

COOPERATION IN WORLD HERITAGE SITES: SOME REFLECTIONS

Cooperación en sitios Patrimonio Mundial: Algunas reflexiones

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INTRODUCTION

A wide range of issues reflect back in our minds when we talk about cooperation. Cooperation on world heritage is a globally important issue that touches on the sustainability of WH sites. Collective recognition by state parties of sites of Outstanding Universal Values in various countries and among peoples of different cultures is important for global cultural co-existence and intellectual enrichment. It also promotes dialogue while still preserving diversity.

Article 4 of the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage states that “Each State Party to this Convention recognizes that the duty of ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage ... belongs primarily to that State. It will do all it can to this end, to the utmost of its own resources and, where appropriate, with any international assistance and co-operation, in particular, financial, artistic, scientific and technical, which it may be able to obtain”. Further, on Article 7 it is stated that “... international protection of the world cultural and natural heritage shall be understood to mean the establishment of a system of international co-operation and assistance designed to support States Parties to the Convention in their efforts to conserve and identify that heritage” (UNESCO. 1972).

1. WHY DO WE COOPERATE?

Nations have agreed, based on Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Right, that people have the right to participate in cultural activities and cooperation programs irrespective of their “...origin, nationality, age, language, gender, belonging to minority groups, etc.’ (UNESCO Extea 2010: p.9) .

According to the Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Cooperation, international cooperation is accepted as «...a right and a duty for all peoples and all nations, which should share with one another their knowledge and skills» (UNESCO Etxea 2010: p7). Furthermore, on World Conference on Cultural Policies/ MONDIA-CULT (Mexico 1982) it is noted that “International cultural cooperation defends the need to share cultural knowledge through exchange. This cooperation will be based on the respect for the cultural identity and the value of each culture, without assimilation.” (UNESCO Etxea 2010: p9) The above declaration has accorded the right to protect sites and cultures of world heritage to all humanity

Cooperation is usually viewed as communication between external and internal bodies. Cooperation between communities, communities and people, and between community and Government should also be insured. A logical link between local communities, people who live near sites, and government offices at various levels needs to be developed. But how is this regulated?

Policies concerning cooperation should be formulated taking in to consideration and with regard to types of heritage properties: i.e. policies for built heritages (this could be subdivided into religious and non-religious), natural sites (fossil landscapes, geological sites, sites with unique flora and fauna) and cultural landscapes (agricultural landscapes, pastoral landscapes, etc.). Indigenous knowledge surrounding World Heritage sites are crucial for understanding the functioning of the whole system which is passed only through direct interactions with community elders. One needs to understand and appreciate the individual character of heritage properties and the accumulated knowledge which preserved them through several millennia. Although an all-encompassing guiding principle could be put in place, at the same time, cases should always be considered individually. That is why management plans are needed for each and individual

sites proposed for nomination as world Heritage. Management Plans are always expected to have a legal protection mechanism in place. However, not all state parties are ready for a 100% functioning protection system.

How is cooperation viewed in relation to cultural sovereignty?

This is, however, a sensitive issue. National/ political sovereignty is of paramount importance for the national identity of every nation. This issue is addressed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as it is based on the respect for cultural identity and the value of each culture, without the possibility of cultural subordination or assimilation. Cooperation between communities and higher learning institutions, between communities and researchers has to be based on the principles of just, fair, and all inclusive participatory approaches.

Before any cooperation takes place, its significance to the site or cultural property has to be evaluated by communities living at the site and by all stake holders. As Willem J. H. Willems (Willem J. H. WILLEMS, 2012) has argued, this also calls for a system of valuation of heritage property from historical, psychological, societal, political and economic angles. Not only the type of cooperation, but also the general management system of the property should be decided based on these principles. Thus again, the importance of a working management plan is important and should include the above essential principles.

It is true that wealthy nations have all the necessary means needed to protect, conserve, manage and put in to use their WH sites. Whereas in contrast to that, developing nations lack the means necessary to undertake what their sites need and to sustainably use them. It is within the right of all concerned bodies to cooperate to protect the common heritage of humanity, where ever they are located or under whomever custodianship they are found.

