



The Alliance between Tourism and Mankind's Intangible Heritage

The Possible Tangible Benefits of Working on Intangible Heritage Issues at World Heritage Sites

by
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First of all I would like to thank the organizing committee of Forum Barcelona for providing me the opportunity to be at this event. I have to admit today I am uncomfortable about speaking on this particular topic as I am by no means an intangible heritage expert. Most of my professional life, including work at UNESCO has been involved in projects in protected area management, heritage that is quite tangible. In fact, the World Heritage Convention, for whose Secretariat I work for, deals with the World's, mankind's priceless and irreplaceable properties. **(Slide with presentation title)**

Just to clarify the situation, UNESCO supports cultural heritage through two key conventions, the World Heritage Convention and a new UNESCO convention created in 2003 called the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. This 2003 convention addresses the issue of intangible heritage directly. This convention is now in the process of being signed by the different countries with an interest in the protection of their intangible heritage; these include heritage such as, oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship.

I agreed to do this talk today because of the importance of the topic. For me it is particularly interesting from a management point of view. As we all know, preserving cultural identity and authenticity in the face of tourism is challenging. It's because of this that I'm delighted to plunge into these complicated issues exploring the eternal questions of balancing development and conservation. **(Slide – general WH)**

As I mentioned I work under the World Heritage Convention. The full title is the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage; frequently abbreviated as the World Heritage Convention. It was adopted by UNESCO in 1972, and is based on the principal that World Heritage sites or properties have outstanding universal values and should be preserved for future generations. The World Heritage Convention is the only international convention that protects both natural and



cultural properties. The UNESCO, World Heritage Centre (WHC), located in Paris, France is the international secretariat coordinating the implementation of the Convention. Currently, 177 countries (States Parties) have signed the World Heritage Convention. The World Heritage list contains 788 properties including, 611 cultural, 154 natural and 23 mixed (or cultural and natural) properties. **(Slide – natural, mixed, cultural sites)**

In putting the talk together, I started with the definition of intangible heritage that is listed on this session's programme; *"intangible heritage is understood to be the practices, representations and expressions, know how and techniques that provide communities, groups and individuals with a feeling of identity and continuity."* In fact this definition is taken from the 2003 UNESCO Intangible Heritage Convention. From this I asked myself how World Heritage could contribute to aiding these goals, facilitating the alliance between tourism and intangible heritage.

As I mentioned the World Heritage Convention contains both cultural and natural sites and properties. Under cultural heritage there exist six Cultural World Heritage criteria, and four natural World Heritage criteria, the elements that would qualify a site for World Heritage status. Sites have to fulfill one or more of these criteria to qualify as World Heritage. In addition, there is an additional requirement called the *test of authenticity for cultural sites and fulfilling the conditions of integrity for natural sites*. Generally authenticity in this case is usually determined by examining if the materials in the cultural site are authentic. Integrity is determined for a natural site by the integration of the ecological components of the property mostly this is related to a property having a sufficient size to include all the elements of the ecosystem.

Regarding intangible heritage, I am told by the experts, that World Heritage Cultural Criteria 6 touches most on this aspect of heritage. Criteria 6 states that each property nominated *(a) (vi) should be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.*

Sites where perhaps tangible and intangible heritage best come together are in World Heritage cultural properties listed as "Cultural Landscapes". Cultural Landscapes represent the "combined works of nature and man" and are defined geo-cultural regions that have the capacity to illustrate the essential and distinct cultural elements of such regions. An example of this cultural site classification includes the Rice Terraces of the Philippines where preserving these ancient methods of rice cultivation are intrinsically linked to the World Heritage values. **(Slide of Cultural landscape sites)**



However, returning to the World Heritage Convention and tourism which is the focus of this discussion. As is no surprise, World Heritage sites considered to be the most important natural and cultural sites in the world, attract considerable visitation. The over-riding importance of tourism to World Heritage, both as an opportunity and if poorly managed as a threat, was recognized by the World Heritage Committee when it authorized the World Heritage Centre, in 2001, to develop a World Heritage Tourism Programme. This Programme's goal is to demonstrate linkages between sustainable tourism and the conservation of World Heritage and to develop tools and methods for broad tourism applications.

But just how may World Heritage contribute to possibly aiding the protection of intangible heritage? What is the value added of World Heritage in intangible heritage conservation protection; the possible tangible benefits of working on intangible heritage issues at World Heritage sites? Here are a few ideas, on that topic that I hope will provoke some discussion and debate.

Awareness building (Slide of Sian Ka'an)

Providing communities, groups and individuals with a feeling of identity and continuity is certainly a general cultural and an intangible heritage goal. Pride or community identity is an important element in maintaining site values. It is assumed that protected areas will be valued not only if they produce economic benefits for local people for example, from tourism, but if they have local people believing and taking pride in the moral value of conserving the site. Site pride and identity by local people are considered essential ingredients in long term site protection and should be taken into account and go hand in hand with economic development initiatives related to tourism.

