategy was introduced (Steiner & Frey, 2011: 25).

Another point of discussion is the question whether heritage is still valued as important for its intrinsic values. Historic values and esthetic values compete with social and economic values. Policy makers increasingly tend to seek justification for

allocating funds to heritage by attributing socio-economic values to heritage as a result of the universal scarcity of funds for heritage conservation. Consequently, heritage discourse altered from a conservation oriented-approach to a value-oriented approach. Increasingly the value of heritage for society is emphasized by arguing that heritage has a significant social and economic impact. Indeed, heritage has a social and economic impact, but the intrinsic value may not be ignored.

## Conclusion

This article raised some significant issues in order to feed the academic debate concerning the link between cultural heritage and sustainable development and more in particular, the policy discourse that tends to be just taken for granted. Even though we are convinced that cultural property can contribute to sustainable development, we question whether this is always the case. The discourse on cultural heritage and development tends only to consider the positive aspects of heritage. We believe, however, that cultural heritage can also oppose development and that this has to be acknowledged and prevented. In addition, as international cultural heritage policies acknowledge the link between cultural heritage and development, it is striking that developing countries tend not to find access and implement these policies. It is the exclusive responsibility of the state concerned to adopt (or not) UNESCO policies and it is perceived that an organisations such as UNESCO can only contribute by raising awareness and offering encouragement. States with a low level of development are not always able to implement international heritage policies, to consider the demanding process of nominating a site as World Heritage or requesting international assistance, etc. or they do not consider these things as a priority. On the other hand, an internationalist vision on heritage conservation has prevailed in recent years (Francioni, 2004). This vision reflects the idea that cultural heritage belongs to all of us and thus is not national property as such. How can this dilemma be solved? Is it possible to let UNESCO or other states intervene in some cases when really necessary? Or is this still a bridge too far in a world order of sovereign states governing international organisations?

<sup>16</sup> UNESCO CLT-11/CONF.210/INF.1

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