2. WHO OVERLOOKS THE COOPERATION MODALITIES?

Cooperation modalities are issues that concern international bodies such as UNESCO; since the state parties are signatories to the convention. State parties cooperate between themselves on world heritage sites based on the generally accepted common goals for the protection and valorization of sites. However, any

major activity on World Heritage sites should follow the regulations, approval and involvement of UNESCO. Thus, cooperation on World Heritage sites, be it between any local or international body has to be approved by UNESCO. This approach is meant to protect the Outstanding Universal Values and Integrity of the properties. Whether the issue of sovereignty is raised or not, state parties have to comply with this fact. However, the cooperation terms have to be agreed upon by all stake holders, including indigenous communities, local people, state parties, and other partners.

Communities need to adapt to the ideals of cooperation once their sites or landscapes attract the interest of others. Note that the values of properties change with nomination. Various international and local bodies undertake different collaborative activities in World Heritage Sites. In some cases there is lack of detailed discussion on the proposed collaboration programs between the two parties. And, the regulators appear to be not too enthusiastic in creating the coordination needed to attain the above goal. Culture sectors within State parties should work in collaboration with sectors involved in culture-related issues. Further, even remotely culture-related sectors such as trade, industry, agriculture, tourism, environment, education, youth, women, etc. should be involved in such cooperative endeavors. These sectors have stakes that are linked, in one way or another, with culture and heritage.

It is a fact that some world heritage sites nominated as Cultural landscapes have attracted the attention of international organizations such as FAO for the role that they could play in protecting the biodiversity and indigenous knowledge involved in farming and traditional architectures in water and soil conservation. The designation of unique and intact agricultural landscapes such as Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) mostly overlap with cultural landscapes that received UNESCO's recognition and nomination. Collaborative work with international institutions, who work on food sovereignty could also support collaborative undertakings in appreciating and preserving bio-cultural landscapes.

I would like to present an example of a collaborative undertaking which took place for the documentation and preparation of the Nomination File and

Management plan of the Konso Cultural Landscape in Ethiopia. The whole endeavor was a result of collaborative effort between the Konso communities, the local, regional and central government, local NGOs and scholars, with financial support from the UNESCO, AWHF and the Christensen Fund, a USA based NGO working on the protection and stewardship of bio-cultural diversity. This collaborative effort has helped to enable the Konso Cultural Landscape, with its unique and extensive dry stone terrace system, water and soil conservation techniques, land use and traditional architecture to be recognized as World Heritage. In addition, the Konso are also known for their burial systems, living megalithic tradition which involve mummification of the ritual leaders and traditional management system based on decentralized and yet very cohesive system in which the rituals play major role. The OUV of Konso CLS states that The Konso Cultural landscape is “an outstanding example of human urge to understand and appreciate his environment, whatever constraints it may pose and to use it to the best of his knowledge and capacity applying good practice.” (Konso Nomination File, 2011).

The benefits of cooperation based on an agreed upon plan led to a fruitful and successful result. To insure the sustainability of the Konso Cultural Landscape, its agricultural importance and unique attributes were once again reviewed. The unique agricultural tradition in Konso, which is mostly referred to as an example of arid environment adaptation, has further attracted additional programs focusing on its unique sorghum varieties (Beyene, Y. 2013 and references therein)_ and agro-forestry, and preparations are under way to propose its nomination for Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS).

The collaborative work in Konso has further encouraged UNESCO and donor organizations to further revise the Management Plan prepared six years ago. Although there are criticisms about the fact that the management plan which was put in place was not fully applied, the additional efforts are hoped to revitalize the efforts and help to look in to the intangible aspects and their importance at depth.

In developing countries, funds for the protection and management of World Heritage sites are usually expected to be raised from international donors and

through UNESCO. Local governments and local stake holders could also be essential sources of funding. There are instances when local communities, through practical cooperation agreements with government and outside sources, have raised significant funds to conserve and valorize their World Heritage Sites. The Konso communities, through cooperation with the regional government, have secured part of the tourist revenue from visits to sites for community use and conservation efforts. Also, in collaboration with foreign embassies and culture centers, and with community direct participation and contribution, they have built an information center and a local museum. Again, in partnership and cooperation with the national body responsible for antiquity protection, they are engaged in conservation and restoration of their architectural heritage.

This example from Konso can be viewed as best practice example for the empowerment of local communities and the concerted efforts of the respective stake holders. It is advised, however, that the culture experts working in the area should take in to consideration the efforts exerted and the positive outcomes from those cooperation efforts. One needs to build upon the gains and the positive accomplishments, while at the same time wisely revising the current situations.