In a UNESCO tourism project in six World Heritage sites, conservation education campaigns are being used successfully to develop this sense of site identity. In these campaigns an animal or a bird identified by the surrounding local population is used as a symbol upon which to base an entire social marketing campaign. The symbol could be a toucan as in the case of Sian Ka'an Reserve in Mexico or a Manta Ray as in the case of Komodo National Park in Indonesia.

Puppet shows for local schools, songs, drawings are all produced with the species symbol as the main conservation focus. Sermons in churches and mosques are also written to incorporate conservation messages. These highly effective programmes have



produced good results in achieving more community awareness of the importance of the site.

As these campaigns take hold and species becomes identified with the site, I think it would be interesting to see if the “pride” and identity of a particular symbol could be expanded and incorporated into many of the local community’s cultural practices, their intangible values, linking them into this campaign of social marketing. For example, could a traditional dance used to inaugurate the start of a village’s fishing season be used in tandem with a conservation campaign to limit destructive dynamite fishing?

Tourism public use plans (Slide of tourism public use plans being developed)

Few World Heritage sites have tourism plans to provide baseline data and a global vision on how tourism will be developed and managed. World Heritage officers must frequently respond to reports of inappropriate tourism development but may have little information on site tourism management policies upon which to base decisions. Having tourism public use plans outlining agreed upon tourism policies particularly on infrastructure development issues can help the sites and guide World Heritage decision making.

In developing a World Heritage site tourism plan, site management can consider incorporating the site’s World Heritage values into the broad policy framework. The information on why a site was or will be listed as World Heritage can provide useful input for the plan’s broad tourism vision. Here the sites’ World Heritage significance is combined with national regulations and other related policies to form a more robust management instrument.

When developing these tourism public use plans would it not be also possible to incorporate tourism management policies that address the issues of intangible heritage? Could not plans be encouraged to link the protection and management policies of the site to activities reinforcing local cultural values? For example, a Mayan site in Meso America where a local population uses a site for religious purposes. It would be possible to include within the plan policies for the continuation and support of these practices referring back to the site’s values and criteria so as to support these intangible cultural activities of local indigenous people. If such a tourism plan was provided with the site nomination it may provide a useful management tool to maintain a number of these intangible cultural activities.

Limiting numbers (Slide of people)



Many believe that too many tourists can turn intangible heritage into folklore, the “commodification” of culture. If folklore is to be avoided, limiting visitor numbers to the site or to certain zones of a site so as also to limit impact in local communities, may be a recommended management policy.

It seems today more than ever before there is a willingness on the part of the tourism industry to become more involved in conservation and protection efforts at the sites they visit. It may be that tourism industry cooperation could be sought for this strategy of keeping tourism demand stable and the quality of local culture high. Although many questions remain on how feasible this option may be, the World Heritage label, possible media promotion of positive tour industry cooperation through the UN press, and this trend in industry social responsibility, may in the future provide the needed elements for motivating tourism industry involvement in this issue.

Perhaps, cooperation would be facilitated by having the tourism industry participating from the start, in activities such as the development of the aforementioned tourism public use plans. With this they would become involved in decisions on visitor numbers, and the development of logical concession policies for the site to limit market flooding. In sites with existing problems of increasing visitation, perhaps industry could become active in developing add-on attractions to other neighboring sites to relieve tourism pressures at those highly visited sites.

Today, in creating an alliance between tourism and heritage, going beyond the usual guidelines for industry interaction at protected areas is needed. Giving lists of sustainable guidelines and desired behaviors to industry officials is important but a deeper and more effective engagement with the industry must be sought. Support from company officials to work with site management so as to not to exceed the limits of the site’s management capacity and the local communities abilities to maintain their values, generating needed international support for the conservation of tangible and intangible heritage, changing the policies of the ground operators to respect cultural traditions, and motivating visitors to also respect traditional them, all may be possible.

At this point in time, experience is needed to determine how best cultural heritage management, aided by UNESCO, could gain support from the industry to help create these kinds of stable environments in which management initiatives could be jointly initiated to gain maximum conservation and intangible heritage benefits.

Many other questions remain concerning the issues of supporting intangible heritage.

Nom del diàleg: Turisme, diversitat cultural i diversitat
Data: 15 Juliol
Sessió: El binomi Turisme-Patrimoni Cultural Immateral

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- Is the concept of pride in relation to these social marketing campaigns easier to first develop within the confines of the physical parameters provided by a World Heritage site?
- Are World Heritage sites with their clearly defined borders better places to manage and maintain intangible heritage intact?
- Folklore may be more valuable in the short term but maintaining cultures with their intangible heritage intact may actually produce far greater economic benefits in the long-term. Could there be projects for determining the economic value in maintaining authenticity?

Perhaps I've asked more questions than I've provided solutions for and it's obvious that pilot projects and much research are needed to address this issue.

I would like to again thank the organizing committee for allowing me to be here and you the public for your attention.