



GUIDANCE NOTE

People-Centred Approaches to the Conservation of Cultural Heritage: Living Heritage





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This guidance note begins with a brief discussion on people-centred approaches to heritage conservation. This is a discussion that has been taking place for some time but involving community members still remains a real challenge at many heritage places. This document has been written for those who are – or potentially could be – involved in heritage: policy-makers, heritage practitioners and community members, and aims to provide them with some guidance on how to work towards increased community participation.

The following pages attempt to explain why taking a people-centred approach to heritage is important (Part 1) and why working with communities is a key focus of such work (Part 2). Part 3 then discusses specific benefits that can be gained by all parties if such an approach is adopted. Suggested ways of working so as to foster community engagement are then given (Part 4) and a selection of available tools that may be of use are provided (Part 5). Links throughout the document offer routes to further reading and other resources.

Part 1: Why take a people-centred approach to heritage? _____

Cultural heritage has been created by people and it has been created for people. Our world is a better place for the richness that cultural heritage brings.

Although individual people and their contribution to cultural heritage is important, it is often more appropriate to work with groups of people – or communities – as culture is usually accomplished through collaboration. It can also be more helpful to think in terms of the efforts made by groups of people to the conservation of heritage: communities of place, communities of interest and communities of practice.

At heritage places that are considered to be a ‘living’ part of their community (and examples range from Buddhist temples to the London underground), the community’s engagement often brings advantages to both heritage and community alike. Communities contain capacities and assets that outlast political or professional structures and complement specialist knowledge and skills. A people-centred approach harnesses

these capacities in order to offer long-term conservation and co-management for the good of the heritage and for the good of the community.

Conversely, there are many examples that illustrate the negative impacts that can occur when heritage is divorced from society by an imbalanced management system. Where the relationship between people and heritage is divorced from society by an imbalanced management system. Where the relationship between people and heritage has been weakened or broken, a people-centred approach seeks to identify the problems and rectify them.

Taking a people-centred approach is not simply a suggestion for increasing participation within a management system. Instead, it is about addressing a core component of heritage management – the people who are connected to heritage – and ensuring that it is an integral element of conserving that heritage.

Part 2: Why engage communities? _____

Communities have become the focus of a number of international and national policies, as strong communities tend to be beneficial for both individuals and for society as a whole. Strong communities are made up of good support networks and active community groups with volunteering opportunities contribute to improved health and well-being; increased social inclusion; reduced criminal and antisocial behaviour; increased enterprise and learning cultures; and encourage participation in the democratic process. In the case of heritage, community involvement contributes to this broader picture but also brings specific advantages to the heritage as well.

In this context people-centred approaches do not consider heritage as simply an isolated entity that requires resources for its conservation and management. Instead heritage is seen as having the potential to play an active role in communities and bring benefits to people, thereby demonstrating that heritage is meaningful to society, as well as gaining society’s support for its on-going use and protection. Engaging communities is about strengthening their ability to participate meaningfully in the process of making conservation and management decisions for themselves and their heritage. Communities can be communities of place (those who live within or near to heritage), communities of interest (those who feel a connection to or are

interested in heritage) or communities of practice (those who work with heritage).

Some heritage places already attract millions of visitors and it could be argued that they have no need of new approaches to involve people. However, at heritage places that appear to be successful visitor attractions, the question needs to be asked if other communities, such as local residents, are still allowed to enjoy their heritage as it was originally intended and if they derive benefits from it. These situations need evaluating in terms that go beyond visitor numbers and financial income to include, for example, measurements of how healthy the related community of place is. This discussion is often approached through the lens of sustainable development, with the objective of creating a sustainable community¹. Not only does this sustainability discourse suggest measuring the success of a heritage place in terms of economic, environmental and social factors, but also places an emphasis on conservation as the only way of ensuring that future generations enjoy heritage resources.

However, all too often within the wider international discussion of sustainability, heritage is given only a limited mention². The perceived marginal contribution that cultural heritage can play to such agendas has two negative impacts: it both fails to harness fully the potential contribution that culture can give to issues such

¹ Indeed when the 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention was commemorated in 2012, it was seen as an opportunity to reflect on the contribution of World Heritage in particular to sustainable development, in the spirit of the Rio +20 conference. In fact, the World Heritage Committee declared the theme of that year as 'World Heritage and Sustainable Development: the Role of Communities' with a number of meetings producing statements on the important contribution communities can make to heritage and draw from it.