Cooperation has to be built on trust and partnership through several months, even years; based on an agreed upon strategic plan for a common goal. This goal can be crucial for the immediate tangible result in the host country and/ as well as addressing a more global issue to the collaborating external body. Thus, cooperation in world heritage sites serves greater purpose than it appears. It insures the conservation of bio-cultural diversities through the direct participation of communities using their age old traditional knowledge and there by insuring the future of our global agriculture. At the same time, it enables local communities to insure their food security by using their traditional systems and help them in poverty alleviation through new job opportunities, such as regulated and specialized agro-tourism. It also serves the government in the general economic development and “image building of a nation.

I would like to further touch upon a few other examples where cooperation has proved to be beneficial to some world heritage sites.

3. LALIBELA ROCK-HEWN CHURCHES

The Lalibela Rock Hewn churches **are** located in the northern mountainous region of Ethiopia. Lalibela was nominated in 1978 as a cultural site. This site of an architectural marvel from the 12th. Century is also a house to invaluable and very important Christian artifacts which are vestiges of all humanity. The living cultural practices which are built around the ancient Christian traditions are not yet fully documented. This world Heritage site was impacted due to natural (climate and seismic activities) and manmade causes (due to living religious practices in the site). Thanks for international cooperation program with the European Union financial support and the coordination of UNESCO, five of the eleven rock-hewn structures were covered with shelter to gain time until future research provides a better means for their conservation. Again, with support from World Bank, the overall management of the Lalibela town/settlement is underway. Many other partners and stake holders as well have contributed their support. The local people, Regional government, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Federal Government, and all of the major stake holders have joined forces to maintain the integrity of the site and its OUV. In order to support these efforts, a management plan was put in place by the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and the regional government in cooperation with UNESCO and the University College of Dublin (UCD). Local communities, the church and people of Lalibela who have stakes have taken part in the general effort. A plan to undertake the conservation of the Bete Gabriel-Rufael is currently underway in cooperation with the World Monument Fund and UNESCO. Such progress in conservation efforts was possible due to cooperation between all of the stake holders, which was also well coordinated by UNESCO. A concerted effort has resulted in the publication of a workable management plan, again with the collaboration of UNESCO and the state party. But, the question remains that the site development, conservation and tourism activities have preceded the publication and endorsement of the management Plan. This is mainly because, when the site was nominated, formulation of a management plan was not a requirement for nomination. Formulation of a management plan in retrospect however would require adjustments to situations on the ground which is not always easy. (Lalibela management Plan, 2015)

4. SIEMEN MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

The Siemen Mountains National Park in northern Ethiopia was nominated as Natural site in 1978. Its Afro Alpine flora and the endemic fauna it harbors (Walia-ibex, Abyssinian Wolf, and Gelada baboons) makes it unique bio-diversity area. In addition, its spectacular natural setting (jugged volcanic mountains) resulting from several tens of million years of erosion makes it a unique landscape.

From the day it was nominated, protection of the property was a major issue, as the local population depended on its resources and competed with its rare fauna. Road built through the park, cattle grazing, increasing number of farming communities were the main concerns for the protection of this unique landscape. Several attempts were made throughout the years to mediate the dilemma of conserving the site. The Park was under UNESCO's list of world heritage in danger since 1996. After 19 years of continuous efforts by the Ethiopian government, the regional government, the local community in collaboration with UNESCO, IUCN and the Austrian and Spanish governments support, the number of endangered Walia-ibex has risen, the road is redirected outside of the park and mechanisms to regulate the cattle grazing problems are put in to place. International donors meeting was successfully undertaken to insure the protection and sustainability of this fragile bio-diversity. However, still the Semien Natural Park is in the list of World Heritage in danger.

Once again international cooperation has proved to be instrumental in the protection of the Siemen Natural Park. Collaborating bodies have always been willing and ready to provide their support through UNESCO. (WHC-13/37.COM/7A.Add.)