² For example in: UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda (2012) [Realizing the Future We Want for All. Report to the Secretary-General](#). New York: United Nations: 27.

as community dignity, cultural inclusion, poverty alleviation, etc., as well as marginalizing cultural heritage in such a way that it is not perceived as playing a useful role in society. A shift is needed where the heritage sector manages to become more significant, thereby not only producing benefits for communities but gaining their support in recognition of the meaningful contribution that heritage can play. As it cannot be taken for granted that there will be future support for maintaining many heritage assets, heritage needs to take on a more dynamic role where it can produce results beyond its confines, reaching equilibrium with society which will see more reason to safeguard it.

Emphasis on providing the community with a genuine and self-driven role in public affairs ties into a call for endogenous approaches to sustainable development; change must be rooted in local understanding of needs and opportunities, so that such change brings long-lasting benefits to the community³. This has been adopted in the area of community development and it has been noted that even disadvantaged communities have capacities and assets that can benefit their own development and their heritage resources⁴.

Another strand of people-centred approaches to conservation is the Living Heritage Approach⁵, where living heritage is characterized by the ongoing use of heritage by its associated community for the purpose for which it was originally created. Living heritage is strongly linked to a community and is therefore subject to a continuous process of evolution, as change is

³ See, for example, the [Indigenous Peoples' and Community-Conserved Territories and Areas](#).

⁴ E.g. the Asset-Based Community Development approach, see Kretzmann, J.P., & McKnight, J.L. (1993) *Building Communities from the Inside Out: a path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets*. Skokie, IL: ACTA Publications.

⁵ Wijesuriya, G. (2015) [Living Heritage: a summary](#). Rome: ICCROM.

embraced as part of the living nature of the heritage place. This maintains a continuity of community connections (as expressed both in terms of tangible and intangible heritage) and those connected communities take responsibility

to maintain their heritage by traditional or established means. Furthermore, such heritage is linked to or has relevance for the contemporary life of the community who endeavour to draw various benefits from it.

Part 3: What are the benefits of people-centred approaches? _____

In order to improve the relationship between heritage and society, it is helpful to think in terms of working with specific groups of people in order to support the development of their capacities so that they are better able to contribute should they want to. The World Heritage Capacity Building Strategy identifies three such target groups as: practitioners, institutions (described below as ‘decision- and policy-makers’), and communities and networks⁶. Each of these groups brings capacities and can gain benefits from their contribution to heritage conservation.

Although it is not always easy, there is increasing awareness that people-centred approaches brings recognized benefits to heritage, to those working in the heritage sector and to communities.

Benefits for decision- and policy-makers

By promoting community participation in heritage, policy-makers are able to be seen engaging in much broader debates (such as sustainable development), promoting measurable opportunities for community engagement, opening up democratic processes and improving transparency of government. This in turn could provide political advantage, attracting new support from a wider number of people. Owners of heritage and other interest groups could potentially access more funding and other resources. Developers could gain planning approvals more efficiently through public engagement, saving both time and money.

⁶ World Heritage Committee (2011) [The World Heritage Strategy for Capacity Building](#) (WHC11-35COM-9BE).

Benefits for heritage practitioners

Those working with heritage are those who can gain direct benefits from community members who engage in managing, monitoring and providing resources and knowledge for its management (not just fund-raising but ‘people-raising’); through access to traditional knowledge systems; and by creating a broad-base of support for conservation.

Benefits for communities

Tourism is often cited as being the means by which heritage can provide economic benefits to communities, although it can bring both negative and positive impacts. Other broader benefits for community members should be considered, including: greater sense of ownership; stronger cultural identity; spirituality; increased employment opportunities; increased economic returns through heritage ‘added value’; contributions to sustainable development; more sustainable communities; increased cultural and social inclusion and intergenerational integration; more life-long learning experiences; more varied leisure opportunities; poverty alleviation and improved intercultural understanding⁷.

It should be noted that these benefits will vary from case to case and will be affected by the type of heritage (archaeological site, museum

⁷ Such benefits are illustrated through case studies in publications such as: Gould, P.G. & Burtenshaw, P. (eds) (2014) ‘Special issue: Archaeology and Economic Development’, *Public Archaeology* 13: 1-3; Galla, A. (ed.) *World Heritage. Benefits beyond borders*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Vinson, I. (ed.) (2011) ‘Social Benefits of Heritage (thematic double issue)’. *Museum International* 63:1-2.

collection, historic town centre, cultural landscape, etc.), the level and type of community engagement and interests, the available support and infrastructure, and the wider context. While

there is no simple recipe, there are many examples that can be explored to understand the range of possible approaches and to inspire adapted approaches elsewhere.

Part 4: Who can promote people-centred approaches to heritage? _____

In order to be most effective and to build strong healthy relationships, community engagement needs to take place as early as possible. Dialogue needs to be an on-going activity over time, rather than providing information at later stages. People-centred approaches can be supported by any one of the groups involved in heritage through concrete actions, examples of which are listed below as suggestions of ways forward.

Decision- and policy-makers can:

- Give voice at a national/international level of the benefits that heritage can deliver to society
- Promote dialogue with development agencies to see heritage part of the sustainability agenda
- Revisit the management systems in place for heritage and assess the ways in which they can be adjusted to allow greater community involvement
- Allocate resources for capacity development in the area of community engagement
- Ensure that funding for heritage-related projects allow for community consultation and involvement

Practitioners can:

- Assess the existing management system and its ability to facilitate community engagement, making adjustments where possible, in particular to promote joint management processes and monitoring
- Identify and dialogue with communities
- Engage communities for the identification of heritage and its interpretation, and the strategic development of conservation projects
- Involve communities in defining values and assessing significance
- Set objectives that do not only aim to protect heritage but also to deliver benefits to society, then set joint management actions and share resources

Community members can:

- Be proactive in suggesting and organizing their own heritage-related initiatives
- Seize opportunities offered by policy-makers and practitioners to participate, engage in decision-making and volunteer
- Share knowledge about the heritage place
- Highlight concerns and request benefits
- Share available resources, not just money but human resources, services, etc.

Part 5: Extending to nature _____

The theme of People-Centred Approaches to Conservation is one that reaches beyond the cultural heritage sector and the natural heritage sector too is engaging with it: indeed both sectors are working towards a new paradigm shift based on the wellbeing of both people and heritage.

Recent work on nature-culture interlinkages⁸ undertaken by ICCROM, IUCN and other partners has illustrated how there is an underlying rationale in both sectors to reinforce the 'people' or 'community' factor in their respective

⁸ UNESCO World Heritage Centre (2015) [Culture-Nature Links](#). *World Heritage* 75.

discourses. This is part of a broader shift from the care of heritage alone to the pursuit of well-being of both heritage and society as a whole (people and the environment). This work on nature-culture interlinkages has provided an important opportunity to explore and test this premise together and, where appropriate, facilitate a shift in respective management and conservation approaches.

It can be said that more effective management of sites is now understood to include a focus on the collective wellbeing of natural and cultural heritage, *as well as* that of people. This shift has become a way of overcoming past errors where heritage processes were overly led by experts and unfolded in isolation from the wider concerns of society and the environment. In this

context, People-Centered Approaches for the Conservation of Natural and Cultural Heritage is a way of providing a theoretical basis to underpin future heritage management practices.

For this reason the People-Centered Approaches Programme has focused on both nature and culture, involving practitioners from both the natural and cultural heritage sectors. Thanks to the specific formulation of international and regional courses on 'Promoting People-Centred Approaches: Engaging Communities in the Conservation of Nature and Culture' (see below), the experiences of participants and resource people are also being pooled to enhance our understanding of future challenges and opportunities.

Part 6: How can this be done? What resources are available? _____

Although genuine community engagement in heritage remains a huge challenge, significant experience has already been gained in some heritage places with publications and other tools available that share approaches and offer guidance. Some examples are given below.

Training

Among other organizations, ICCROM provides specific capacity-building initiatives related to the conservation of cultural heritage. In particular, a new course on Engaging Communities has been developed, primarily aimed at conservation practitioners, to provide the necessary knowledge and tools to work more effectively with communities through existing management systems. This course will also be used as an opportunity to create a forum for participants to share their experiences from both the cultural and natural heritage sectors, learning from each other and other heritage practitioners who are actively involved with communities.