5. PALEOANTHROPOLOGICAL SITES OF LOWER OMO AND THE LOWER AWASH

The Lower Omo and the Lower Awash sites were inscribed in the UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1980, based on the major archaeological discoveries made in the areas during the 1960s and 1970s. In the case of the lower Awash Valley, the discovery of Lucy and numerous other similar hominid fossils that lived between 3.0 and 3.6 Ma ago at Hadar has resulted in the naming of *Australopithecus*

afarensis, a new hominid species. In addition, the discovery of stone tools, evidence of the earliest material culture dated at 2.6 Ma had significantly changed the perception of the antiquity of culture, as ‘...A reference point in the study of the origins of mankind, the Awash Valley contains one of the most important groupings of paleontological site on the African continent.’

The Lower valley of Omo was investigated in the 1930s and again from 1968 onwards by a large team of international specialists. This site is of exceptional universal value from the historical and scientific point of view.

There was no any cooperation work done between institutions with regard to these sites. A number of international team of scientists visit the sites every year for research purpose. No management plan was put in place during their inscription, which is still the case up to now. Researchers conduct their research work based on permits issued from the Authority for Research and Conservation of Culture. A great deal of scientific data that bear on human biological and cultural evolution has been collected from these sites. These two sites have produced an unparalleled scientific data on our evolutionary history. (Beyene, Y. 2010—and references there in)

The sites are protected so far thanks for their remoteness. It is high time now, that management plans be put in place and reasonable boundary adjustments be done since there are development projects underway in both areas. The sites have very fertile soil with water resource for large irrigation. Collaborative undertakings between UNESCO, ICOMOS, IUCN, researchers, people, communities, and Government should provide win-win solution for the inevitability of development schemes.

Now the European Union has allocated some funds in the framework of its aid package to Ethiopia, to study both areas for tourism development. The program is in planning stage and it is expected that it may provide some answers to the problem at hand. Again, we have the beginning of a new era of collaboration in a much neglected category of World Heritage.

It would be worth mentioning the restitution of the Axum Obelisk in Axum. This restitution has demonstrated the benefits of international cooperation.

6. IN CONCLUSION

Cooperation between major donors and developing nations is sometimes linked to poverty alleviation provided through development programs such as in the area of tourism. The process is usually intricate which is processed through the donor's bureaucratic systems and priorities. International consultants are usually hired. The proposals put forward by the developing nations are usually twisted or changed into what the consultants and the donating parties deem appropriate. Most grants have been criticized due to poor project performance and accomplishments.

Values of World heritage sites are not always measured only by what the sites themselves represent. Scientific findings and other artifacts from the sites are the attributes that contribute to the value of the sites. If sites are to be valorized and their attractions are to be presented, museums or interpretation centers have to be put in place; museums that qualify to house the collections from the world heritage sites. Even if they are built, it is very difficult to insure their sustainability due to lack of human and institutional capacities. Thus some international organizations are not very sympathetic for construction works. Therefore cooperation tends to focus on soft support such as technicalities, consultancy and multimedia. There is no doubt about the importance of these; however, building infrastructures such as museums and interpretation centers, if not equally important, is essential for the sustainable use of world heritage sites. The rationales for cooperation thus need to be reassessed and adjustments should be put forward.

In African regions, important institutions which are working with UNESCO are playing important role. The case in question refers to African World Heritage Fund. Thanks to the agreement at continental level of the African leaders to create AWHF, and to the generous contribution of the Spanish Government, the Fund is now at a level where it is supporting important undertakings in African World Heritage Sites. Its successes fullness and sustainability is dependent on the continuity of collaboration between all concerned parties.

Cooperation between traditional management system and the modern management system is crucial for the sustenance of cultural landscapes. The thorough understanding of the functioning of the traditional management fabrics

is crucial to devise a plan, within the framework of the management objectives, to invite partners and stakeholders.

Although cooperation is beneficial to all cooperating parties, sustainability is an important issue in maintaining the integrity of sites of world heritage importance. Countries have the obligation of developing their local capacity in order to insure sustainability and they also need to put in place policies in which the economic development of the nation is interwoven with the development and protection of their sites. World economic review shows that tourism is a confirmed economic motor which generates great sum of money. UNESCO works together with financial institutions/donors such as the World Bank and European Union in helping developing nations with world heritages to help them develop planning for development through responsible tourism. Developing local capacity specifically human resource through education, no doubt help reduce eternal and total dependency on cooperation, however important it is.

Everybody agrees that cooperation in World Heritage sites is a way to take collective responsibility. This collective responsibility has salvaged many sites in danger and protected many others.

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