- [Promoting People-Centred Approaches To Conservation: Living Heritage](#)

Participatory management

Stakeholder analysis can be an important first step to opening up a management system to participatory approaches. By identifying the range of stakeholders and interest groups, analysis can then be carried out to identify which groups and communities could be engaged. Example of how to go about this can be found in:

- Hockings, M. *et al.* (2008) [Enhancing Our Heritage Toolkit. Assessing Management Effectiveness of Natural World Heritage Sites. Tool 3: Relationships with Stakeholders](#). Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre.
- Myers, D., Smith, S.N. & Shaer, M. (2010) [A Didactic Case Study of Jarash Archaeological Site, Jordan: Stakeholders and Heritage Values in Site Management. Activity 2: Identify Stakeholders](#). GCI.

Heritage organizations can provide engagement opportunities and involve others in decision-making. An example of practical guidance in this area can be found at:

- Trow, S. & Tunnicliffe, S. (2011) [*Knowing Your Place: Heritage and Community-led Planning in the Countryside*](#). London: English Heritage.

Cultural mapping

Cultural mapping is: ‘the set of activities and processes for exploring, discovering, documenting, examining, analysing, interpreting, presenting and sharing information related to people, communities, societies, places and material products and practices associated with those people and places’⁹. The process of cultural mapping can provide a meaningful and active role for community members and the results can be used in a variety of ways to promote community dignity, social inclusion, sustainable tourism, etc. There are several practical guides to carrying out cultural mapping, including:

- Galla, A. (2011) *Museums, Cultural Mapping and Heritage Tourism in Southeast Asia*. Pacific Asia Observatory & ICOM: Brisbane & Paris.
- Taylor, K. & Cook, I. (2012) *A Contemporary Guide to Cultural Mapping. An ASEAN Australia Perspective*. Jakarta: ASEAN
- Flavelle, A. (2002) *Mapping Our Land: A guide to Making Maps of Our Own Communities and Traditional Lands*. Lone Pine Foundation, Edmonton
- Clark, I., Sutherland, J., and Young, G. (1995) *Mapping Culture - A Guide for Cultural and Economic Development in Communities*. AGPS: Canberra.

Heritage interpretation

Heritage interpretation is: ‘any communication process designed to reveal meanings and relationships of cultural and natural heritage to the public, through first-hand involvement with an object, artifact, landscape or site’¹⁰. These

⁹ Taylor, K. & Cook, I. (2012) *A Contemporary Guide to Cultural Mapping. An ASEAN Australia Perspective*. Jakarta: ASEAN: 3.

¹⁰ Interpretation Canada (1976) [*Our Work Defined*](#) [online].

processes have the potential to be participatory and allow individuals and communities to identify heritage values and share them with others. Again there are examples of toolkits that help practitioners and communities to use interpretation to explore their heritage:

- Brochu, L. & Merriman, T. (2011) *Put the HEART Back in Your Community: Community Experience Planning*. Fort Collins, CO: Heartfelt Publications
- Porter, J. et al. (2010) [*Talking About Our Place Toolkit*](#). Inverness: Scottish Natural Heritage.
- GKA (2007) [*Local Interpretation Plans: a Tool Kit to Help Communities Explore Local Heritage*](#). Cardiff: Groundwork Wales/Herian.

Asset-based community development

It has been noted that even disadvantaged communities have capacities and assets that can benefit their own development and their heritage resources. Guidance on identifying and mobilizing those assets that already exist within a community can be found in:

- Kretzmann, J.P., & McKnight, J.L. (1993) *Building Communities from the Inside Out: a Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Skokie, IL: ACTA Publications.

Case study examples

Much can be gained from examining the experiences of others in similar situations. Case studies that explore the potential benefits to be gained from heritage with some examples of community engagement can be found in:

- Brown, J. & Hay-Edie, T. (2013) [*COMPACT: Engaging Local Communities in the Stewardship of World Heritage*](#). New York: UNDP.
- Galla, A. (ed.) (2012) *World Heritage. Benefits Beyond Borders*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



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